


Improving Outcomes  
and Promoting Well-Being  
Through Choice

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 **THE SOPHISTICATED DOG**

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What is Stress?

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Think about it

- a. A physiological response to a trigger that causes a disruption to the status quo
- b. A physiological and emotional response to change
- c. An emotional reaction to unpleasant, (seemingly) inescapable circumstances
- d. Any experience that results in fear, anxiety or other emotional distress

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### Stress

- Triggering event
- Disruption/challenge to status quo
- Physiological reaction

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### Think about it

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### Function of Stress

- Adaptive
- Helps animal survive
- Preparation (developmental stress)

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Types of Stressors

- Physical
- Psychological

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Categories of Stress

- Good stress
- Tolerable stress
- Toxic stress

*NOTE: Definitions by Bruce McEwan, Ph.D. of Rockefeller University*

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Good Stress

- Challenging in short run
- Rewarding in long run
- Can result in ‘personal growth’

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### Tolerable Stress

- Challenging
- Negative/Distressing
- Animal can cope
- Can result in 'personal growth'

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### Toxic Stress

- Challenging
- Negative/Distressing
- Animal **unable** to cope

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### Activity

- Task:
  - Watch the dog
  - Write down the body language you see
- Discussion:
  - Do you think the dog is stressed?
  - What type of stress is the dog experiencing?

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### Determining Type of Stress

- Signs of distress?
- Focus/ability to work?
- Motivation?
- Normal self-control?
- Quick return to baseline?
- Behavior deteriorating?
- Abnormal behavior?

*Many thanks to Kristina's June 2021 IAABC Stress Class for help developing this list!*

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### Type of Stress

- Depends on individual's experience
- Example: COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Bottom Line

- Specific stressor is not the key
- Individual's ability to cope is the key

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Negative impacts of stress

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Impacts of chronic stress

- Partial list
  - Decreased growth
  - Decreased immune function
  - Reproductive issues
  - Slower healing
  - Gastrointestinal problems
  - Heart issues
  - Muscle loss
  - Early death
  - Decreased behavioral health

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Fear learning

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Enhanced fear learning

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Recent stressful experience ->  
Enhanced fear learning

Long and Fanslow, 2012; Rau et al., 2005; Schmetzer, 2015

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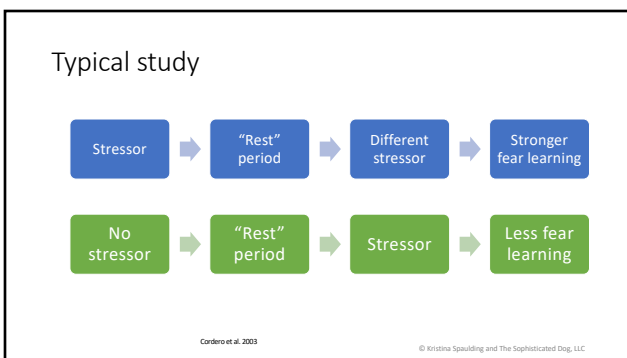
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Extinction learning

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Extinction of behavior  
(e.g. jumping)

- Is this the same or a different type of learning?

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Extinction is fragile

Pavlov, 1927; Konorski, 1967; Bouton, 1993

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Fear learning is not erased

Pavlov, 1927; Konorski, 1967; Bouton, 1993

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Okay, but I don't use extinction...

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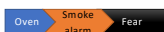

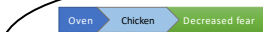
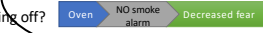
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- Previous learning 
- Fear extinction 
- Counter conditioning 
- ...is the smoke alarm going off? 

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Impaired fear extinction

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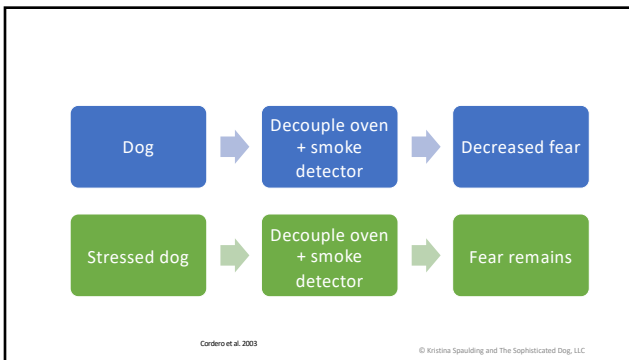
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Stress and extinction

- Decreased reduction in conditioned fear
- Increased recovery of fear across sessions

Maren and Holmes, 2016; Wilson et al., 2013

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Immediate extinction deficit

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Learned Helplessness

- The belief that one's behavior has no impact on the outcome

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Warning!

