



Prey Drive Solved:
Getting Started

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Welcome

I am absolutely delighted to have you here. This class will show you all of the neat little foundational tricks that you need to know to stop prey drive becoming a problem for you if you have a young dog who hasn't yet reached adolescence. And – if you have a dog who is already giving you problems due to their prey drive, it will give the foundations to work effectively with your dog.

I struggled for years working out how to work with my first high prey drive dog and it makes me so excited to be able to share this class with you because I know that it can be so hard to get help with dogs like your dog. Let's get started!

This PDF file can be downloaded onto your phone or tablet so that the class can go with you and be easily referred to when you are out and about.



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What is Prey Drive?

Prey drive is sometimes called predatory aggression. It is completely normal dog behaviour. It is desirable by lots of people and is deliberately bred into many breeds of dog – but it is misunderstood or thought to be simpler than it is. I have heard it be described as a behaviour problem, as something that indicates that dogs with it are dangerous and in some cases, I have seen it be recommended that dogs be euthanised for having a high prey drive. But what is it?

Really, if we say that a dog has a high prey drive, all that we mean is that the dog has a strong desire to do something with prey – or a prey substitute like a toy.

Different dogs want to do different things with prey and each of the actions they might want to take is often described by scientists as the Predatory Motor Sequence.



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The Predatory Motor Sequence consists of the following:

Hunt

This is the sort of ground covering searching that is done by spaniels, setters, pointers and HPR breeds. Each has their own style, but all will quarter ground, using their nose to see if there are prey animals around. Full disclosure, this one isn't often listed in the literature but I always include it because it's such a big part of what so many breeds do.

Orient

The dog has located a prey animal and turns towards it or moves to a position they can clearly see the animal from.

Eye

The dog will go completely still and stare at the animal. This can happen with toys too and is often seen in border collies.



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Stalk

The dog's body will be lowered, their head will be low too and they will move slowly toward the prey animal.

Chase

This is the stage where the dog will be running toward the prey animal - that animal will likely be running away.

Grab-Bite

If the dog gets close enough, they may grab-bite the prey animal, closing their mouth over whichever part of the animal they can. It has been suggested that this bite is intended to disable and may cause injury to the prey animal.

Possess



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Retrieving breeds like the Labradors, spaniels and HPR breeds are likely to do this. The prey (or toy) will be held in the dog's jaws and carried - often for long periods of time. This is an integral part of retrieving. Again, full disclosure - this isn't often mentioned in the literature about prey drive. I include it because it is so important to many breeds of dog.

Kill-Bite

In dogs, this is a harder bite than the grab-bite and is often accompanied by the dog shaking their head while holding onto the prey animal (or toy).

Dissect

The dog will use their teeth to tear the skin of the prey animal. This is often seen being done to soft toys in pet dogs.

Consume



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In animals where predatory behaviour is aimed at getting food, this is the final stage. Few pet dogs would eat a prey animal if they killed one.

Prey drive is about much more than chasing other animals and I'll get onto how you can use this sequence to help you prevent your dog's prey drive causing you problems.

Why do dogs have prey drive?

I suspect that if you are reading this you are keen to avoid or resolve problems that your dog's prey drive is causing you. Your dog is likely a pet and you really don't want them running off chasing other animals or disappearing off following a smell or bringing you a dead rabbit. As I'm going to explain here, if your dog does have a prey drive, while there is loads you can do to help make sure it isn't a problem, it is part of who your dog is.



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Our dogs are descended from predators. Genetically, they are still so closely related to wolves that dogs and wolves can breed together and produce fertile offspring. By some definitions that would make them the same species although we don't consider dogs and wolves to be the same species. Behaviourally they are very different from each other so although they are closely related, they aren't the same species.

Still, our dogs are closely related to wolves and they are a species who live by getting food using the Predatory Motor Sequence. The hunt and possess parts that I included tend not to be listed by scientists studying dogs but David Mech who is a well-known biologist specialising in studying wolves discusses how wolves hunt for prey whenever they are moving and although it is rare, he does describe witnessing an instance of a wolf carrying live prey to the den to allow pups to practice how to get food.



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It is not all that common for prey drive in dogs to be about getting food. Dog tend to get food from humans – either humans who feed them or by scavenging food that humans have thrown away. Dogs have been selectively bred by humans for a really long time – for up to 7,000 years. Initially that breeding was intended to produce dogs who could help people find, catch and kill wild animals, tend livestock and get rid of animals like rats that people generally don't like to have around. Each of those tasks uses one or more parts of the Predatory Motor Sequence.

Border collies are bred to have a strong desire to perform the orient, eye, stalk and chase parts of the sequence. The chase needs to be controlled to avoid scattering sheep but they need to want to do it. Some lines of collie are bred to do a grab-bite too. It is useful if they need to herd larger animals like cattle if they will grip the animal.



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Spaniels are bred to have a strong desire to hunt using their noses and a strong desire to possess items and carrying them around. That way they can be directed to find game birds hidden in undergrowth and scare them up into the air so that they can be shot. And then they can be sent to retrieve them.

