



# T.R.U.S.T.

Programme for Reactive dogs



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## So what is T.R.U.S.T?

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TRUST has developed over the 20 or so years that I have been living with and training reactive dogs. Usually it is the aggressive souls that find their way to me; they can be aggressive to other dogs or to people or both.

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R Respect

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U Understanding

S Structure

T Teach

Let's take a closer look at each of these

# Trust

*“To believe that someone is good and honest and will not harm you, or that something is safe and reliable”*

*Cambridge English Dictionary*

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Trust goes both ways; the dog needs to learn to trust you and you need to learn to trust the dog.

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The dog needs to know that he is safe from:

- Pain
- Punishment
- Scary situations
- Unpredictability
- Aversive training equipment and techniques

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He needs to know that:

- He will be taught to make good choices
- His warnings will be listened to
- You will protect him when he feels worried
- He can have his own safe space

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You need to know that the dog:

- Will keep his teeth to himself
- Will learn to give clear warnings
- Will let you protect him

# Respect

*“To have due regard for someone’s feelings, wishes or rights”*

*Oxford Dictionary*

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Respect also goes both ways. We need to respect the dog’s need for safety and space as well as respecting the dog’s feelings. He may be terrified of a certain situation; he may flinch when you move your arm/hand in a certain way or if you wear a particular item of clothing.

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The dog needs to learn to respect the household rules; where he is allowed to sleep, what toys he can play with, to sit politely before being fed etc.

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This does not mean that we have the right to do anything that we would like to the dog; that is not respecting their rights or feelings at all.

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It maybe that a vet visit is a requirement before the dog is really ready to be placed in that situation, so we must make it as stress free as possible by playing the Bucket Game or by teaching the dog to accept a muzzle.

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Respect yourself as well. Dealing with a reactive dog is emotionally tough on us. It can also be very time consuming and can turn your life upside down for quite a while.

Respect that adding a reactive dog to your existing dogs is going to be stressful and that your other dog or dogs will need help to cope with this.

# Understanding

*“The ability to understand something, comprehension”*

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*“Sympathetically aware of another’s feelings; tolerant and forgiving”*

*Oxford Dictionary*

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It is important that you have a good understanding of canine body language so that you can identify when the dog is uncomfortable about something, so that you can stop before the dog has to escalate his threat.

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It is important that you have a good understanding of how dogs learn so that you can teach good habits and new behaviours and can work the dog on an emotional level.

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It is our job to help the dog to understand that the world isn’t a scary place and to help him understand that he can learn to be around people and dogs and can be in new environments and situations with the tools that we are going to empower him with.

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Understand and respect the dog that you have in front of you and try not to dwell on the past. We can do nothing to influence the past, but we can influence today and the future.

Understand that you may get frustrated with the dog’s progress and that you may be embarrassed if your dog acts out in public. Recognise that you may feel a failure at times and remember to celebrate success.

# Structure

*“Construct or arrange according to a plan; give pattern or organisation to”*

*Oxford Dictionary*

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Dogs thrive on structure; they love predictability. They need to know that B follows A and that C follows B. However, this doesn't mean that life needs to be so predictable that it is boring.

By structure, read routine. A routine gives comfort to a worried or anxious dog. A structured daily routine really does help to settle a dog, although this doesn't need to be regimented. So we can have the routine of getting up, going out for toilet breaks, having breakfast, having a break and then going out for a walk but this can be fluid and not fixed to set timings. Some days we may get up at 6am, other days we may get up at 8am but toilet breaks, breakfast, walks etc. always follow in the same predictable pattern.

Structure also means that you plan how you are going to train/teach the dog. Each step needs to be planned; each behaviour needs to be broken down into structures steps so that learning occurs without frustration or too much failure.

# Teach

*“Impart knowledge to or instruct (someone) as to how to do something”*

*Oxford Dictionary*

*“To cause or help (a person or animal) to learn how to do something by giving lessons, showing how it is done, etc.”*

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

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We need to teach the dog the behaviours that we would prefer him to carry out in place of the behaviours that he is currently resorting to. We need to teach him that he has other choices and that these choices pay dividends.

This teaching needs to be reward based not punishment based; we need to teach the dog what we want him to do rather than punishing him for doing what we don't want him to do.

Punishing a dog for growling or snapping will only lead to a dog that doesn't give a warning. We need those warnings that a dog is uncomfortable because we can then act on them. If the dog trusts that his warnings will be respected, then he will not feel the need to escalate to more serious threats.



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So there you have it; the bare bones of the TRUST programme. A programme that incorporates management, training, trust and respect to turn those challenging reactive dogs into wonderful companions or working dogs.

Watch out for more information coming soon.

Check out our web page:

[www.caninetutor.org.uk](http://www.caninetutor.org.uk)

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And join us on Facebook :

<https://www.facebook.com/CanineTutor/>

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Thank you to all those reactive or fearful dogs who have enriched my life and that have taught me so much about how to help them and who inspired this programme.

Here are just a few of them;

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