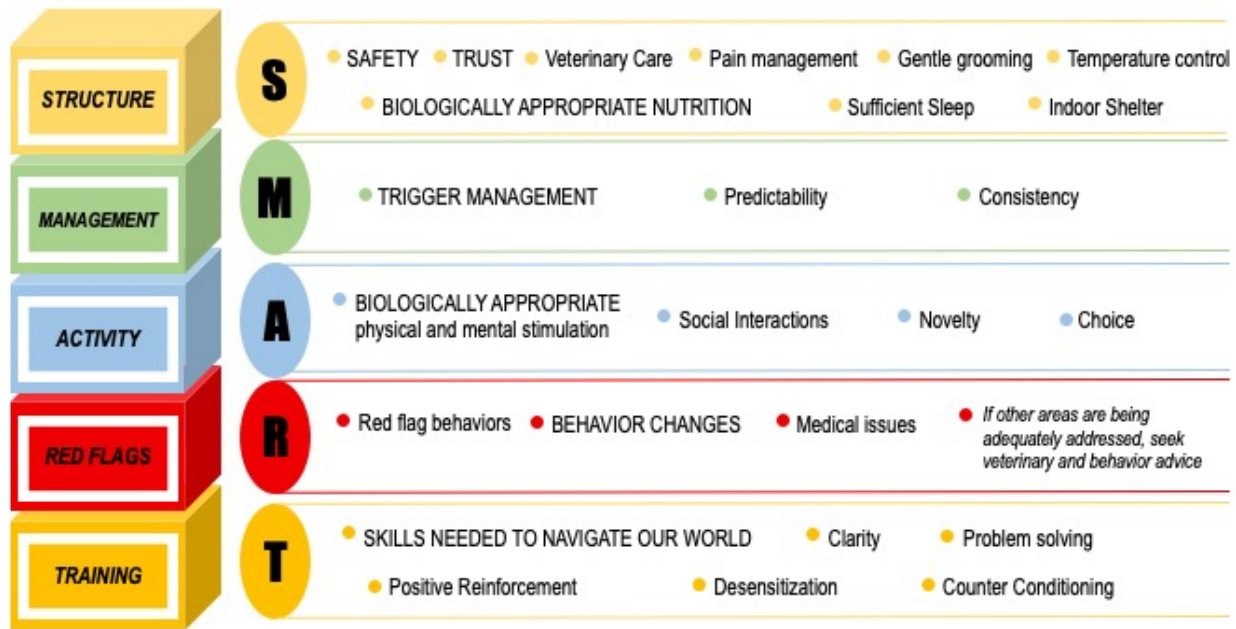




A holistic approach to your relationship with your dog

S.M.A.R.T.: Structure, Management, Activity, Red flags, Training

The S.M.A.R.T. framework—**Structure, Management, Activity, Red Flags, and Training**—helps us meet our dogs’ needs across the physical, social, emotional, and environmental spectrum. When each area is thoughtfully addressed, dogs thrive. When gaps exist, unwanted behaviors often emerge.



STRUCTURE

Creating a healthy physical and emotional environment.

Safety & Trust

- Provide appropriate shelter, temperature control, and freedom from excessive noise.

- Respect each dog’s perception of danger—fearful dogs may need more consideration.
- Build trust by avoiding aversive handling and allowing space, especially for fearful or new dogs.
- *Dogs that feel unsafe have a harder time learning*

Medical Care

- Undiagnosed pain or illness can cause behavior changes.
- Ensure regular vet checkups, especially for seniors.
- Pain management is essential for both acute and chronic issues.
- Always rule out medical factors when behavior problems emerge.

Nutrition

- Avoid ultra-processed diets; prioritize biologically appropriate food.
- Dogs need ~15 calories per pound of body weight per day (adjust by age/activity).
- Add variety—mix in lean meats, veggies, wet food.
- Use meals as enrichment: scatter feed, snuffle mats, puzzle feeders.

Sleep

- Adult dogs need 12–14 hours; puppies and seniors may need more.
- Anxious dogs may sleep less and show jumpiness or reactivity.
- Excessive sleeping can also be a sign of health or emotional issues.

Gentle Grooming

- Regular grooming supports physical comfort and stress reduction.
- Choose groomers who use low-stress handling.
- For grooming-sensitive dogs, work with a behavior consultant.

MANAGEMENT

Set up the environment to reduce problem behaviors and set your dog up for success.

Keep in mind that rewards/reinforcement oftentimes don’t come from us; the dog may be getting reinforced by something in the environment (mailman approaches → dog barks → mailman leaves), or even at a neurochemical level (a dopamine boost due to the dog’s completing a habit loop).

Predictability & Consistency

- Routines help dogs feel secure—especially anxious ones.
- Consistent expectations build confidence.

Safe Space

- Provide a designated area (crate, gated room) where your dog can decompress.
- Turn “confinement” into “sanctuary” through positive associations.
- Essential for dogs with stranger danger, kids in the home, or busy environments.

Trigger Management

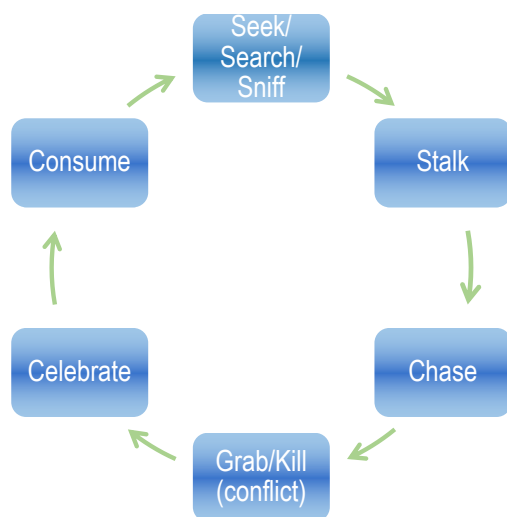
- Identify and reduce exposure to known triggers (e.g., close curtains if barking at passersby).
- For dogs struggling with visitors, avoid greeting rituals until training is in place.