- Some of this research is not fun to think about
- But we can use it to help other animals

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Seminal research!

- Leaf, 1964; Overmier & Leaf, 1965

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Definitions (Maier and Seligman, 2016)

- Objective helplessness
- Subjective helplessness

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This was a radical idea!

According to Maier and Seligman (2016)

- This made waves
- Suggestion of animal cognition in 1960s

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This was a radical idea!

- Richard Herrnstein objects:

*“You are proposing that animals learn that responding is ineffective. Animals learn responses; they don’t learn **that** anything.”*

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Is it the electric shock or lack of control?

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Another study

- Seligman & Maier (1967)

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### Control is the key

- Other terms related to control:
  - Contingency (control) vs. non-contingency (no control)
  - Agency (perceived control)
- Maier and Seligman, 2016
  - Animal learns that the probability of an outcome given a response is different from the probability of an outcome given no response

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### Effects of *inescapable* shock

- Reduced or impaired
  - Offensive aggression
  - Social dominance
  - Food/water intake
  - Preference for sweetness (anhedonia)
  - Exploration
  - Instrumental/Skinnerian learning (even when control restored)
  - Fear extinction

Maier & Watkins, 2005; Rau et al. 2005; Haselton et al. 2015; Maier and Seligman 2016

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### Effects of *inescapable* shock

- Increased
  - Defensive behavior when threatened
  - Attention to external stimuli
  - Fear learning
  - Neophobia

Maier & Watkins, 2005; Rau et al. 2005; Haselton et al. 2015; Maier and Seligman 2016

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Similar effects seen in humans

- Learned helplessness
  - Model for depression
- Actual or perceived control
  - Decrease perception of pain intensity

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Learned helplessness

- Animals learned their behavior doesn't matter and this inhibited attempt to escape
- That's what we thought...and then came...

Neuroscience!!!

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What is actually happening...

Maier and Seligman's model

Maier and Seligman, 2016

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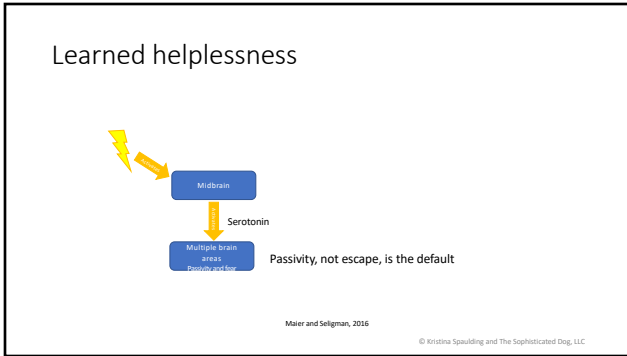
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- ### Learned helplessness
- Serotonin neurons in midbrain project to:
    - Periaqueductal gray and striatum – inhibits escape
    - Amygdala – increases fear/anxiety
  - Neurons in midbrain become sensitized
    - Lasts about three days
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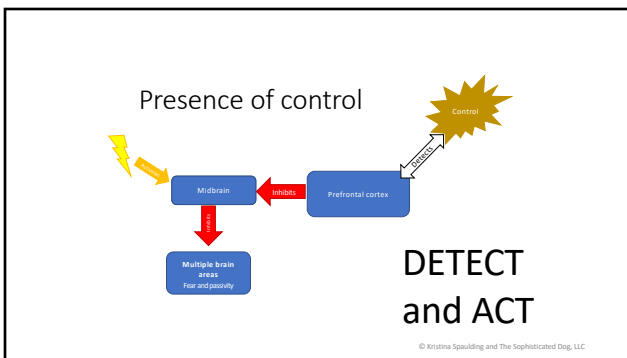
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### Serotonin

- Released for escapable AND inescapable aversives
  - Large, rapid increase
- Inescapable shock – levels remain elevated
- Escapable shock – drop rapidly

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### With control...

- New proteins are produced by the brain
  - Related to plasticity
  - Help the animal actively cope with stress
- In the future, animal anticipates control in new contexts
  - Even if they are uncontrollable!!!!

