

SIMPLIFYING
SHELTER
BEHAVIOUR



Supporting Owners with Challenging Behaviours



Tom Candy BSc (Hons) MSc CCAB CDBC CSBS CBAT-KA



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Consider *the Scope* and how this can *benefit* rescues and shelters
- Be introduced to the *three R model* of behaviour modification
- Consider how we can *set smart targets* to best support owners.



What's the Scope

SIMPLIFYING
SHELTER
BEHAVIOUR



The Headlines (PDSA, 2024)

SIMPLIFYING SHELTER BEHAVIOUR



What **behaviours** does your dog show?



30%

Jumping up
at people

22%

Barking or
vocalising*

17%

Spending time in quiet
areas of the home

12%

Showing signs
of fear

11%

Growling, snapping
or biting
unfamiliar dogs

11%

Signs of distress
when left
alone**

4%

Growling, snapping
or biting **familiar dogs
not in household**

3%

Growling, snapping
or biting **other dogs
in household**

2%

Growling, snapping or
biting **owners/carers**

2%

Behaviour towards my
children that worries me

* e.g. howling, whimpering, for more than a minute at a time at someone out of the window
** e.g. scratching, destructive behaviour, prolonged barking, crying, howling, toileting in the house

1% have bitten their
owner or carer where
professional medical
care has been needed
(150,000 dogs)





What Does This Mean for Rescues?

(Salmen et al., 2000)

- It's long established that behaviour is one of the key reasons for relinquishment and RTK
- Data collected from **12 U.S. animal shelters**
- 1,984 dogs and 1,286 cats relinquished (after exclusions).
- Owners gave up to **5 reasons** for surrender; **71 total reasons** were classified, with **24 as behavioural**.

