

COURTESY OF

DOG PARENTOLOGY PODCAST



Readiness Checklist



You've chosen a non-triggering time of day



Your dog has slept well, meaning 12-15 hours of sleep



Your mindset is one of patience and happiness



The place you will be teaching is free or very low of distractions



Your dog is feeling well, and not directly after vaccines or shots



Your dog has not had an emotional eruption in the last 24 hours



Facts

Dogs cannot consolidate lessons learned if sleep deprived.

Dogs with less than 15 hours of deep quality sleep are sleep deprived

Dogs who've had poor past are more likely to be unable to focus with high distraction

Vaccines and shots may leave a dog not feeling their best

Creating a **Sensory Positive Experience** directly engages with the dog's executive function and creates emotional balance

A chronically stressed dog can take 24 hours to recover from one upset.

Previously stressed dogs are known to have an enhanced response to subsequent stress.

To successfully teach your dog new ways to cope, you need to model the mindset of calm and joy. Your mood matters.

Dogs can feel unwell just like us; headaches, tummyaches.

COURTESY OF



DOG PARENTOLOGY PODCAST

The “Something Better” game is a gentle yet effective way to help your dog develop impulse control. This game guides your dog away from unsafe or challenging situations using Sensory Positive Experiences, making it especially useful for dogs with suspected or known trauma. Remember, dogs need time, patience, and repeated practice to learn these new skills. Your role is to remain calm, cheerful, and encouraging throughout the process.

If your dog doesn't succeed right away, that's perfectly okay! Dogs learn best when we allow them to make mistakes, simply state ‘ah well...you'll get it’, without frustration, and try again after a short pause. It is important not to IGNORE failures as seen in operant conditioning and positive reinforcement, just underplay them while staying engaged. Keep an eye on your dog's energy levels—trauma can make learning more exhausting—so it's essential to stop when you see signs of fatigue and try again later. At the end of each level, look for signs that your dog is consistently calm and confident before progressing. This prevents moving too quickly, which is especially important for dogs with trauma, ensuring they feel secure and ready to advance

What It Takes to Teach A Challenging Dog

Co-regulation is the heart of the “Something Better” exercise, where your emotional state directly influences your dog's ability to stay calm and focused. It's pretty amazing when you think about it—another species, your dog, is trying so hard to learn from you, even when it's challenging for them. Recognizing this effort with gratitude can deepen your bond. If your dog gets frustrated or loses concentration, take a deep breath, smile, and gently reassure them with, “You've got this! Something Better.” By staying composed and positive, you help your dog mirror your calm energy, reinforcing their trust in the process. Co-regulation is not just about guiding your dog; it's about creating a safe, supportive space where both of you work together to build their impulse control and emotional resilience.

Tip #1

For best results, ensure your mindset is calm and encouraging. Make an effort to smile at your dog. Keep your tone light and happy. Do not use this cue in challenging situations before mastery is achieved.

COURTESY OF

DOG PARENTOLOGY PODCAST



Beginner Level

At the beginner level we begin strengthening specific aspects of executive function (like picking up the phone in your dog's brain and asking for Conrad), such as working memory, cognitive flexibility, or impulse control. The lack of stress keeps Tom (the amygdala) calm allowing your dog to learn effectively.

1. Start with Calm Focus: With a relaxed and cheerful tone, enclose the treat in your hand, keeping the treat securely inside.
2. Give the Cue: Hold your closed fist with the treat in front of your dog while calmly saying, "Something Better."
3. As Your Dog Approaches: There is no doubt your dog will try to get the treat from your hand. As they do, be ready to use the marker word "Yes" with a warm smile when they shift their focus or lose interest.
4. Building a Communication Channel: The key is to establish a link between your words, your positive emotions, and the predictable outcome of receiving a treat. When your dog moves their gaze away from your fist, sits, or even looks slightly away, immediately say "Yes" and reward them with a treat from your other hand, creating a Sensory Positive Experience.
5. Handling Frustration: If your dog starts to paw at your hand out of frustration, gently lift your fist away a little and softly say, "You've got this! Something Better." This diffuses their frustration and keeps the experience positive.
6. Encourage Any Effort: Don't wait too long for a perfect response; even small shifts in behaviour, like sitting or a quick glance away, are worth rewarding. Encourage these small efforts, as they will grow into bigger successes over time.



Tip #2

Adjust your approach if your dog shows signs of fatigue or frustration. Take a break to let them reset, showing you're attentive to their needs.

COURTESY OF

DOG PARENTOLOGY PODCAST

Intermediate Level

1. Progress the Challenge: Once your dog shows some impulse control with the treat in your hand, move the treat under your foot and cheerfully say, “Something Better.” (*Remember the principle: The treat under your foot represents a ‘never-ever’ item, so make sure to pick it up after each time, and always give a treat from your pocket or pouch.*)

2. Encourage and Reward: If your dog hesitates or looks away from the treat, immediately create a Sensory Positive Experience with a happy “Yes!” and offer a treat from your pocket or treat pouch.