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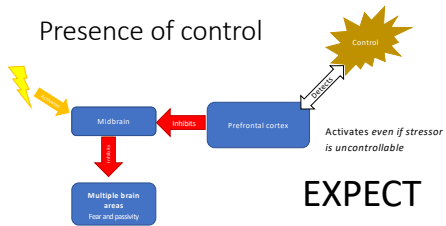
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### Presence of control



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### Using aversives

- Does this information support the use of aversives?
  - No
    1. Escapable shock still causes fear/passivity
    2. Control over good things has the same effect

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### Activity

- Task
  - Determine dog's preferred toy and type of play
  - NOTE: Only one handler
- Supplies
  - Four types of toys

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### Impact of Control

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### Benefits of Control

- Watson & Ramey 1972
  - Control over mobiles
  - Yoked pairs
  - Experiment was about learning, not control

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### Benefits of Control

- Escapable shock
  - Inoculates animal against inescapable shock
  - Generalizes across context
  - Lasts *at least* 7 days

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### Benefits of Control

- Escapable shock
  - Prevents emotional boost to memory
  - Decreases fear conditioning
  - Improves (fear-related) extinction learning
  - Decreases freezing
  - Increases exploration
  - Increases instrumental learning
- *Often better than in animals never shocked!*

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### Good News!

- Generalizes across valence
  - Control over aversive -> Control over appetitive
- Better yet...
  - Control over appetitive -> Control over aversive

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### Non-Contingent Reward

- “Non-contingent” access to food/water
  - Decreases learning about contingent rewards
  - Impairs ability to avoid bad things (shocks)

Joffe et al., 1973; Goodkin, 1976; Overmier et al. 1980; Lucas et al. 2014

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### Contingent Reward

- Rats raised with control over food, water, light
  - Decreased reactive and defensive behavior as adults
- Additional benefits
  - Improves avoidance learning
  - Increases exploratory behavior
  - Reduces neophobia

Goodkin, 1976; Joffe et al., 1973; Mineka et al. 1986

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### More evidence for benefits of control

- Opportunity to choose
    - Activates reward-processing area of brain
  - Performance enhanced
    - Free choice > forced choice
  - Animals prefer choice over no choice even if
    - Requires more effort
    - Doesn't improve outcome
- Leotti and Delgado, 2011, 2014 and Fujiwara et al. 2013; Murayama et al. 2013; Catania and Sagvolden, 1980; Bown et al. 2003; Leotti et al. 2010

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### Maier and Seligman: Conclusion

• “We are mindful that in the theory of explanatory style, ‘hope’ consists largely in the habit of expecting that future bad events will not be permanent, global, and uncontrollable; rather they will be temporary, local and controllable (Seligman, 1991, pp. 48-49). Such expectations are likely the best natural defense against helplessness, and we speculate that the ventromedial prefrontal cortex-dorsal raphe nucleus circuit may be usefully thought of as the ‘hope circuit.’”

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### Putting it all together (agency)

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Before we continue, a little background...

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Goal-directed behavior

- Flexible, consciously accessed (explicit)
- Outcome->action
- Hippocampus based

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Habit

- Rigid, unconscious (implicit)
- Stimulus-response
- Neostriatum based

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### Habit memory

- Extensive training
- Distraction
- Stress

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### Moscarello and Hartley, 2017

- Animals estimate agency in unfamiliar environments
  - Two types of approaches

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### Proactive

- Estimate: High agency
- “What can I do in this environment?” (Moscarello and Hartley, 2017)
- More exploratory and flexible behavior
- Goal-directed
- Uses more cognitive resources

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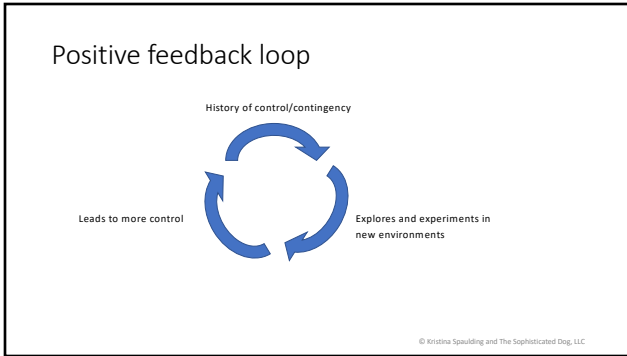
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Reactive\*

- Estimate: Low agency
- “What can this environment do to me?” (Moscarello and Hartley, 2017)
- Innate, rapidly initiated behaviors
- Habit (rigid, inflexible)
- Doesn’t require action-outcome processing
- Uses fewer cognitive resources