Maremma sheepdogs and the other livestock guardian breeds help farmers by having no predatory desires at all. They hang out with the sheep and keep them safe unsupervised by people so it's important that they have no prey drive. They will aggressively chase off any wolves or dogs who try to worry their flock.

If that wasn't all complicated enough, the 1800s saw the introduction of breed showing. When that came along, dogs started to be bred for the way they looked. In the UK, it has led to some breeds having distinct types that don't always look the same. Cocker spaniels are a good example with show bred cockers and working bred cockers looking very different from each other. In some



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parts of the world, dogs do have to pass working tests to be allowed to be bred from in attempts to maintain the traits that the dog was originally bred for.

More recently again, designer crossbreeds have become popular as has the rescue and transportation of street dogs to homes in other countries.

Genetics are complex and even where dogs are being bred for a particular task, there will be lots of variation in their behaviour. But – the introduction of breeding practices that are about things other than how the dog behaves means that it is even harder to predict in advance if a puppy will grow up to have a high prey drive or not – and if they do have a high prey drive, exactly what it is that they'll want to do with prey.



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Adolescence and Prey Drive

I have a section on adolescence because it is often when prey drive starts to become a problem. At the time I'm writing this, there isn't all that much research about adolescence in dogs but there is tons of research with people and adolescence seems to be part of maturing for all mammals. Certainly, adolescent dogs can be just as challenging to live with as adolescent humans.

Just in case you are not aware of what goes on during adolescence, let me give you a summary. Adolescence is just part of growing up. In dogs it typically starts around 6 months of age. Some dogs are younger or older than that but 6 months is a good rough guide. It ends when the dog is mature. The ending of adolescence is not like a switch being flicked, it doesn't happen all at once but for most dogs, somewhere between 2 and 3 years of age, the process will be complete and they will be mature.



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That time from 6 months – 2 years is a time of enormous change for young dogs. During it their adult teeth finish growing. They experience rapid growth which can be painful for some dogs. They have hormone surges.

Their brains undergo enormous changes through a process called neural pruning where the neurons that haven't quite made the grade are removed to create a more optimised brain. It's more than just pruning, the frontal cortex – which is the part of the brain that is responsible for higher cognitive functions like impulse control, problem solving and social interactions – matures during adolescence. The neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky talks about the frontal cortex not coming fully online until the end of adolescence.

Now that I've explained what a time of great change that age range is for dogs, I bet you won't be surprised to hear that it affects the behaviour and emotions of young dogs enormously. It is so much the case that most



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dogs who are surrendered to rescues are surrendered between 6 months and 2 years of age.

Adolescence is a time when young dogs have a strong desire to explore – they'll dig and climb and run off because they saw something move in the distance.

They are also often keen to meet other dogs and during adolescence are more likely to start running off to play with any dog they see.

When it comes to prey, it is often during adolescence that dogs develop the drive to do something with some sort of prey. A dog who might have done no more than glance at deer while he was a puppy will suddenly become obsessed with them. Thanks to the desire to explore, without help, that dog could easily start to run miles away hunting or chasing deer.

When all of this happens, it is common for people – especially people who have been to puppy class and



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have been diligently training their dog since they were a tiny puppy – to despair. They'll describe the dog as stubborn and will say things like “he knows all his commands and is ignoring me because he's stubborn.” Adolescent dogs are not being stubborn, they are just growing up and going through what is a completely normal process for all mammals.

The part of their brain that would allow them to see a deer and control their desire to chase the deer isn't properly working yet. An adolescent dog is more likely to see the deer and chase the deer without a second thought.

Here's the tricky thing. Most young dogs will chase anything that moves. Leaves, crisp bags, bees – as well as wildlife. For many of them, that desire will alter drastically as they mature. Some will become less interested. Others will become more selective and start ignoring crisp bags in favour of squirrels – becoming obsessed with them. Without help and support from the



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humans in their family, their interest in prey can become an ongoing problem.

Preventing that ongoing problem is what this class is all about.

Prey Drive or Reactivity?

Before we get onto training, there is one more thing to address that is important. Often part of the reason that prey drive becomes a problem is because prey animals are hard to avoid and most of us don't want our dogs just taking off chasing anything. It's too easy for them to end up on roads or in fields of livestock. So, we use leads to prevent the chasing.

Without careful work to prevent it, the use of barriers like leads can easily cause dogs to become frustrated.

When that happens, they might bark and lunge. Some dogs will grab the lead. Some dogs might grab you.



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Sometimes the frustration is so great that dogs will start to bark and lunge at other dogs too.

It can be difficult to know if you are dealing with a dog with a high prey drive or a reactive dog. Or both! To add to the difficulty is the lack of a clear definition of reactivity. Most often, though, when I see or hear dog trainers discussing reactivity, they are talking about dogs who are barking and lunging to keep something frightening away from them.

That's where it can become difficult.