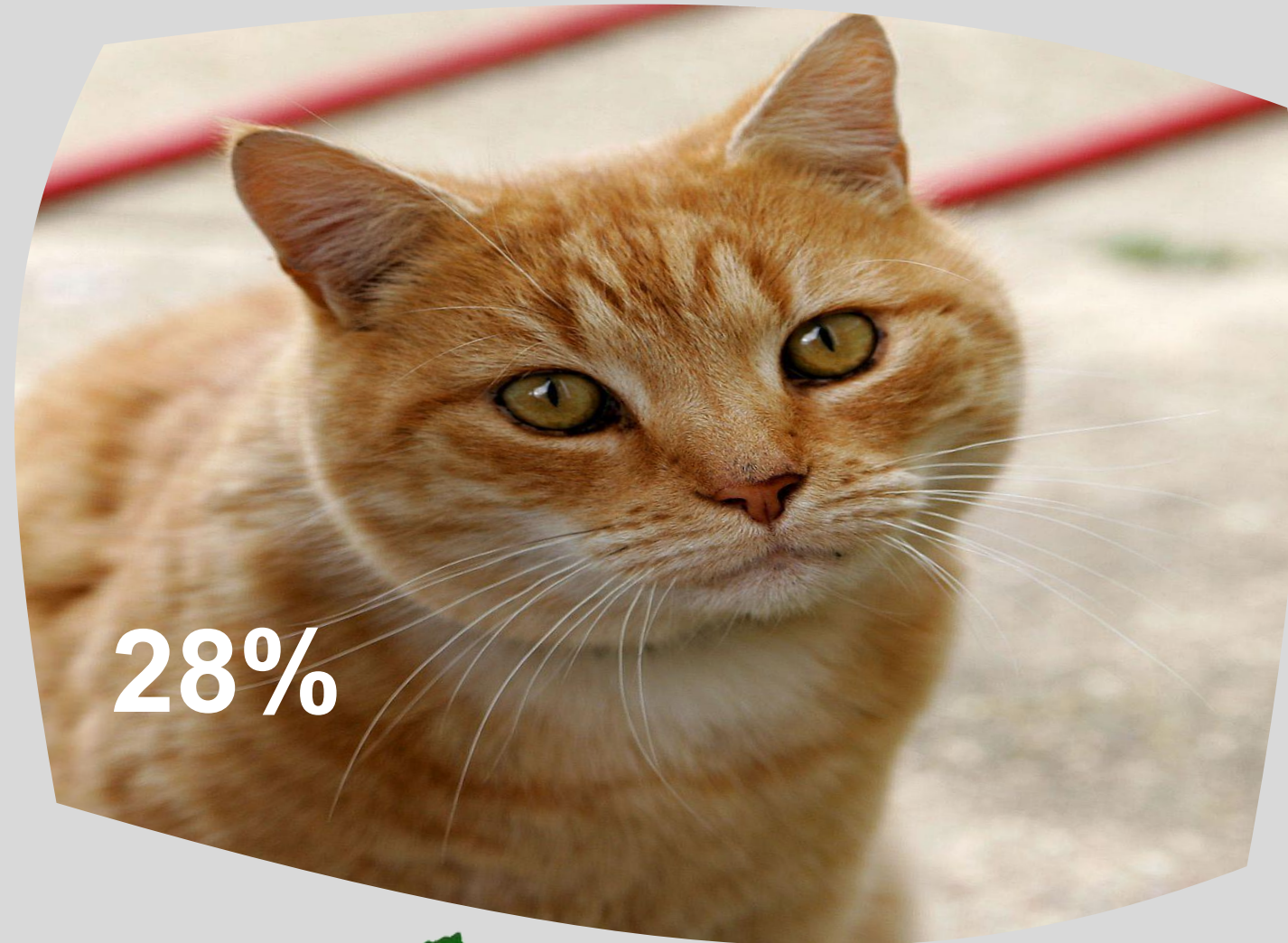




SIMPLIFYING SHELTER BEHAVIOUR



What Does This Mean for Rescues? (Salmen et al., 2000)





What Does This Mean for Rescues?

(Salmen et al., 2000)

- **Top Issues:**

- **Dogs:** biting, aggression, escaping, destructive behaviors, disobedience, house soiling, excessive activity, vocalization.
- **Cats:** house soiling, inter-pet conflict, aggression, destructiveness, biting, unfriendly behavior.





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- 1131 calls to wood green, the Animals Charity (UK)
- Callers looking to **relinquish their dog for behaviour problems** were offered free support
- Researchers looked at acceptance rates, dog demographic and the types of behaviours reported





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- **Level of acceptance**

- 24.4% of owners accepted free advice.
 - Acceptance was higher for:
 - Neutered dogs (27.7%) vs entire (19.6%).
 - Dogs under 6 months (33%).
 - Dogs originally adopted from rescue centres (40%).





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- **Level of acceptance**
- Owners of dogs with **general management issues** (e.g., pulling on the lead, recall problems) were almost **6 times more likely** to accept advice compared to those with **inter-dog aggression in the home**.





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- **Most Common Behaviour Reasons**

- Aggression between dogs in the home (20.2%).
- Aggression around children (19.3%).
- Least common: inappropriate toileting (3%), anxious/obsessive behaviour (3.1%).





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- **Most Common Behaviour Reasons**

- Aggression-related issues made up **68.3% of all cases.**
- Owners were least likely to accept advice when the issue was **serious, complex, or disruptive at home** (e.g., inter-dog aggression).





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- **Most Common Behaviour Reasons**

- Aggression-related issues made up **68.3% of all cases.**
- Owners were least likely to accept advice when the issue was **serious, complex, or disruptive at home** (e.g., inter-dog aggression).





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- **So will they?**
- Offering advice prevented relinquishment in a **quarter of cases**, sparing stress and trauma for dogs and owners.
- However, uptake was limited, especially for complex problems like inter-dog aggression.





Will Owners Accept Help?

(Powdrill-Wells, Taylor & Melfi, 2021)

- So will they?
- Owners may avoid advice if they anticipate high effort, cost, or poor outcomes.
- Preventative strategies (e.g., puppy training classes, vet advice, better owner education before adoption) may be more effective on a wider scale.



***SIMPLIFYING SHE
BEHAVIOUR***



How Can We Help?