Respecting Personal Space

- Especially important for fearful or anxious dogs.
- Common violations:
 - Direct eye contact
 - Leaning over or reaching toward the dog
 - Walking straight toward without an escape route
- Use curved approaches and gentle body language.

ACTIVITY

Mental and physical fulfillment reduce frustration and improve behavior.



- **Seek/Search/Sniff**
 - “Find It”, Puzzle toys, snuffle mat, nose games, novelty, “sniffaris” on a long line, car rides
- **Stalk**
 - Personal play with your dog – high and low arousal
- **Chase**
 - Flirt pole, ball toss, keep away, take turns
- **Grab/Kill**
 - Tug, spring pole, wrestle, weight pull, bite sports
- **Celebrate**
 - Woo Hoo!, victory lap
- **Consume**
 - Shredding, dissecting, chewing

Physical Exercise

- Match activities to breed tendencies—some love to chase, others love to tug or chew.
- Avoid over-arousing activities before your dog has impulse control skills.

Play

- Strengthens the bond and relieves fear.
- Look for “yes” or “no” body cues before continuing.
- Use clear verbal cues:
 - “Ready?” – Get set

- “Go!” – Begin
- “Easy” – Slow down
- “Drop it” – Release
- “All done” – Game over

Low-Arousal Personal Play

- Soft, toddler-style play builds connection and may help reactive dogs.
- Follow your dog’s lead—if they lean in, keep going; if they turn away, stop.

Enrichment

- Rotate and vary enrichment for maximum benefit. Key categories:
 - **Cognitive:** puzzle toys, foraging, training games
 - **Auditory:** calming music, audiobooks, nature sounds
 - **Visual:** nature shows, window views
 - **Olfactory:** sniffaris, essential oils (safe ones), laundry piles
 - **Taste:** novel chews, freeze-dried treats, interactive feeders
 - **Novelty:** car rides, new places, new experiences

A word about neighborhood leash walks

Structured walking on a leash is a skill a dog needs in order to successfully navigate our human world. Like church manners for a 9-year-old child, it’s a necessary life skill, but if that’s *all* they get to do, you would have one frustrated kid. Suburban neighborhood leash walks can be like church manners for your dog.

Neighborhood Walks

- Leash walks are important—but not always fulfilling.
- Supplement with decompression walks or sniff-based outings.

Socialization

Helping your dog confidently navigate new people, places, animals, and situations.

- Socialization means gradual, positive exposure to new:
 - People, animals, environments
 - Sights, sounds, smells, and surfaces
 - Situations (e.g., car rides, visitors, vet visits)
- Every dog’s socialization needs are different based on:
 - Age, temperament, breed tendencies
 - Early life experiences (or lack of them)
- For fearful or anxious dogs:
 - Use a **systematic** approach to gently desensitize and counter-condition.
 - **Avoid flooding** (i.e., overexposing your dog to scary stimuli).
 - Example: If your dog fears the vacuum, don’t force interaction—this makes fear worse.
 - Dogs don’t “get used to it” the way people do.
- Always monitor your dog’s body language and emotional state.
- Work with a behavior consultant to:
 - Identify appropriate starting points

- Create safe exposure plans
- Build positive associations with unfamiliar things

Basic Socialization Guidelines:

- Puppies have unique developmental windows
- Adult dogs benefit from socialization, too.
- Carry treats to build positive associations with new things.
- If your dog seems unsure or stressed, give space or move to a calmer environment.
- Never force your dog to face fears head-on ("flooding").

RED FLAGS

Behaviors that signal distress, frustration, or fear. Don't ignore them—they rarely resolve on their own.

Leash Reactivity

- Triggered by fear or frustration when a dog sees people/dogs on leash.
- Training involves identifying thresholds and using counter-conditioning techniques.

Resource Guarding

- Normal dog behavior—but can become problematic if unsafe.
- Dogs may guard:
 - Food or treats
 - Toys or “found” items
 - Resting spots, rooms, or people
- Signs include: avoidance, stiffening, growling, snapping.
- Avoid punishment; consult a qualified behavior consultant.

Fear & Anxiety

- Anxious dogs may react to storms, visitors, or changes.
- Punishment increases fear and breaks trust.
- Treat dogs' fear as real—because it is to them.

Separation Anxiety

- True panic when left alone.
- Requires structured behavior modification and often vet support.

Children

- Confident, resilient dogs do best with kids.
- Red flags:
 - Fear of or aggression toward children
 - Overly rough play
- Teach kids dog-safe behavior and consent signals.

TRAINING

Training teaches dogs how to safely navigate our human world.

- Focus on what you *want your dog to do*—reinforce desired behaviors.
- Avoid punishment-based methods that erode trust and increase fear.
- Skills vary based on your dog’s lifestyle, age, breed, and temperament.
- Behavior modification often includes:
 - Positive reinforcement
 - Desensitization
 - Counter-conditioning

Work with a certified trainer or behavior consultant to create a plan tailored to your dog’s unique needs.