For reactive dogs who are trying to keep something away from them, the process that happens is often:

The dog sees the scary thing and it's close enough to scare them.



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They bark and lunge toward it to try and frighten it away.

The scary thing often does go away.

Then the dog adopts barking and lunging as their strategy.

For high prey drive dogs who really want to go after the thing, the process that happens is a bit different.

The dog sees the rabbit and tries to chase it but is stopped by the lead.

It's a bit annoying for the dog but they move on with their walk.



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They see another rabbit and again the lead stops them chasing it. This time the dog is more annoyed and they bark and lunge forward with frustration, trying to free themselves.

Over time, whenever the dog sees a rabbit, they bark and lunge because they feel frustrated knowing that they won't be able to chase the rabbit.

If their frustration levels are high enough, they may also redirect their frustration and grab the lead, bite their person or bark and lunge at other dogs if there are any around.

From the human perspective, it looks identical to reactivity.

The dog sees something on a walk.



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They bark and lunge at it. Or maybe even just lunge toward it.

The thing goes away.

The problem is that treating it like reactivity won't solve the problem. A dog who is barking and lunging to keep something frightening away is in a very different emotional state than a dog who is barking and lunging because they feel frustrated that lead is stopping them from accessing prey.

How can you tell what you are actually dealing with?

The first thing to look at is what is the target for your dog's behaviour. If they are directing it at birds or wildlife, the chances are, it's linked to prey drive.



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The second thing to do is observe your dog's reaction when the thing goes away. Reactive dogs who have chased a threat away often relax when the threat is gone. High prey drive dogs who are frustrated don't tend to relax and in fact, their behaviour may intensify as the thing goes away.

The third thing to think about if you are finding that the reactivity is happening with other dogs too is – do you know if your dog gets along with other dogs if they can meet them off the lead. For dogs who enjoy meeting other dogs, frustration can occur when they don't get to meet them especially if they've played with lots of other dogs.

So – if you have bought this class because you have a reactive dog and you aren't making any progress with reactivity and some of the reactivity you experience with your dog is directed at birds or wildlife, then work through the class and see if it helps to make some shifts in your dog's reactions.



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Preventing Resource Guarding

Resource guarding is really normal for dogs.

Usually people start reading up on it or asking for help from random, unqualified strangers on social media if their dog starts to growl, snap or even bite them if they approach their dinner bowl or try to take something from the dog. I am so glad that you have been smart enough not to get your advice from social media.

There is more to resource guarding than aggression. Some dogs would never dream of confronting a person in any way. Those dogs are just never going to growl or even give a person a hard stare. Those dogs still resource guard but it looks different. Instead, those dogs might run away and hide if they have something in their mouth. Some of them might swallow the object. So many dogs end up having emergency surgery because they've swallowed something that they shouldn't – and



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lots of those swallowing incidents are down to the dog trying to keep something that is precious to them.

Remember when I was talking about the predatory motor sequence earlier? Well – part of the reason that resource guarding can be such a problem is that loads of dogs are bred to want to possess items – hold them and carry them around. The dogs don't necessarily want to hand the things over. They get their pleasure from holding them. For those dogs it goes beyond exploration using their mouths which all puppies do.

So, what can you do to prevent your dog's need to hold things becoming a problem for you?

You need to do three things, really.

1. Make sure that your dog does get to hold and carry things lots. Give them their own things that they get to carry – and don't take those away. Warn your visitors



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that when the dog comes over carrying something that it is just to be admired but not touched. If you are going to teach them to retrieve, make sure that you take your time and don't try and take the thing away too quickly.

2. Put things away that you don't want your dog to have. Manage your environment so that your dog doesn't experience having things constantly taken from them.
3. Teach a reliable drop. Here is a great way of doing that. I got this idea from the animal trainer, Chirag Patel. Then you can get things back if your dog has picked up something that is dangerous for them or if somebody has forgotten to put something away.

VIDEO LINK



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Manage for Success

Having talked about the problems that leads cause, I am aware of the irony of moving onto talk about management – which does include using leads.

The reason that management is so critical for high prey drive dogs is that because engaging in prey drive is so much fun for dogs, it is easy for them to start viewing it as something they do on their own, for themselves.

What I'm going to teach you in this class is how to get involved so that it is something that you and your dog do together instead.

To achieve that goal, management is going to be key. That is how you will make sure that your dog isn't just going off on their own without you.

There are lots of ways to be successful with management. I'm going to give you the foundations here and what you should do is choose what is most



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appropriate for you and do that. If you are right at the beginning of your journey, try things out and see what works best for you.

The first thing that you can do is think about where you are taking your dog. If all you want to do is go for a pleasant walk then try and select somewhere that doesn't have lots of the sorts of animals that makes your dog lose their mind with excitement. Save those places for when you are up for training.

Consider different sorts of walks – especially if you have a dog who you find stressful to walk. You might hire a fenced in field. Or go for walks around a town – sociable dogs often love town walks and dogs who love to use their noses often like the different scents. Or you might drive to somewhere quiet, get out of the car and walk around a small area making lots of noise to encourage wildlife to move off and then go and get your dog. If you spend time doing the things I'm going to suggest here,



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you can easily spend quite a while in a really small area without it being boring for your dog.