If you Don't Have a Trainer On Staff

- *Can you link up with a local trainer, to offer low cost services?*
- *Refer to appropriate videos, facebook groups ect*
- *Work with a trainer to produce handouts*





**SIMPLIFYING SHE
BEHAVIOUR**



If you Don't Have a Trainer On Staff



If you Have Training/Behaviour Experience

*SIMPLIFYING SHE
BEHAVIOUR*





SIMPLIFYING SHELTER BEHAVIOUR



RISK ASSESSMENT

REDUCE

RESOLVE





RISK ASSESSMENT

- *Consider risk to others, themselves, environment etc.*
- *Could be formal or just a short one*





RISK ASSESSMENT-HOME

- *Risk to potential triggers*
- *Will this change in new environment*
- *What's the reputational risk to the rescue*
- *Risk to adopters*



REDUCE (MANAGEMENT)

SIMPLIFYING
SHELTER
BEHAVIOUR





REDUCE

Short term management and environmental modification are key:

- *To keep the dog's arousal levels at a point where they can still learn – 'below threshold'*
- *To maintain safety and welfare*





REDUCE-IN HOME

- *Decompression opportunities*
- *Appropriate walking routes*
- *Thinking about equipment*
-



SIMPLIFYING SHELTER BEHAVIOUR



Lowering overall stress levels by managing the environment will help a dog to remain under threshold and support success in a BMP.



