

## Chase This, Not That!

A dog's love of a good chase is both a blessing and a curse. It makes playing with them extra fun; what a joy it is to play fetch and chase with some dogs! And it's got a dark side too—chasers love to chase cats, cars, joggers and bicyclists, and that doesn't tend to work out so well for all involved.

In an earlier post I talked about teaching my new pup Hope not to chase Sushi the cat, and several readers asked how I am doing that. Here's a summary of both a generic plan and how it looks in detail in one home, with one dog, and one cat. Obviously, the details vary tremendously, but the basic plan is relatively universal.

1. **MANAGE AND PREVENT:** What could be more fun than chasing something if a dog is so inclined? Dogs are, after all, cursorial predators (meaning they run things down for a living), and that tendency is still very strong in many of them, 12,000 + years later. (And admittedly, not so much in others.) There is little more reinforcing than a great chase to some dogs, so once you know it's an issue, job #1 is to prevent it from happening unless you can use the situation as a training session. That means leashes, gates, etc.. whatever you need to do to keep your dog from getting reinforced by a super fun chase game.

At the farm: Once I knew Hope loved to chase Sushi (happened once outside and once inside), I used leashes, gates and management to prevent it from happening again. If Hope was outside loose, then Sushi was inside. If Hope was inside, Sushi was in her kitty suite if I couldn't be on "cat duty."

2. **MASTER** at least one incompatible behavior. While you are managing the situation, work on teaching at least one (more is better) behavior that inherently prevents chasing and gives you a chance to give your dog a whoppingly wonderful reinforcement. You could use "Watch" (turn away and look at me), sit down, lie down, turn away and chase you, go get a toy, etc etc. Your choice should be based on finding something that replaces chasing (or even focusing on the chasee) and is something that is easy and fun for your dog to do and for you to reinforce. Don't choose "Sit" if it's hard for your large breed dog to sit down, or "Lie Down" if your dog is nervous outside and he likes to chase cars. Fighting fire with fire is often a good idea, so if you have a dedicated chaser, you could teach him to look at you when you say "Watch" and then let him chase you as a reinforcement.

When I say "master," I mean to teach the behavior (again, more than one is better, gives you more flexibility) so that your dog will do it even when she is distracted. Start, as you would with all cues, with no distractions, and then work your way up to mild distractions, and then strong ones.

At the farm: We were already working on turning to me when I said his name, and sitting on cue, so I used both of those. When we started this, I had only had him for 1 week, so I didn't want to get too elaborate. I probably said his name + reinforcement 25 times a day, and asked him to sit about the same number of times. For reinforcement he got great treats (kibble for easy responses, cooked pieces of steak for ones when he was distracted), cooing and belly rubs (he appears to adore them) and chasing me when I ran. Well, I can't run much, which is truly cramping my style. I hobble along like Chester dragging his bad leg while calling after Mr. Dylan (any one else remember Gunsmoke?!) But I speed up as best I can, and have friends and Jim use running as much as they can, because herding dogs like Will seem to love little more than a good run after a friend.

3. **ASK FOR A BEHAVIOR** in the presence of the chasee. Use the behavior(s) you've been working on and give your dog a chance to be right or to be wrong. Only do this when you have some control. Don't start with the dog and cat loose outside, or a loose dog who can see cars passing

by right in front of him. Do what you need to do to create a 'win' and avoid a 'loss'... if you need to use a leash, then start there. Perhaps you ask your dog to look at you when he sees the cat behind a gate (no leash necessary there) or when you let them both into the same room together (leash might help here!). If your dog chases cars, be thoughtful about how difficult it will be for your dog to respond to your cue, the one you've been working on so hard in other contexts. Perhaps you start just on your front porch, not walking any closer to the street, and jackpot your dog for any positive response before going any further.

If your dog doesn't respond to your cue, show them some great food and lure them away from the object of interest. At first I'd give the food (assuming that's what your using at that point) even if you had to put the food beside their nose and use it to lure them toward you, but after a while you might want to use "negative punishment" and show them the food (right to their nose), lure them away from the car or cat, and then say "Oh Dear. Too bad... you would have gotten this if you'd been good, but you missed your chance. I'm so sorry." (It's really fun here to eat the food yourself.. not sure it affects the dog, but boy it feels great! Unless the only food you have is Liver/Fish Chunky Yunkies or something, Yuck.) If this happens several times in a row (no response), then you need to go back to Step #2, or set up the situation so that the chasee is farther away.

When your dog does respond to your cue, Whooooo Hooo! Jackpot (10 treats in a row, one at a time, while you wax eloquently about how brilliant she is, or run like crazy, laughing and clapping, throwing yourself down on the ground and letting happy dog lick your face.. etc etc...). Give reinforcements based on the difficulty of the exercise. Once you've gotten several good responses in a row, start asking for a bit more from your dog (cat closer for example).

Continue this at least 3 times a day if you can, more is better. Don't exhaust your dog (or cat!) by asking for a Watch, for example, over and over and over again in a row. Ask for one or two good responses, then move on to something else.