If you have a dog who gets more and more excited the longer you are out consider doing shorter walks and maybe doing a few more of them. A lot of people with young working gundogs don't really walk them. They take them to places and spend maybe 20 – 30 minutes doing some training and then take them home again. They might do that 2 or 3 times a day. They do it as a way of managing the environment and their dog to set them all up for success.

Think about what's happening at home. Is your back door always open and your dog always out in the garden doing their own thing? If it is, I would encourage you to change that habit for the moment. The difficulty with a dog who is outside doing their own thing is that if they have a high prey drive, there is every chance they are busy out there learning that they can amuse themselves doing predatory things and that it is something they do



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alone. Most gardens no matter how small will offer opportunities. There might be mice passing through or other wildlife – and there will be birds flying overhead. If that is your habit, change it and make sure that you go out with your dog and do the things that I'm going to recommend in the rest of the class. It is important that you become part of the picture if your dog has or might grow up to have a prey drive.

The next thing to think about is the equipment you are using to lead your dog and how you are handling the lead.

In general, I prefer a well fitted body harnesses – the ones that are fixed and don't tighten when the dog pulls - over collars or anything at all around the dog's neck or head.

Ideally something designed to be comfortable to wear. I often use canicross harnesses for that reason. You can



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check out harnesses on these websites:

<https://dogfit.co.uk/> and <https://www.mountaindog.uk/>

My preference is for leads to be as long as possible while keeping YOU safe. Often one of the things that makes leads a source of frustration for dogs is them being far too short. Ideally, I would use leads that are no shorter than 2 metres. In areas where you are away from roads, you can use longer lines – 5 – 10 metres are good lengths.

However, you do need to think about your own safety. Sometimes that is just not going to be appropriate. Maybe your dog is large, fast and able to drag you to the ground easily. Or perhaps your dog is able to grab and kill cats or small dogs even while on a lead. Don't worry. There is more you can do to keep yourself safe and your dog safe.



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Consider using a double ended lead and a harness that connects at the front as well as the back. Having two points of connection on your dog can really help with dogs who pull hard on the lead. A double ended lead is just a lead with a clip at either end instead of a clip at one end and a handle at the other.

Here is a harness with a connection on the front and the back: <https://ruffwear.co.uk/products/front-range-everyday-dog-harness>

Here is a video of me demonstrating what that looks like with Roxy.

VIDEO LINK

Some dogs learn to back out of harnesses and if that is a concern for you, some manufacturers make harnesses with an extra strap so that they are harder to slip out of. This one is an example.

<https://ruffwear.co.uk/products/web-master-harness>



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You might feel as if you need a bit more support and if you do, a headcollar that your dog has been carefully conditioned to wear can really help you. This make of headcollar is good because they don't tighten around the dog's face: <https://www.dogmatic.org.uk/>

The thing to remember with headcollars is that they do take away more freedom to move from your dog which will increase the possibility of frustration becoming a problem. So do make an extra effort to make sure your dog is happy wearing the headcollar and make sure you are often incorporating the suggestions I'm going to make in the rest of this class whenever you are walking. Headcollars give you much more influence over your dog's head so they do carry a risk of neck injury. To help make them as safe as you can here is what to do:

- ✚ ALWAYS use with a double ended lead and have the other end attached to a harness.
- ✚ Use the headcollar as a backup only and make sure that the lead stays loose.



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- ✚ When you are leading your dog in a headcollar, walk them so that you are next to their shoulder.
- ✚ Make sure that your dog has been properly taught how to wear a headcollar and is happy to do so. If you're not sure how to do that, check out the muzzle class download link below and do the same training but using a headcollar rather than a muzzle.

If you feel that there is a risk of your dog grabbing cats or small dogs while on the lead, a muzzle will help keep you and your dog safe from the consequences of that happening. I have a great muzzle class which I've decided to include with this class because I know that for some people, it will make a huge difference.

Here is a link to the muzzle class which you have access to. You will need to log into my website before you'll be able to download it:

[Muzzle Training Course](#)



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How you handle your lead and where you position yourself makes a huge difference too.

VIDEO LINK

The last thing to show you about lead handling is something that helps prevent the lead being pulled from your hand. What I would say about this is that I would use it with one of these Animal Centred Education or ACE handles [ACE dog lead handle](#)

That's what I'm using in the video. The handles help to keep the tension out of the lead when you grip it using your thumb. That's helpful because tension in the lead might make your dog more likely to lunge forward.

VIDEO LINK

Get the most from food

What I often see when I'm browsing around on social media is people who say – I use high value food and my



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dog still doesn't respond. Or – people searching around for the holy grail of food. Something that will be more exciting to their dog than a squirrel/rabbit/deer – or whatever it is that their dog is most interested in.