RESOLVE

*SIMPLIFYING SHE
BEHAVIOUR*



SIMPLIFYING SHELTER BEHAVIOUR

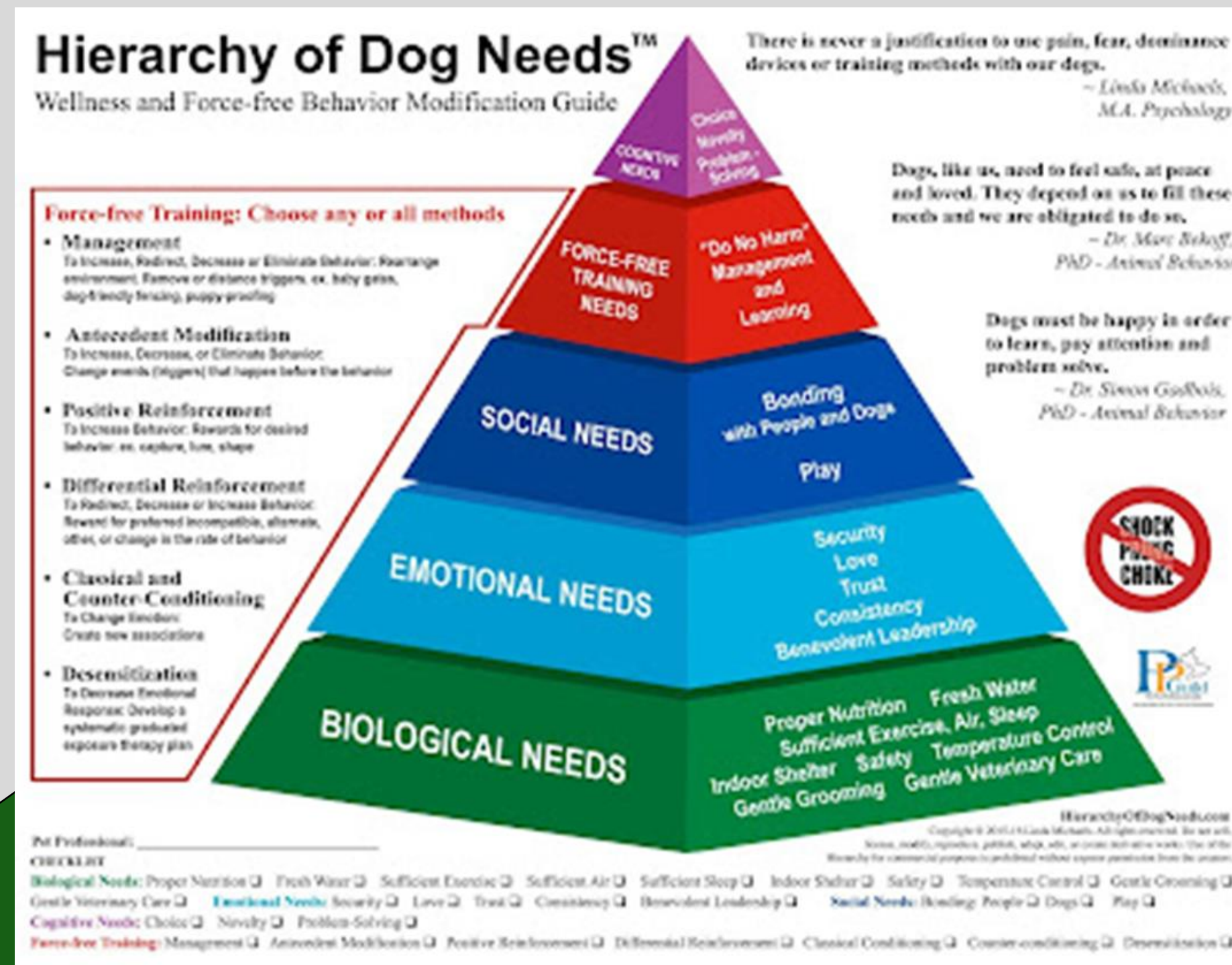




SIMPLIFYING SHELTER BEHAVIOUR



HIERARCHY OF DOG NEEDS





RESOLVE

- *Consider all training options and rule in or out*
- *Teach coping skills away from triggers*
- *DsCC in variation*





RESOLVE-DSCC

Why both

- Using **Counter Conditioning** alone – the stimulus likely to be too intense – the dog would not be able to learn
- **Systematic Desensitisation** helps us keep them under threshold at all times





RESOLVE-DSCC

- *Aiming to work in this zone*
- *Learning optimised*
- *Established via assessment*
- *Needs to be noted*
- *Regular breaks*

STRESS & SUPPORT SCALE

Stay On The Beach!

Dog's stress level is analogous to rising water level

DOG:

- loose body
- soft mouth, ears
- not avoiding trigger
- sniffing ground
- passing glances, easy to look away
- moving to explore environment



Ideal

Follow the dog.
No prompt needed.

DOG:

- gathering info
- arcs towards trigger
- ears up
- focused eyes
- air-scenting
- disengages easily



OK

...but do a
slow stop at the
shoreline. Wait
for disengagement.



RESOLVE-DSCC

- *Some point*
- *Train staff what to do if they see these signs*

STRESS & SUPPORT SCALE

Stay On The Beach!

Dog's stress level is analogous to rising water level

DOG: -arousal level moderate, but is decreasing -intent on trigger -disengages without help, but takes more than 2 seconds.	DOG: -unable to disengage -stiff face and body -tail up and stiff -mouth closed -breathing faster -avoids trigger altogether -pickier about food
	
Small hints	Call Away
Shift your weight away, Verbal "done?" after disengagement. Help dog get back to shore.	Call, move to 'dry land', and treat.

STRESS & SUPPORT SCALE

Stay On The Beach!

Dog's stress level is analogous to rising water level

BAT ZONE

Dog is CURIOUS about the trigger

Dog moves directly towards trigger

DOG:

- loose body
- soft mouth, ears
- not avoiding trigger
- sniffing ground
- passing glances, easy to look away
- moving to explore environment



Ideal

Follow the dog.
No prompt needed.

DOG:

- gathering info
- arcs towards trigger
- ears up
- focused eyes
- air-scenting
- disengages easily



OK

...but do a
slow stop at the
shoreline. Wait
for disengagement.

DOG:

- arousal level moderate, but is decreasing
- intent on trigger
- disengages without help, but takes more than 2 seconds.



Small hints

Shift your
weight away,
Verbal "done?"
after disengagement.
Help dog get back
to shore.

DOG:

- unable to disengage
- stiff face and body
- tail up and stiff
- mouth closed
- breathing faster
- avoids trigger altogether
- pickier about food



Call Away

Call, move to
'dry land',
and treat.

DOG:

- over his head
- signs of reactivity



Get Away

Call away and
treat! If needed,
use mime/real
pulling to get to
safety.

PLIFYING
ELTER
AVIOUR



RESOLVE

SIMPLIFYING SHELTER BEHAVIOUR



Behaviour is conditional, so if we change conditions, we will see change in behaviour.