3. After a few successful times, make a small noise right after the dog looks away, and have them look up at you. They should see your smile and hear “Yes!”, then, reward as normal. This advances the “Something Better” to include looking at you.

4. Be Patient with Mistakes: If your dog doesn’t stop reaching for the treat, remain calm, avoid any negative reactions, and quietly reset the exercise. Wait a few moments before beginning again, always with the same cheerful encouragement.

5. Watch for Fatigue: Keep an eye on your dog for signs of tiredness. Dogs with trauma may need more breaks as they use a lot of energy to focus and learn.



Tip #3

Remember to say “Something Better” first before tempting your dog. It’s not only a nice thing to dog but it also allows them to understand what is being asked of them.

COURTESY OF

DOG PARENTOLOGY PODCAST

Advanced Level

1. **Raise the Stakes:** When your dog consistently leaves the treat alone under your foot, place the treat on top of your foot. As they approach, gently repeat “Something Better” to remind them of the game.
2. **Celebrate Small Wins:** If your dog backs away from the treat or even glances elsewhere, respond with a positive “Yes!” and immediately create a Sensory Positive Experience by offering a reward from your pocket, not the treat they were focusing on. Make sure to pick up the treat on your foot.
3. **Handle Unsuccessful Attempts with Grace:** If your dog takes the treat let them and ignore them, wait a few seconds, and then repeat the exercise with patience and encouragement. You can bend over and have your hand ready to cover the treat if the dog is struggling to understand.
4. **Recognise When to Pause:** Dogs with trauma can become mentally exhausted faster. Look for signs that your dog might need a break, and don’t hesitate to end the session on a positive note, knowing you’ll come back to it later with the same gentle energy.



Tip #4

Establishing a clear and consistent way of communicating with your dog is key. Use the marker word “Yes” with a smile of encouragement to signal a job well done

COURTESY OF

DOG PARENTOLOGY PODCAST



Proofing Games: Strengthening Your Dog's Impulse Control

Once your dog has successfully completed the Advanced Level of the "Something Better" game, it's time to challenge their impulse control with proofing exercises. Proofing helps solidify the skills they've learned by gradually increasing the difficulty and ensuring they can maintain their response in various situations.

1. Change the Environment:

Begin by playing the game in a familiar and low-distraction area, then gradually move to new environments, like the garden or a quiet park. As you change locations, maintain a calm tone and remember, it's a Sensory Positive Experience. Use the marker word "Yes" and a smile to acknowledge their success



2. Introduce New Distractions:

Gradually add distractions. Using your own discernment about what your dog can handle, you may try something like a towel with a little bit of scent like peanut butter, or anchovy paste (I've used a rock and the side of a fence for my dog, smearing a scent on it) and leaving it at a distance in advance of playing 'Something Better'.

If your dog struggles to focus, calmly bring them back to a simpler version of the game without the added distraction, reinforcing the basics before progressing again.


Remember that your dog going over to the cloth, and not choosing 'Something Better' is not to be scolded and the item they take or consume should not be taken away. This means planning ahead to make sure your dog cannot become harmed.



Tip #5

Dogs, especially those with trauma, are sensitive to the emotional states of their caregivers. Practicing deep breathing and maintaining a calm presence helps set the tone for each training session. Your calm energy creates a safe space for your dog to explore, make mistakes, and learn.

COURTESY OF



DOG PARENTOLOGY PODCAST

3. Vary the Rewards:

Change up the treats or rewards to keep the game engaging. Offer a variety of treats, from their favourite snacks to toys or praise, to maintain their interest and enthusiasm. Use the marker word “Yes” as soon as they demonstrate impulse control, followed immediately by the treat or reward.

4. Remember to Pick Up the Treat:

If you toss a treat on the ground during these exercises, always remember to pick it up if your dog doesn't take it. This helps maintain a clean slate and prevents confusion for your dog.

5. Handling Mistakes with Calm and Patience

Mistakes are part of learning, and your dog will sometimes struggle to meet the challenge of proofing exercises. Here's how to handle those moments with patience and positivity:

Pause and Reset: If your dog becomes frustrated or repeatedly tries to get the treat, calmly lift your hand or foot away, and in a soft tone, say, “That's okay! You've got this!” Give them a moment to settle before trying again. DO NOT block your dog physically or step on something if they go for it. Not only is this intimidating to a dog, you are making it a punitive experience. Simply let them enjoy it and remember they are still learning.

Watch for Signs of Fatigue: Dogs with trauma or a history of stress may tire quickly during these proofing sessions. If you notice them losing focus or becoming frustrated more easily, it's best to take a break. Allow them to rest and reset before continuing, so the learning experience remains positive.

YOU'VE GOT THIS!

The “Something Better” game is all about dog parenting at its finest; having fun together while learning and it's an opportunity to deepen your bond with your dog through shared experiences, trust, and positive communication. By keeping the game engaging, rewarding, and full of gentle encouragement, you're helping your dog build confidence and impulse control that will last a lifetime.

With your calm guidance and consistency, your dog will continue to develop these essential skills while knowing they are safe and supported.