If you are still searching for that perfect food that will trump prey, stop. Nothing will. For high prey drive dogs, the only way food would trump prey is if the dog was starving and I do not recommend that you starve your dog in the name of training. You don't have to.

What I am going to suggest that you do is think about how you deliver food to your dog. The very first thing to think about is making sure that you can easily get to the food you have with you. You don't want to have it in a box and wrapped in a plastic bag so that it takes you ages to get a piece of food out. I know that carrying food like that will keep your pockets cleaner but it's no use for rewarding your dog. By the time you've gotten food out to reward them, they'll be off doing their own thing.



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So – here’s what to do. Get yourself a proper treat bag. That way you can keep your pockets clean AND still be able to get food easily. There are loads of different types. You can get silicone ones that are super easy to clean. You can buy treat bags that you wear around your waist on a belt. You can get treat bags that you put in your pocket. Spend a bit of time on your favourite internet search engine and find the perfect treat bag for you. Then use it. If you are worried about hygiene, buy several of them and then you can wash them in rotation.

The key thing is to make sure that you can get the food out quickly and easily.

Now that you’ve got your food access sorted, experiment with 3 different ways of delivering food to your dog. Lots of the time when dogs have done something desirable, they are rewarded by being handed a piece of food and then they get patted on the head. I’m sure that for some dogs that is rewarding but



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what I often see is that dogs move away when people pat them on the head. They don't often enjoy that sort of contact. The food probably helps them tolerate it but just being handed a piece of food is probably quite boring for them.

That sort of reward might well work for a dog who doesn't have a high prey drive – but your dog does. Or at least you think they might do.

So you need to make your food delivery a bit more exciting. Here are 3 ways to do that.

Scatter

Scatter a few pieces of food on the ground or on a handy tree stump or park bench for your dog to sniff out. Using their nose to find the food will be satisfying for the dogs who love to follow scent trails. It'll also make your food rewards last longer.



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VIDEO LINK

I'm going to come back to this later on in the course.

Chase

Bowl your food along the ground for your dog to chase. You can bowl one piece, let your dog eat it and then bowl another piece in the opposite direction as much as you like. Dogs who love to chase will find this enormous fun. Try and use food that is easy to see and doesn't break apart for this.

VIDEO LINK

Catch

Toss your food into the air for your dog to catch. Many dogs love the action of catching something flying through the air. It makes the food much more exciting and will make your dog see the food that you have as much more valuable.



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VIDEO LINK

Test them all out and see what your dog's favourite is. Then you can use that to reward your dog when they do things that you love.

Do also use decent quality food when training your high prey drive dog. No food will trump prey but your dog is going to be way more enthusiastic about eating small pieces of roast meat or something like this [choppable pate](#) than they are about a dry biscuit. Do make an effort to take tasty food out with you on walks. If you are using loads, make sure it is healthy and reduce the amount you put in your dog's bowl to compensate so that they don't get fat.

Pattern for lead off

Patterns are a big thing in dog training at the moment – and for good reason. They are awesome for building strong, reliable behaviour in dogs. They allow the dogs



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to engage with the environment which is so important for high prey drive dogs – and also retain a connection with their person. Repetitive patterns are great for forming habits and if you can make habits that help with that moment when the lead comes off, it'll make all the difference to you.

There are loads of different ways to use patterns to maximise your training and we're going to look at one in this section.

A lead coming off – or the transfer from a short lead to a long line – can easily become a signal to your dog that they don't need to pay any attention to you. When you are dealing with a dog who has a high prey drive – or who might have a high prey drive – you want them to stay connected to you. Otherwise, they are likely to just go off hunting for prey animals.



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One way to start preventing that is to make a pattern out of taking the lead off. Here's what to do.

- + Get about 10 small treats in your hand.
- + Take the lead off.
- + If your dog already takes off on you, attach a long line before you take the lead off.
- + Place a treat on the ground. Once your dog has eaten it, look for them lifting their head and as they do, place another treat on the ground. Keep going until you've given 3 – 4 treats.
- + Toss a treat into the air for your dog to catch. Repeat with 3 – 4 treats.
- + Bowl a treat along the ground. Once your dog has caught it wait for them to turn toward you and then bowl another one in the opposite direction. Repeat with 3 – 4 treats.



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VIDEO LINK

So long as you are consistent with this and do it every single time you take your dog's lead off, you will transform your dog's thinking from "Hooray – freedom – see you later, loser!" to "Awesome. Time for a game with my favourite person."

If you start with a dog who hasn't yet learned to ditch you as soon as the lead comes off, you will be able to stop it from happening in the first place.

This is a fast, easy thing to do and all it needs is for you to have treats in your newly sorted treat bag. Then you just have to remember to do it.

And – it leads really nicely into the next section of this class – automatic check ins.



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Automatic Check Ins

Different dog trainers mean slightly different things by automatic check ins. So don't worry if you talk to another trainer who does it differently. There are thousands and thousands of right ways to train a dog. This is how I do automatic check ins.