- **Normally considers:**

- **Skills** the animal can learn
- Experiences that **change feelings**
- Increasing **probability** for desired behaviour
- Withdrawing **reinforcement or opportunity** for less desired behaviour



PROGNOSIS AND EXPECTATION SETTING

*SIMPLIFYING SHE
BEHAVIOUR*





S

Specific

State what you'll do
Use action words

M

Measurable

Provide a way to
evaluate
Use metrics or data
targets

A

Achievable

Within your scope
Possible to accom-
plish, attainable

R

Relevant

Makes sense within
your job function
Improves the
business in some
way

T

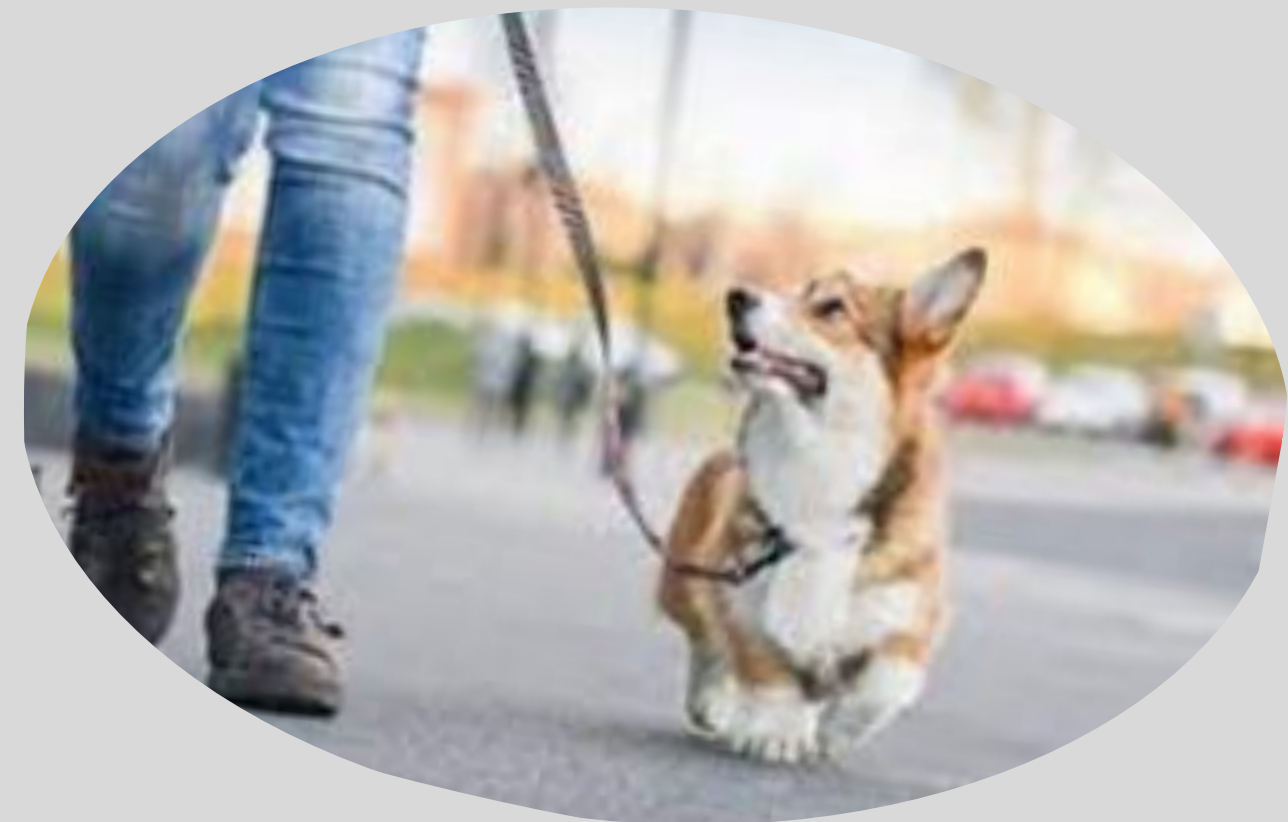
Time-bound

State when you'll get
it done
Be specific on date
or timeframe



SPECIFIC

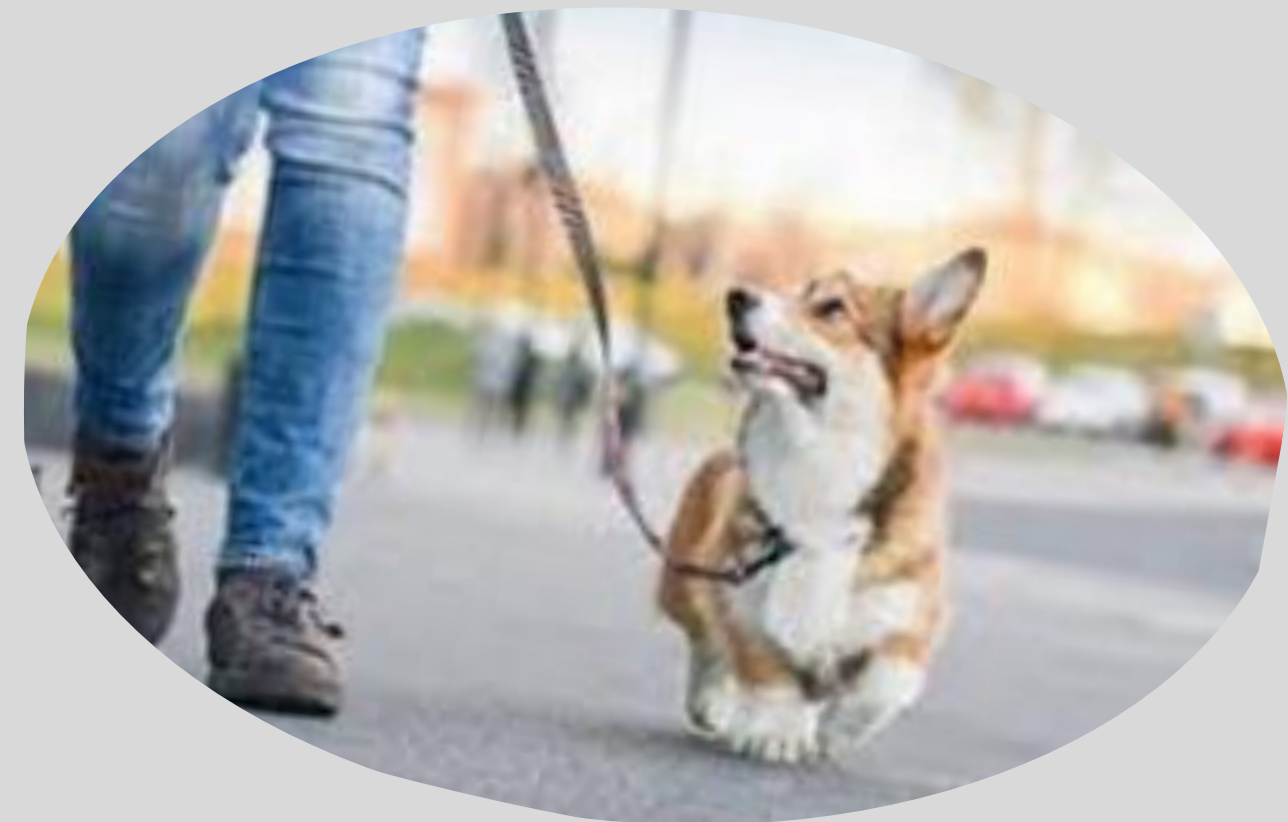
- *Being specific increases likelihood of attaining goals*
- *'I want my dog to stop being reactive'*
 - *Possibly unachievable or a long way off*
- *What could we have instead?*





