

The welfare of working and sporting dogs: the five freedoms and beyond

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The Five freedoms

(Farm animal welfare council)

- Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
- Freedom from Discomfort
- Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease
- Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour
- Freedom from Fear and Distress

The Five freedoms

- **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst**

Five freedoms

- **Freedom from Discomfort**
 - by providing appropriate shelter and a comfortable resting area

Five freedoms

- **Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease**
 - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment

Five freedoms

- **Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour**
 - by providing sufficient space
 - proper facilities
 - company of the animal's own kind

Five freedoms

- **Freedom from Fear and Distress**
 - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering

Five freedoms

- mainly about **absence of negative things**
 - absence of pain etc
 - very important
- recent shift in focus towards **presence of positive things/positive emotions**
- Absence of negative things and presence of positive things

Positive emotions

- Good welfare is about
 - meeting five freedoms
 - and going beyond by **promoting positive emotions**
- Related to new animal welfare concepts
 - 'Quality of life'
 - having 'a life worth living'
 - having 'a good life'
 - search terms on Google scholar for papers
- Welfare is about physical, behavioural and social aspects & also involves emotional states

Positive emotions

- Animals have emotions
- Positive emotional ('affective') state
e.g. happy, calm
- Negative 'emotional' state
e.g. anxious, fearful, depressed, stressed,
frustrated

Emotions and learning

- Emotional state affects:
 - Attention
 - Memory
 - Judgement
- Emotional state causes bias in the way animal perceives the world
- Happy, optimistic - tend to view new and ambiguous things positively
- Judgement bias to anticipate positive things

Emotions and learning

- Negative, pessimistic state
 - tend to view new, ambiguous things/stimuli negatively
- Judgement bias to anticipate negative things

Emotions and learning

- Implications for learning and training
- Optimistic dog - more likely to engage in novel task, cope with challenges better, not fearful, expecting positive
- Pessimistic dog - reluctant to engage in novel task, this can impair training and learning
- Long-term stress can lead to reduced ability to learn

Positive states

- Positive emotional states are important for:
 1. **Good welfare**
 2. **Performance**

Positive states

- We've talked about **Why** positive states are important
 - Welfare
 - Performance
- Let's look at **How** to achieve positive states in working dogs

Positive emotions in kennels

- Many working dogs kept in kennels
- Kennels very stressful for many dogs
- Very important for dogs in kennels to:
 - 1. Engage in stress-relieving and rewarding activities**
 - 2. Have positive emotional states actively promoted**

Promoting positive emotions

- **Chewing**

- Safe and appropriate things to chew
- e.g. chew toys, kong toys
- human-grade raw meaty bones
 - check with your vet first
 - bones must be raw and human-grade
 - not too many as can cause constipation
 - First see [RSPCA Australia knowledgebase](#) for safety tips
- form of kennel enrichment, variety
- serotonin release, cost effective

Chewing

- Kong toys filled with food
- Predictable delivery otherwise may increase stress
- Some people have raised concerns about whether feeding enrichment might reduce motivation to work ??
- 2010 study on military dogs found feeding enrichment:
 - had no detrimental effect on working ability
 - significantly increased dogs' ability to learn from rewards (enhanced their learning capacity)
- **Avoid chewing deprivation**

Promoting positive emotions

- **Raised sleeping area with bedding**
 - provides a lookout
 - thermal comfort
 - physical comfort
 - avoid pressure sores
 - cost effective
- **Avoid long periods alone in kennels**

Promoting positive emotions

- **Daily exercise**

- exercise freely off-lead in safe areas, dog can regulate exercise themselves, is best
- in compatible pairs or groups

- **Seeking, exploration**

- familiar and unfamiliar places
- new scents etc

Promoting positive emotions

- **Social contact with humans**
- Positive rewarding interactions
 - patting
 - playing
 - grooming
 - taking the dog for walks/to safe areas to exercise freely off-lead, dog can regulate exercise themselves

Promoting positive emotions

- **Social contact with other dogs**
 - individual housing common in kennels
 - compatible pair housing
 - compatible group housing
- Avoid social deprivation, avoid isolation -> stress, depressed, frustrated -> negative state -> affects welfare and performance

Puppies

- **‘Critical socialisation period’**
 - occurs 3-17 weeks of age
 - social and behavioural patterns established
- Positive, safe social contact with:
 - humans
 - mother dog, littermates
 - other dogs
 - places
 - things etc

Puppies

- Adequate social contact - shown to decrease inter-dog reactivity and fearfulness of people, places and situations
- If deprived of adequate social contact:
 - more likely to develop antisocial behaviour – implications for working ability
 - severe long term effects on success as pets when retire

Promoting positive emotions

- Positive training
- **Reward-based training**
 - Reward 'wanted' behaviour
 - Positive reinforcement
 - Ignore 'unwanted' behaviour

Reward-based training

- Example: Dog jumps up to greet people
- The owners have tried pushing her down and kneeling her to knock her off balance when she jumps. This has not worked.
- She now jumps from further away to avoid the knee.

The RSPCA does not recommend this kind of approach and instead encourages dog owners to adopt reward-based training as a much more successful and humane technique

Reward-based training

- Reward-based training technique:
 1. The dog should be ignored if she jumps
 2. She should only receive attention (including eye contact) when she has four paws on the ground
 3. The moment four paws hit the ground - she should be rewarded e.g. food treat, attention
 4. The dog will most likely jump again with a little less effort – and again reward her as soon as those four paws hit the floor.
 5. Soon the dog will discover that it is NOT the jumping up that is being rewarded, it's the 'four paws on the ground', and she will start to volunteer the behaviour that the owners want - four paws on the ground.
 6. Only when she is standing or sitting should she be rewarded with attention and treats.

Reward-based training

- **RSPCA view: most humane & effective**
 - Enjoyable for the dog
 - Sets the dog up to succeed
 - Positively enhances dog-handler bond
 - It avoids undesirable behavioural side effects

Training

- RSPCA does not support the use of physical punishment (positive punishment)
 - applying something aversive (painful or unpleasant) to the dog when a certain behaviour is carried out
- e.g. RSPCA is opposed to (electric) shock collars
 - inflict pain
 - can be used to abuse animal

Punishment and poor performance

- Punishment

- increase anxiety
- elicit strong fear response → generalise to people & other things
- defensive aggressive behaviour
- escape and avoidance behaviour
- decreased confidence
- reluctant to try anything new for fear of 'correction'

Punishment and poor performance

- Punishment can lead to: ‘Learned helplessness’
 - depression
 - learning problems
 - decreased motivation
 - response suppression

Punishment and poor performance

- 2008 study on military dogs punished with more aversive stimuli had lower performance scores (aversives included hanging dogs by collar)
- Dogs trained with positive punishment exhibit more behavioural problems

Reward-based training increases performance

- Dogs trained with rewards tend to be more obedient
- Reward training avoids undesirable behavioural side effects
- Reward-based training is cost effective
- 2010 study military dogs found that positive dog-handler interaction (stroking the dog, patting, verbal praise, toy, food) increased work performance in those dog-handler teams

Working and sporting dog welfare

Important to:

- Meet the five freedoms
- And go beyond to ensure positive emotional states

This is necessary for good welfare

And also because evidence shows that it improves performance