Before I get onto automatic check ins I want to tell you a tiny bit about markers and how they are used in animal training. Basically, a marker is a sound that lets your dog know something good is coming to them. It lets you bridge that little gap of time between your dog doing a good thing and you reaching into your treat bag and getting out a treat. You've got a few seconds to get the treat to your dog.

You can buy clickers which are little plastic devices that make a click sound when pressed. They are great for training sessions but can become just another thing to



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juggle on walks. So – for walks, a marker word is a great idea. I often use Yes or good. It does not matter what word you use so long as it isn't something you say all the time and it is something that is easy for you to say. Hallelujah is a word you probably don't say every day – but it doesn't exactly trip off the tongue.

Once you've chosen a word, spend a little bit of time teaching your dog that it means something. Otherwise it'll just be a meaningless noise to them.

This is super simple. All you have to do is say your word and then give your dog a little piece of food. For the next day or two, 3 times a day get 10 pieces of food and practice. The order is important. You need to say the word first and THEN give the food. By the time you've practiced a few times a day, your dog will know what the word means.

VIDEO LINK



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Now that you've got a marker word, we can move on to automatic check ins.

What you'll likely find with most dogs and especially with puppies under 5 months of age is that they will glance at you sometimes. When that happens, be ready to say your marker word and give them a piece of food. You can do it on lead, off lead and you can do it anywhere.

This is just a habit to get into and over time what you'll find will happen is that if your dog is off lead and running around, they will run back of their own accord and check in with you. It's a little trick to help them stay closer to you.

VIDEO LINK

I do this a lot and work hard to build value in it partly because it's a good skill for dogs to have and partly because I walk a lot in dense forests and sound can be difficult in forests. Sometimes it's hard for dogs to locate



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where a sound is coming from if they are among trees. This is because forests contain a lot of different surfaces that sound waves can hit and reverberate from. I much prefer not to rely on calling my dogs for that reason. I want them to pay attention to where I am and regularly come over to me.

If you have a dog who literally never looks at you which you might well do, use the food bowling that I talked about earlier from your new lead off pattern. If your dog knows that you will bowl food in one direction and then another, they are likely to run, eat a piece of food and then turn back to you. You can start to use your new word to mark the moment they look and then bowl food in the other direction.

VIDEO LINK

That will help your dog to learn that looking at you pays off. And then they'll start to glance at you at other times



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too. Be ready when they do to mark and then reward them.

Cue Hunt or Eye

The earlier parts of the predatory motor sequence don't involve contact with prey animals and can be hugely rewarding for dogs.

I'm going to give you a few ways that you can start to put those on cue and use them to build a stronger connection with your dog.

Hunting Option One

Loads of dogs absolutely love this part of the predatory motor sequence. I suspect it's why scent based dog sports are so popular with dogs and their people. It's such fun for the dogs and most of the time dogs are hunting using their nose.



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Safety Announcement: If your dog might chase or catch other animals – or run off really far - have them on a long line AND spend time in the area you are going to play in walking around, making a lot of noise so that any animals move off. The animals might not be there – but their scent will be and your dog can have fun following it.

There are a couple of ways to do hunt. If you have an active dog who loves to move do this:

Start off with your dog next to you.

Make a quarter turn and then send your dog off. I use the cue hunting-hunting for this.

As your dog passes you, turn away and encourage them to follow you in the new direction while still following their nose. As they pass you again, turn and go in the opposite direction.



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The turns are there to help your dog stay closer to you without stopping them from hunting.

While your dog is doing that, you can drop pieces of food for them to find or hide toys for them. That way it seems as if you know where all the good stuff is.

VIDEO LINK

You can also look for times when a bird has just flown off or a rabbit has just moved off and take your dog there to do hunting on cue. It'll further reinforce your dog's belief that you know where the good stuff is and that you are worth hanging around with.

Hunting Option Two

Some dogs favour stillness and lifting their nose to sniff the air when they smell something interesting.

If you have one of those dogs, do this:



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Watch for your dog going still and when they do, stop with them.

If they glance at you at all, mark and reward it just like you would with a check in. Doing that helps it feel more like it is something you are doing together.

Stand with them and let them take in the air.

While they do that, you can start to add a word to what they are doing – you can say ‘Smell it’ or something else that makes sense to you.

Stay there for as long as you can letting your dog take in the smell.

VIDEO LINK

If it looks like it is getting overwhelming or your dog seems stuck in it, walk into your dog’s peripheral vision,



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say their name and when they look to you, move away while giving them some food treats.

Signs that it's getting overwhelming would be – your dog looking more tense, lowering their body – as if they are about to dash off and often ears moving forward too.

VIDEO LINK

As you move away, make sure that you move your feet first. Often when we try to move our dogs away from something, we start the movement with our arms and shoulders and doing that sometimes makes them brace – which is why you might find that you have to pull your dog along with you. If you are mindful about moving your feet first, it can help your dog to move along with you.

