



Counter- Conditioning

This is a simple description of an approach to help your dog feel better about the things that create stress for him or her. Whenever possible work at a distance where your dog is aware of the stressor, but is not having a reactive episode. This is the ideal place for learning to take place.

1. Identify the “threshold distance”—the distance at which fearful or aggressive behavior is first elicited (e.g. when the stimulus is 6 feet away).
2. Begin the counter-conditioning session at a distance where the dog notices the stimulus, but remains under threshold (e.g. when the stimulus is 7 feet away).
3. Feed the dog when he first notices the stimulus.
4. Continue feeding until the stimulus disappears.
5. When the stimulus disappears remove the food.
6. Continue at this distance until the dog becomes comfortable and begins to anticipate the food. This is called a “Conditioned Emotional Response (CER)” because the dog has become conditioned to associate the stimulus with the availability of food.
7. Slowly increase the intensity of the stimulus, continuing to keep the dog under threshold.

As the dog begins to offer CERs you can begin to move to a cued behavior. This can take a long time, or it might go quickly. As you change distance you will need to reduce other factors in intensity, such as motion or sound of trigger.