



Training - a mental workout for YOU

We mentioned in a different audio segment how training is a mental workout for your dog - but let's also look at how training can be mentally tiring for us trainers!

When you first start out with your counterconditioning sessions, there is a lot going on: You have to of course manage your dog on a leash (maybe it's the first time you have used a long line, too). You have to keep an eye on the trigger, scatter treats, read your dog's body language AND scan the environment for potential "intruders".

Depending on just how reactive your dog is and how well you could set up your session, this can be a lot! Additionally, counterconditioning is really different from any type of training most dog owners have done before. Classical conditioning can be tricky to wrap your head around at first.

If you feel somewhat tired after the sessions, and like you need a break as well - this is completely normal. You didn't do anything wrong. In fact, you were doing very well being so observant and attentive and trying your hardest.

On the one hand, this will get better just with time and practice. I guarantee that counterconditioning will not feel that tiring a few weeks from now. If you do it consistently, a lot will become automated and you won't even think twice about for example handling the long line and scattering treats.

One the other hand, you can make this easier for yourself right away by setting up easier situations. Triggers with less intensity (that means larger distance to visual triggers and lower volume of auditory triggers) in well-visible places work best.

That way, you do not have to keep an eye on your surroundings as much, and you do not have to assume your dog will go over his threshold any second.

If counterconditioning currently feels really stressful for you, then chances are it is also too stressful for your dog because too many things are going on at once. We need to change that and have both of you in a beneficial state of mind.



Of course, you should not be relaxed and sleepy as if you're chilling on the couch with a movie and chips - you do need to be alert and aware of the trigger (just like your dog!). But your training sessions should *not* feel highly stressful or exhausting either.

We said that for our dogs a little bit of stress is ok - a lot of stress is detrimental. The exact same applies to you. You should be attentive and alert but not on edge and really agitated. If you feel very worried and anxious during your sessions, and really tired afterwards, you need to tone down the intensity.

If you have a friend or family member who can assist, you can also recruit their help for your training.

For example: You could focus only on your dog: holding the leash, scattering the treats and watching his body language. Your helper focuses on the environment: Keeping an eye on the trigger to make sure the intensity stays the same, and checking that nobody gets too close to you and your dog.

If you do not have someone who can help you, you can also make the setup a bit easier for yourself by tying your dog up instead of holding the leash.

I want to be **very clear** that I do not in any way suggest you tie your dog up to a tree and then bring in a trigger so close that he goes over his threshold. That is going to be extremely stressful for your dog and will really set you back in your training.

I am suggesting that you could use a tie-out instead of holding the leash of your dog in case you find it difficult to manage the leash and treats etc.

It goes without saying that you can only do this with triggers that are very predictable and won't suddenly come moving towards you. The last thing you want to deal with is having to un-tie the leash of a lunging dog who's crossed his threshold!

But if you have a quiet and predictable place, it makes managing everything during the session a bit easier to not have to fiddle with a leash. The same goes for hand-free leashes - just watch out that you don't trip over them.

To sum it up: It is normal to feel that training is a bit tiring for you as well. On the one hand, this will get easier just through time and repetition. However, if training seems really stressful to you, there are several ways you can make it less intense. Stay further away



from the trigger, pick predictable surroundings, and outsource some of the training tasks (by using helpers or a tie-out).

We don't want your dog to be overly stressed - and the same always applies to you as well!