VIDEO LINK



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The other thing that you can do is when you are getting a good response to the scatter cue that I'll talk about later on is use that. Cue scatter, let your dog eat a few pieces of food. Walk a couple of steps while they do and cue scatter again. As you move away from the exciting smell, you'll be able to do less scattering and more walking.

Eye

Safety Announcement: Let your dog eye birds and wildlife. Don't let them do this with other pets, children or people moving fast (joggers, cyclists etc). If it ever gets overwhelming and they do move into a chase, you don't ever want it to be directed at a human or somebody else's pet.

I know that if you have problems with your dog barking and lunging or chasing wildlife that you probably try and stop them from looking at all. That's completely understandable. It's also really difficult to do in practice.



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It is very difficult to avoid all wildlife – and if birds are of interest to your dog, I'd say it's impossible to avoid them. So working to make seeing wildlife more manageable for your dog is a really good idea.

Start looking for opportunities. Ideally you'll be far enough away that when your dog sees the prey, they aren't instantly barking and lunging.

Most dogs will stop and watch if they see prey that is a distance away. Watch for them doing that. Then stop with them.

If they glance at you at all, mark and reward it just like you would with a check in. Doing that helps it feel more like it is something you are doing together.



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When they watch, you can add a word to it. I say 'See it' but you can use something else that makes sense to you.

Stay there for as long as you can letting your dog take in the sight.

VIDEO LINK

Again, if it seems to be getting overwhelming for them (I'll talk about this more in the arousal section later), follow the advice above to start moving away.

I should mention that scent is a significant sense for dogs and what you might find is that your dog can calmly see things if they can't also smell them but if you are in a place with lots of scent, you will probably need to be much further away for calm seeing. The scent will cause your dog's levels of arousal or excitement to rise meaning that when they see another animal, they will already be excited.



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One last thing about all of this. Depending on your living setup, your garden may be a place where your dog hunts for or sees prey. It's easy to get downhearted about that. How can you possibly manage your dog and the environment when even a simple trip to the garden can be a hunting trip?

I'd encourage you to change the way you think and instead be grateful for the many and easy opportunities you have for training. If you are in it, get out of the habit of just leaving the door to your garden open for your dog to come and go as they please. You want to be part of all your dog's experiences with prey so that they start to see you more and more as a partner. That can't happen if you're busy chopping veg for dinner while your dog is out in the garden hunting wildlife.

Instead, create a new habit. Look into or go into the garden before you let your dog out. Scare any birds into



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the air and chase out any other animals. Then go out with your dog and play the hunting game with the scent.

If birds or other animals are far enough away, pop a lead on your dog and play the seeing game that we've just been talking about.

None of this will give your dog a high prey drive if they don't have one – but if they do, doing all of these things will work to make you more relevant to your dog when you are out walking.

Pattern for exits

Similarly to getting leads off, going out of houses and leaving cars can be a time for dogs to want to just charge off without a second thought for you.

Start to change that. What I like is for my dogs to get out of the car or house and turn to me.



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You can do it just by calling their name. Practice in the house for a few days first. Have some treats handy. In your pocket or in hidden pot somewhere nearby. You don't want to hold them in your hand because what can happen is that then you end up with a dog who only responds if you have a treat in your hand – which you don't want.

So with treats handy but not visible to your dog, say their name. When they look at you, give them a treat. Do it loads and loads throughout the day for a few days.

Then start to say their name as they go out the door or get out of the car. This will start a great habit of them turning to you rather than straining to be off.

[VIDEO LINK](#)



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The scatter cue

If you work hard on this, the scatter cue can be used to get your dog to run to you. It can be used to give your dog something to do while something exciting like a jogger or a cyclist passes them. It can be a great way of helping your dog calm down if they have gotten really excited.

All you need is 3 or 4 pieces of food, your dog and a place where other dogs aren't going to run over for a few minutes.

Say scatter and then scatter the food on the ground. Make it obvious at first that you are dropping food. Use food that is easy for your dog to see and smell. Something like tiny cubes of cheese will work well at first.

The order is important. You need to say scatter and THEN drop the food.



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VIDEO LINK

Once your dog is a pro at knowing what the word means, practice in lots of different places.

Practice and practice and practice and use your management tools to make sure that you don't have to use it in an emergency. The more you practice, the stronger it will get and eventually, your dog will respond to your scatter cue without even thinking about it even if they are off the lead.

Preventing tight leads

A couple of things that happen when dogs go into adolescence is that they have a much harder time listening to you AND their prey drive will often go through the roof. They are not being stubborn – there is a storm going on in their brain and they just can't always listen to you.



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So, it's a time when you'll likely want to use a lead or a long line more. What very often causes that to be a problem with young dogs is they've never been taught how to manage themselves well on a lead. Some of them have always pulled on the lead. Others haven't spent much time on a lead.

Suddenly the extra confinement that happens in adolescence causes frustration and you end up with a dog who pulls hard and is difficult to manage. Then walks are miserable for everybody. It's part of the reason that young dogs so often end up in rescues.