At the farm: I began letting Hope and Sushi together in the house and asking for him to either look at me or sit on cue as soon as he saw the cat. (Once Sushi learned she wasn't going to get chased she stopped running away, which made things a lot easier.) This went very well, partly because I'd worked on it so hard, and partly because Hope is a relatively responsive little pup. Once I was at 95-99% inside, I started letting my guard down outside and not worrying so much if they were both outside together (after about a week). Then, every time he saw the cat I'd say "Hope" or "Sit" and give him my best and most wonderful reinforcement.

4. USE MILD Positive Punishment when necessary if it's relevant and suitable. This would only be applicable in some situations, not in others. Try body blocking between a dog and a cat for example (see my farm example below). Perhaps if you had a car chaser you could get between the dog (on leash of course) and the car, and back him up in space a few paces (I love "space corrections" — you're not mad, not raising your voice, just 'taking the space' back away from your dog.) I am always very cautious about positive punishment, but as I said in an earlier post, I do not think it inhumane in the least if it is done thoughtfully and carefully. After all, as defined, it is adding something (the 'positive' part) to decrease a behavior (which is what makes it 'punishment' as defined by Skinner et al). The trick is knowing your dog, what you can 'add' to decrease a behavior, and doing it with the right timing.

At the farm: A few times Hope ignored my cue, and was about to start another chase. Because chasing Sushi is SO reinforcing, I just couldn't let him get away with doing it. (In many other

contexts I would just let it go and go back to reinforcements... but you just can't do that when the problem behavior is inherently as reinforcing as anything you can provide.)

Before he could start chasing, I got between them, facing Hope, and backed him up in space a few feet. While I was backing into him (to back him up), I spoke very softly, but with a low voice, disappointed voice saying something like: "What are you doing Mr. Hope? We don't bother cats in this house." Okay, full disclosure, sometimes I used other words, and sometimes they weren't quite so sweet, but I always try to use a quiet, disappointed, but still benevolent voice.

However, two times I was behind Hope, he was about to chase Sushi and I had no way of getting between them. I said his name and got nothing, and I knew darn well the chase was about to start, so I tossed my bait bag (handily in hand) such that it landed right in front of Hope. I said "no" right before it landed, and glory of glories, the timing worked out perfectly. Hope is a relatively soft dog, and it had a big effect on him. Ever since then he's responded to my requests to look at me or sit down around the cat, but I don't think it all would fit together if we hadn't worked on a solid foundation of what TO DO (versus what NOT TO DO). (In other words, just saying "no" rarely works unless you teach the dog what you DO want him to do first.)

5. BE PATIENT AND HAVE STAMINA. Everything else is the easy part, this is the hard part! What can I say? This is going to take time. How much depends on your dog, you and how much he has chased something he shouldn't in the past. If he's been doing this for years it's going to take a lot more time and stamina than if you can get it turned around early on. Do keep one thing in mind: Research shows that it takes 21 to 28 days of consistent practice to turn around an old habit and learn a new behavior. It turns out that most people are really good at trying something new (exercise for example) for 10 to 14 days. Do the math. Whoops. So think about your behavior around this issue, and remember that you'll need the most support and help around day 11 to 28!

Hope is doing well, but it's only been two weeks. I'd estimate we need at least 6 months of work, but overall things should continue to improve, with the predictable set back occurring every once in a while. Right now he still goes over to Sushi, tries to interact, and I have to ask him to sit or look at me. He'll do that right away, but Sushi is still irritated by his very existence, and Hope still thinks it is fun to get close enough for her to swat at him. Cross your paws for poor Sushi: we finally got stalking out of the picture and now she has a dog who wants to play with her. Maybe she'll read the blog about all the cats who like to play with dogs?

If you have a chaser that you've worked with, I know readers would appreciate any other ideas and tips you have for them. I'd love to hear too how you are handling it.

Meanwhile, back on the farm: True confessions: between my smashed knee, Jim's exhausting brace, a puppy who has to urinate ridiculously often (checking on 'puppy vaginitis,' will have chinese med appt soon) and now Will having oral surgery as I write... things have been a tad challenging at the farm. Will broke his root canal tooth last weekend, so he is having it extracted. (More on that soon, including some serious grousing, but I have to go check on him now.)

The best thing that has happened all week (besides a delightful visit from my nephew and his wife) is that the toys we ordered came in. We've been testing toys for months, and have put the winners on the website. (Along with the coolest tiny Kong keychain you can imagine. We are all stupidly entranced by it. Check it out.) We did have a bit of a surprise: we ordered a tough, stuffed sheep that we pictured as being, oh I don't know, toy chihuahua size, and it came more corgi size. We have an entire flock in the back room. Luckily, Hope and Will think it's too cool for words . . .

- See more at: <http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/chase-this-not-that#sthash.JRvA5wZx.dpuf>



#### About the Author

Patricia B. McConnell, PhD, CAAB is an applied animal behaviorist who has been working with, studying, and writing about dogs for over twenty-five years. She encourages your participation, believing that your voice adds greatly to its value. She enjoys reading every comment, and adds her own responses when she can. - See more at:

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