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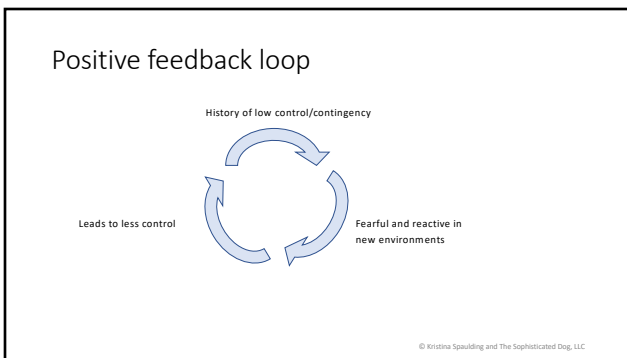
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Activity

- Task
  - Touch the Goblin
  - Two teams at a time
  - NOTE: Only one handler
  - IMPORTANT: **Be conservative!**
- Supplies
  - Gobblins

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What is enrichment?

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What is enrichment?

- Generally includes:
  - Increased opportunity to engage in species-typical behavior
  - Improved wellbeing

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### Welfare and Wellbeing

- Welfare
  - Minimize or eliminate suffering
- Wellbeing
  - Increase positive emotions/experiences

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### Two types of enrichment

- Environmental
  - Enriched environments – facilitate “active, diverse and flexible behavioural repertoire” (Meehan and Mench, 2007)
- Cognitive (Clark 2011)
  - Problem-solving opportunities
    - Utilize evolved cognitive skills (barn hunt, nose work)
  - Control of environment

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### Benefits of Enrichment

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### Optimism and pessimism

- Animals can be optimistic/pessimistic
  - Optimistic – anticipate reward when faced with uncertainty
  - Pessimistic – anticipate punishment when faced with uncertainty

Douglas et al. 2012

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### Increased optimism

- Increased enrichment -> more optimistic (rats, pigs, starlings)
- Enriched to barren environment -> more pessimistic than if always in barren environment

Bateson and Matheson, 2007; Brydges et al. 2011; Harding et al. 2004; Matheson et al. 2008; Douglas et al. 2012

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### Improved cognition

- Enriched environment (toys, tunnels, conspecifics) -> improved cognitive performance
- Multiple species – dogs, rats, pigs, cows, goats

Hagen and Broom, 2004; Milgram et al. 2005, 2006; Puppe et al. 2007; Zebunke et al. 2013; Oosterwind et al. 2016

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### Improved agency and stress coping

- Pigs and automated feeders
- Exploration and skill-building
- Increased cognitive flexibility

Ernst et al. 2005; Ernst et al. 2006; Puppe et al. 2007; Gelfo, 2019 © Kristina Spaulding and The Sophisticated Dog, LLC

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### Effective Enrichment

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### Life for many dogs

- Live in a box
- Access to outside
  - Limited in time and space
  - May be fairly static
- Species typical behavior?
- Limited control

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Assessing cognitive enrichment

- Four possible outcomes (Meehan and Mench, 2007)

High challenge High skill	High challenge Low skill
Low challenge High skill	Low challenge Low skill

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Low skill, low challenge

- Low challenge
- Low skill
- Apathy

Myers and Diener 1995, Wood-Gush and Vestergaard, 1989, Meehan and Mench, 2007

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High skill, low challenge

- Skill exceeds challenge level
- Boredom

Wemelsfelder and Birke 1997, Meehan and Mench, 2007

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### Low skill, high challenge

- Challenge level exceeds skill level
  - Problem is effectively unsolvable
- Frustration, anxiety

Duncan and Wood-Gush, 1972; Dantzer et al., 1980; Wiegkema, 1987; Meehan and Mench, 2007  
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### High skill, high challenge

- Difficult challenge, animal skilled enough to succeed
- Well-matched
  - Mastery
  - Flow??
    - Absorbed in task to exclusion of other things
    - Positive emotional state
    - Highly reinforcing

Meehan and Mench, 2007; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1988  
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### It's all about agency

- Perceived control
- Clark – "agency refers to an animal's ability to gather knowledge and enhance skills for future use" (White, 1959)