I am going to show you something that will help take the frustration and the pulling out of it. You are going to learn how to teach your dog to move away from pressure on the lead rather than lean into it. If you don't train it and practice it, something called the opposition reflex will mean that they pull into the pressure.



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You will still need to work on loose lead walking but this will help take the frustration out of things when the lead goes tight. The lead will go tight when you walk an adolescent dog because you will walk in places that are too exciting for your dog to currently deal with. It's going to happen and this will help stop it becoming such a war.

I prefer harnesses because I don't worry as much about dogs hurting themselves if they suddenly run to the end of lead on one as I do if the dog is wearing a collar. So we are going to do this training with a harness – but if your dog wears a collar you can do it with a collar as well.

I strongly recommend using a static harness that doesn't tighten or a flat collar. You want a consistent contact with the dog and anything that tightens and releases can't give you that.



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Step One: Get your dog and have them wearing their walking harness or collar. Get prepared with a treat and your marker work. Hold their harness where the lead would attach and say the marker word. Your dog will turn to you. Give them a treat.

VIDEO LINK

Repeat lots and lots of times and eventually, you'll notice that if you touch your dog's harness, they turn to you. Don't forget your marker word and treat.

VIDEO LINK

When that happens, move onto step two.

Step Two: Attach a lead and repeat step one. First of all, just hold lead, put a tiny bit of pressure on and mark. Repeat until the tiny bit of pressure makes dog turn toward you.



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VIDEO LINK

Gradually work until your dog will take a couple of steps toward you when the lead goes tight.

Then you can take the training out on the road.

Reinforcing a position

This is the start of training a stop – which is such a useful thing for your dog to know.

It all begins with your dog learning to take up a position that is comfortable for them and well known to them.

What does your dog know most? Sit, lie, stand?



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If the answer is 'none of them, really' then start to watch what your dog does if they are just taking in the world. How do they tend to do it?

What do you know about any prior training they might have had before they came to you? Do they already know something well?

I use sit as a stop position for Ren because her breeder had spent loads of time rewarding her litter for sitting and when she arrived with me at 8 weeks, she already knew how to sit pretty well.

If none of them are obvious winners, sit is probably the easiest to teach. Here is a quick video demonstrating how to do it.

VIDEO LINK



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Then all you need to do is regularly reward your dog whenever they are in that position. Make it really nice for them.

If you are working on hunt or eye on cue, what you can start to do is ask your dog to sit (or stand or lie) during those sessions, reward them with food - and then let them go back to hunting or eyeing.

It's a really nice way of starting to build a stop.

VIDEO LINK

Observing Arousal

I'm finishing off this class with a quick chat about arousal levels. Typically when we dog trainers talk about arousal what we are talking about is how excited the dog is.



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When dogs are highly aroused – very excited – then it's hard for them to listen to people. They tend to get a laser focus on whatever is exciting them and tune everything else out.

A big part of learning to work with prey drive is learning to look at your dog and understand their arousal levels.

To keep it simple for this foundations class, just look for how fast your dog is moving. Have they started to pull on the lead more? Sometimes that can be because of higher levels of excitement making them move faster.

If they are off the lead, are they running faster? Is their tail wagging faster – this is especially obvious in spaniels.

Get used to understanding what your dog looks like when they are able to respond to you and what they



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look like when they've gone past the point of being able to respond to you.

It'll help you to form a map of your normal walks and where on each one tends to be too exciting for your dog to respond. It'll help you know when it would be a good idea to use a lead.

It'll help you to reduce times when you are taken by surprise and have a dog who just takes off on you.

Final Word

Putting all of these foundations in place will help you learn to understand and appreciate your dog's prey drive so much more. You'll be able to stop seeing it as a nuisance and start seeing it as the thing that makes your dog light up with joy.

Take your time with all of this, don't be in a rush. You are working to help your dog understand that you are



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part of their world and are somebody worthwhile paying attention to – even when there is prey around. That won't happen overnight. Enjoy the process and enjoy your dog.

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health, and temperament. You remain responsible for your dog's behaviour.

Who am I?

And why on earth would you listen to me?

My name is Tracey McLennan and I run Best Dog Learning and Stuff. I have over 15 years of experience as a dog trainer. I've got loads of qualifications. I have a BSc (hons) in Canine Behaviour and Training. I am an ACE Advanced Tutor and a Tellington TTouch practitioner.

I'm currently studying for an MSc in Applied Animal Behaviour and Training.

I've lived with challenging dogs and worked through issues with them. My beloved bullmastiff, Calgacus, was so aggressive toward other dogs that most dog trainers and behaviourists wouldn't work with me. Some of them



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recommended he be put to sleep as he posed such a risk to other dogs.

My amazing dog, Cuillin, used to disappear for hours if he could even smell a deer. So many experts advised that I just keep him on a long line permanently.

I like a challenge, so I set out to find other solutions. Calgacus ended up being gentle and playful with other dogs. Nothing made him happier than making a new dog friend.

Cuillin learned to control his impulses and to see me as a valued companion on walks which meant that he could run free in forests once more.