SPECIFIC

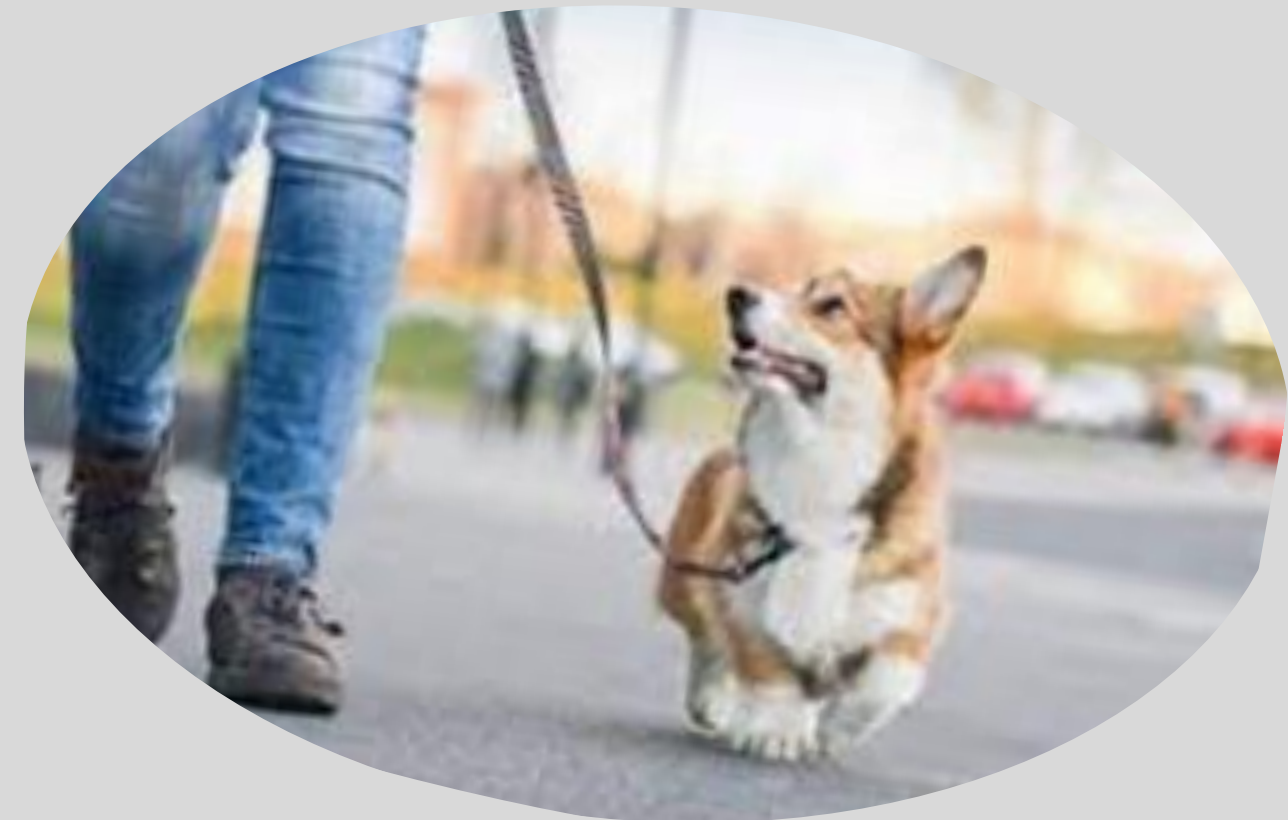
- *Being specific increases likelihood of attaining goals*
- *'I want my dog to stop being reactive'*
 - *Possibly unachievable or a long way off*
- *What could we have instead?*





SPECIFIC

- *Also think about what behaviours we do want to see rather than what we don't want*
 - *I want my dog to walk to heel to the park*
 - *I want my dog to go to his bed, rather than stop barking at the door ect ect*





MEASURABLE

- *What are our baselines?*
- *Need to know where we are now so we can compare*
- *How often are we reviewing*





MEASURABLE

- *How are we measuring*
 - *0-5 scales*
 - *Better-worse-same*
 - *3ds*
 - *Number of clicks*
 - *Diary's, videos,*





ACHIEVABLE

- *Being realistic based off the information in front of you*
 - *Work with the owners,*
 - *How much time do you feel you can give each day?*
 - *Do your plans match their life?*
 - *Gradual increase in criteria*
- Timely review actions**





RELIVANT

- *Can we kill two birds with one stone*
 - *Milos Mat*





TIME BOUND

- *When will you next be in contact?*
 - *Please send me videos in 2 weeks.*
- *When will we compare back to baseline?*
 - *Sometimes hard to see how big a difference has been made week to week*
- *This also applies in centres!*





TIME BOUND

- *Does this work for the owners or staff?*
 - *Holidays,*
 - *Important work tasks*
 - *Child-care*
 - *Large intake of difficult dogs*
- *When will we need to change things if not working?*



Empowering Shelters and Rescues to Improve Behavioural Health



Thank You and Questions?

*SIMPLIFYING SHE
BEHAVIOUR*

