Protocol for
Emotional and Behavioral Modification
By Emily Larlham

STEP 1 INVESTIGATE HEALTH AND STRESS

* Investigate health and daily stressors to see if they are contributing factors.
*Create a plan to decrease stress in daily life during the training process.
*Address other behavioral issues that might contribute to stress.
(The training might not work as well if the dog's behavior is the symptom of a greater underlying problem that is not addressed.
For example, the dog is in pain, anxious when left during the day or worried all day about noises coming from outside the house.)

STEP 2 CREATE A PREVENTION PLAN

* Write a list of your dog's triggers and create a plan to avoid them. Obviously some might be unavoidable but you can limit the exposure as much as you can.
(The training and conditioning will not be as successful if the dog is exposed to the triggers between training sessions.)

STEP 3 CONDITION REINFORCERS AND MARKERS

* Build the correct level of arousal for the reinforcement you will use during training - Increase or decrease the dog's arousal for food.
* Then train and condition the marker and the ways you will deliver the treat before using them in training.
(This is because if you don't condition the reinforcers to be of the correct intensity the training will not be as effective. For example, if your dog is not very interested in food, you will not be able to change your dog's emotional response to things using something he's not really that interested in. Conversely, if your dog is too aroused by food, it will distract him from learning new behaviors and also distract him during set ups. It is also difficult to teach your dog to be relaxed around a trigger using something he is over-excited about. Often people dismiss using food to modify behavior because they unknowingly skipped this step. Some dogs already have the perfect level of arousal for food and can go strait on to training.)

STEP 4 TRAIN AND PROOF BEHAVIORS

* Train and proof the behaviors that will be used during training and set ups. Use no forms of physical or psychological intimidation while training these so your dog has a positive emotional response to them. This will build your relationship with your dog and your dog's trust which will benefit your training.
(If you don't spend a couple of weeks training and practicing these behaviors, they will be hard for your dog to offer in set ups when criteria is increased. By repetition and proofing them you can create a stimulus-response association where your dog will be more likely to respond to the cues without hesitation, similar to how drivers respond to traffic lights.)
Examples of behaviors to train to use in set ups:
*Default leave It from treat bag
*Settle around food
*Standing calmly/walking calmly on a loose leash with distractions
*Attention
*Leash pressure cue
*Let's go cue

Protocol for
Emotional and Behavioral Modification
By Emily Larlham

STEP 5 TEACH THE CONCEPT OF THE SET UP

*Teach the concept of the set up without the dog's triggers present by using a decoy that your dog likes and trusts (a family member or friend). Make sure your dog recognizes them first so he doesn't get startled by them.

*Follow the Protocol for Raising Criteria - Do set ups where you rehearse the movements you will do in training sessions with the real triggers until the dog has gotten to the point where he quickly progresses through the 3 steps of the protocol.

*You can use this as a quick warm up before a set up with a real decoy. It's a great test to see if the dog is ready for the training as the dog might be uninterested in the food or distracted before the trigger is even present.

(This step teaches the dog the concept of a set up first so he is not learning something new while also being exposed to the trigger. Also the handler can practice all the different skills and behaviors they need to do during a real set up. What I usually do is work my client's dog if he trusts me and teach the dog the concept of the set up while the client is the decoy. Most dogs will want to look at their owner and find it hard to look back at first, so the client can watch the learning process before there is a trigger present. Then when the dog understands the game, the client can handle the dog while I am the decoy and I can tell them what to do as I move. You will find that there are lots of triggers you can work on with your dog before you need to use a strange dog or person. Most dogs will struggle with looking away from just their owner running back and forth.)

STEP 6 SEPARATING TRIGGERS IN SET UPS

*STEP 1 Analyze what the dog is reacting to and plan all the different ways you can split the triggers apart to work on one aspect at a time. Work on the easiest ones before the harder ones. STEP 2 Add them together systematically one at a time with the easiest ones first. STEP 3 Vary training for generalization.

*Choose a location with as few distractions as possible. When your dog has mastered set ups in non-distracting environments you can practice in busier environments but reduce criteria and expectations when you begin.

(Training when out and about on walks can work for some dogs, but for others it can be too unpredictable causing the dog to have set backs and the training to not be as effective. With set ups there is less room for errors, it's easier to measure progress, easier to pinpoint triggers that still need work and less stressful for dog and handler.)

STEP 7 TRAINING DURING REAL LIFE

*When your dog has mastered all of his triggers in set ups you can practice in real life scenarios choosing at first environments that you can reliably create enough distance from a trigger if need be. Avoid busy unpredictable environments.

*If you can prevent set backs, you can walk your dog during the training process in areas where you can keep enough distance from triggers that your dog is comfortable.

(Keep in mind that new situations, illness or added stress can cause dogs to regress to do behaviors they did in their past no matter what type of training they have been through. If you see your dog starting to worry about things manage or change his environment.)

HIRE A DOG TRAINER BEFORE YOU START TRAINING IF YOU ARE UNSURE OF THE SAFETY OF YOURSELF OR OTHERS. Hire a trainer when you get to the point where you would like to start working with the dog in reach of other people and dogs. For safety, follow this protocol with the dog out of reach of the decoys at all times with the dog on a secure leash and in a muzzle if necessary.

Protocol for Raising Criteria
for Emotional and Behavioral Modification
By Emily Larlham

**STEP 1
LOOK**

**MARK
LOOKING**

within 2 seconds

(Take too long and the dog might get too aroused or not make the connection between the trigger and the reinforcement.)
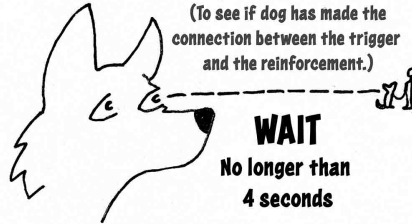
**FEED
LOOKING
BACK**

Feed to mouth

OR

Put treat on ground

(This helps make sure the food is functioning as a reinforcer rather than just "popcorn during an action movie'. It also gives your dog a short break and a way to represent the trigger without it having to leave and come back.)

**STEP 2
LOOK AND
LOOK BACK**

TEST LEARNING

(To see if dog has made the connection between the trigger and the reinforcement.)

WAIT

No longer than 4 seconds

**MARK
LOOKING
BACK**

MARK

**FEED LOOKING
BACK**

(Repeat this one time at first before going back to STEP 1 so that the training doesn't always get harder and harder.)

**STEP 3
NO NEED
TO LOOK
AT ALL**

Repeat STEP 1 and STEP 2 with the same set up until the dog doesn't want to look at the trigger at all and either:

Tells you by offering attention or other behaviors

Settles

Can explore the environment while choosing to ignore the trigger

(Skip this step and it is hard to know if the dog is just eating "popcorn" while watching an action movie or learning to relax around the trigger)

IGNORES, SETTLES OR EXPLORES

**WHAT TO DO
IF THINGS
GO WRONG**

"Let's Go!"

If at any point in the steps the dog cannot look back after the marker, cannot look down for a treat, suddenly becomes fixated or reacts to trigger, use the previously trained cue "Let's Go" and move in the opposite direaction until your dog is comfortable. Then lower criteria and begin at STEP 1. If the dog stops taking food or looks overly stressed, end the session and create a new plan.

If the dog achieves Step 3, ADD CRITERIA sytematically and return to STEP 1
If not, REDUCE CRITERIA sytematically and return to STEP 1