

Behavior Adjustment Training

Handout © 2010 Grisha Stewart, MA, CPDT, CTP <http://doggiezen.com/bat>
<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/functionalrewards>

BAT uses functional and bonus rewards with systematic desensitization in an error-free approach to learning.

BAT reduces fear and aggression by giving dogs socially acceptable ways to communicate their needs.

Functional Rewards

When the dog does a problem behavior, it is usually triggered by something that happens in their environment, which we call the environmental cue, in order to fulfill a need or want.

Fulfillment of the need or want that is triggered by the environmental cue is called the functional reward. Here's the sequence:

Environmental Cue → Behavior → Functional Reward

So the functional reward for behaviors done after seeing a steak are the eating of the steak. The functional reward of behaviors done after spotting the squirrel is getting closer to / chasing the squirrel.

To discover the functional reward of a problem behavior, look at the consequence of the dog's behavior – what are they earning from the people, dogs, and world around them by doing the behavior?

For example, when dogs show aggression, one big consequence is usually an increase in distance from the trigger (they scare it away or are allowed to leave themselves). So we often use an increased distance – walking away from the trigger – as a functional reward.

Basic Steps for Problem Behaviors

1. Do a **functional analysis of the problem behavior** to find the functional reward
2. **Expose** to a subtle version of the trigger. Don't go so close that the dog does the problem behavior, including panic or aggression. Breathing should be fairly calm.
3. **Wait** for good choices (ex. look at trigger, then look away or stop pulling on leash or...). If distress increases, abort the trial rather than letting the dog flounder.
4. **Mark** with a word or clicker.
5. Give access to a **Functional Reward** – fulfill the need that triggered the behavior you are trying to change.
6. Optional **Bonus Reward**, like food or a toy, esp. on walks - distracts from trigger.



When to Use BAT

1. You can figure out what the functional reward is for the problem behavior.
2. You can control access to the functional reward.
3. There is an alternate behavior that will reasonably earn the same functional reward in the dog's everyday life.

BAT for Fear & Aggression

Steps below assume that the functional reward is an increase in distance to the trigger.

Walks: Stage 1. If waiting for good behavior won't work yet in the real world – the trigger is too close and the dog would be too stressed if you wait there, here's an even **easier version**. Start off just by clicking the dog for noticing the trigger. This is basically using classical conditioning with a BAT flavor:

1. Dog notices trigger
2. Click
3. Walk/jog away
4. Treat with food or a toy

Walks: Stage 2. When you can't control the trigger intensity (people or other dogs get too close, etc.), bring treats, so you can do the Bonus Reward version of BAT. The order of events is:

1. Dog notices trigger
2. Wait for alternate behavior (if possible), like looking away from the trigger, calm bravery, ground sniffing, shake-off, etc. Keep leash loose, and breathe!
** If the dog starts breathing faster or looks like they're going to bark, say her name and walk her further away, so she can calm down.
3. Click
4. Walk/jog away
5. Treat with food or a toy

Note that you **walk away before treating**, so the dog notices the functional reward. As time goes on, shift into letting the dog engage more with their environment. Begin to do the **set-up version of BAT out in the real world whenever possible**, using only functional rewards, not treats.

Set-ups and Stage 3 Walks. Set-ups are ideal. Do them right away. Start with an easy version of the trigger and gradually turn up the heat. That usually means starting really far away from the trigger. Take breaks whenever the dog, you, or the helpers need one.

1. Walk toward trigger (or trigger approaches) only until dog just barely begins to pay attention to the trigger. Breathing should be fairly calm.
2. Wait for alternate behavior.
3. Say "Yes" right as the dog makes a good choice.
4. Walk/jog away