Spinka and Wemelsfelder, 2011; Clark, 2017  
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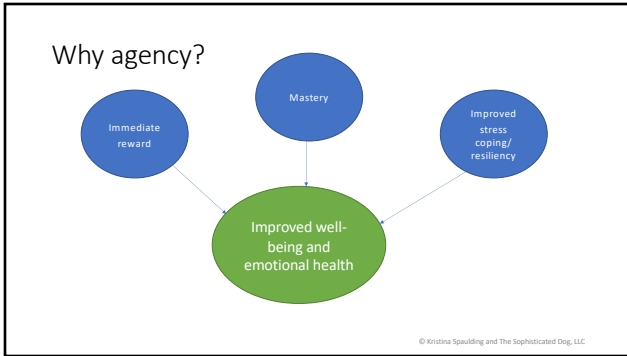
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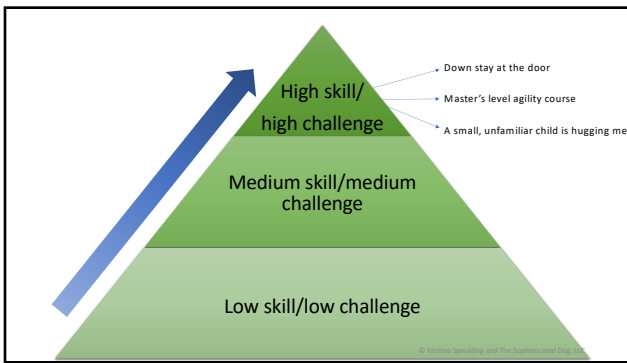
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Creating a Choice-Rich Environment

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### Start Simple!

- Food toys
  - Easy to use
  - Lots of options
- Puzzle toys for advanced pets

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### A Room of One's Own

- Multiple "stations"
  - Locations throughout the house
- Mats, beds, cat trees, etc.
- Pets earn good stuff there
- Ideally in areas family uses frequently

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### Enrichment Doesn't Have to be Expensive!

- Food on floor
- Treats hidden around the house
- Kibble scattered in the yard
- Digging opportunities
- Homemade food toys
  - Toilet rolls
  - Water bottles
  - Other containers

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### Don't Forget Scent!

- Safety first!
  - Some essential oils are toxic to non-humans
  - Use very, very little
- Think about it
  - Animal vs. human scent preferences
  - Find scents you both like

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### Soundscape

- What's the current sound environment?
- White noise
- Calming music

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### Be creative

- Obstacle courses
- Concept training

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Activity

- Task
  - Training plan for sample dog
    - Bullet points only
    - Five minutes on your own
    - Then pair up

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Activity

- Task
  - Role play client/trainer going over training plan
    - Work in pairs
    - Take turns doing each role
    - Use a different sample dog

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Foundation Skills for a Choice-Rich Life

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### Foundation Skills for a Choice-Rich Life

- Uncued eye contact
- Targeting
- Choice-rich confinement training
- Default sit/down/stand
- Solid recall
- Choice-rich leash walking
- Settle on a mat

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### Settle on a Mat

- Irith's version:
  - Settle onto a novel object\* (most often a towel, since portable)
    - Novel object helps avoid possibly counter-productive past associations
  - Food fed to *mat* from first moment animal is engaged with mat
  - No deliberate cue when first taught (may be introduced later)
    - Mat is cue, until behavior is well-established and ready for a handler cue
  - Release cue introduced right away
  - No "sit," "down" or other similar cues used
  - Certain body positions, movements, etc., may be selected for reinforcement

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### Activity

- Task
  - Mat settle
    - Handlers who have not yet worked with the dog
  - All teams at once
- Supplies
  - Towels
  - Treats

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Activity

- Task
  - Food hunt
  - Find the right level for your dog
- Supplies
  - Various items to put food in (or not, as you prefer)
  - Treats

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Activity

- TASK: Summarize what you've learned
  - Work independently – 2 minutes
  - Then work in groups of six to summarize learning
    - 15 to 20 words total

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Summary statements

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### Activity – Commit

- **QUESTION/TASK:** Based on what you've learned this weekend, what actions can you take to improve the well-being of the animals you live and/or work with?
- **Step 1 (3 minutes) - Brainstorm**
  - Brainstorm and write down ideas
  - Could be with your own dogs, client dogs, shelter/rescue dogs, etc.
- **Step 2 (2 minutes) – Commit to action items**
  - Choose one (1) short-term action item – in the next week
  - Choose one to two (1 – 2) long-term action items – six-month time frame
- **Step 3 – Share**
  - Share your commitments with those around you (if desired)

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### Thank you!

- To all of you
- To Jennifer Franco and the APDT
- To everyone at Halifax Humane Society

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### Get in touch

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  - [www.TheSophisticatedDog.com](http://www.TheSophisticatedDog.com)

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