



Help your dog to Control The Meerkat Foundations Auto Check - In

Plus printable worksheets to track
your progress !





You're

IN THE RIGHT
PLACE IF...



1. you love your dog dearly but sometimes they can be just a bit too much. *They get overwhelmed, then start to mess around and you just want them to listen to you!*
2. You want them to focus and are looking for something simple, but don't know where to start.
3. You've tried so much and you just don't seem to be getting it right and need some structured guidance to help increase their responsiveness to you.

Hello there!

Welcome



My name is Danielle and I'd like to welcome you to '**Auto Check - In**'; part of the '**Control The Meerkat collection**'. We all know that life happens and it's not all fairies and puppy tails; despite our best effort! Therefore, I've created 'Control the meerkat' to help **YOU** to understand **YOUR DOG** and learn all about what you can do to help them to cope, when life happens!

'**Auto Check - In**' is one of our first steps to helping your dog learn how to start to regulate their emotions. That's what **Control The Meerkat** is all about, we show you how to help your dogs help themselves. It's not about obedience and telling them what to do; it's about teaching them the skills they need to manage themselves. By doing this our dogs learn how to regulate their own emotions and calm themselves when they feel excited, frustrated, scared or overwhelmed. This is where we begin.

'Self regulation' is a technique i've used for years to help dogs to cope with their emotions rather than relying on us to tell them what to do. This may work for some dogs, though the fallout can be when not told in time they struggle and react. This helps them to become well behaved as they can control their own meerkat and make decisions for themselves making your life with your dog easier!

Good luck with your training!

Danielle Beck, BSc (hons), PGDip, MSc
Clinical Animal Behaviourists & Rehabilitation Trainer
Founder of Control the Meerkat





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- 02 TEACHING THE AUTO CHECK IN

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Foundation Skills



Auto Check - In

These skills are all based on our dogs ability to think for themselves and work out what to do. We need to support and guide them by setting up the environment and being fast with marking when they make the choice. By giving them opportunities to make the right choice it speeds up their learning, and ability to regulate themselves. This type of training can help build confidence in anxious / fearful dogs and reduce frustration in excitable dogs, and those that get overwhelmed.

The skills are small and simple at first but with regular practise in different situations we build strong, effective habits that last.



**INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS AND SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE IN
OUR ONLINE COMMUNITY & LEARNING EMPOWERIUM**



Self Regulation

Impulse / Self Control and Frustration Tolerance



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Auto Check - In



Introduction

Auto Check-In helps to increase your dog's baseline attention and focus. This encourages them to regularly 'Check-In' with you throughout the day. This gives you an opportunity to provide them with feedback, to let them know if they are doing the right thing, or direct them to a more appropriate behaviour.

We can capture "Check-In" throughout the day, when they're looking at something then choose to look back at you. That's what we want. When they do this it shows that your dog is learning how to stop and think, before reacting. It's the start of their impulse control / self control training and is something they need to perfect.



It's best to start in the house, then on a walk. The 'Check-In' is a look in your direction. We want to reward any engagement with you, it doesn't have to be eye contact; for some dogs even a ear flick is good!

The key for these exercises is to build up a baseline of voluntary focus and responsiveness to you.



Auto Check - In



‘Check in’ will start to help your dog by allowing them to engage with the environment, remain calm, and be rewarded. This is how check in works. It builds up a habitual behaviour within your dog where when they see something that they’re unsure about, they look back to you for reassurance. We can then guide them to make the right choice in these situations.

When your dog looks at triggers (dogs and people) they need to be at a distance your dog can cope with, as these things can be overwhelming to them. If this happens they can become emotionally hijacked by the meerkat, and react without thinking. To avoid this, understanding distance and duration of exposure are key.

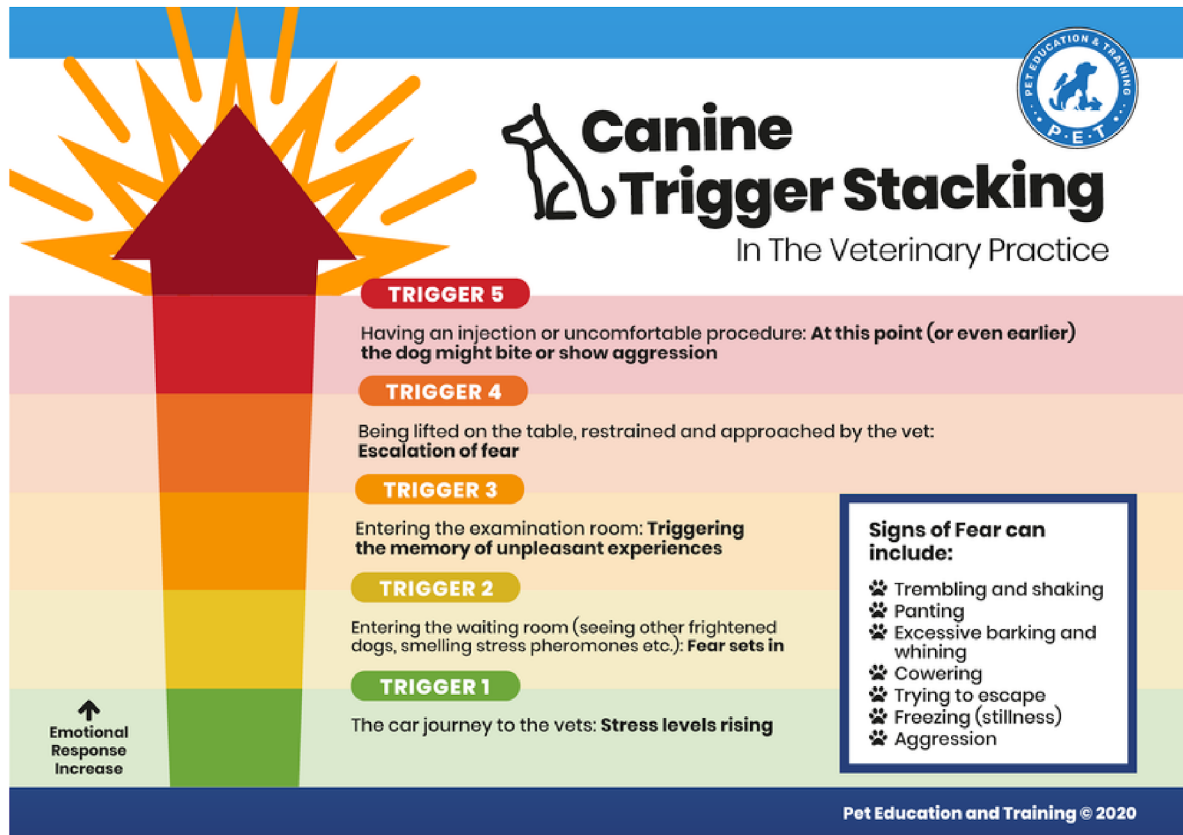


The sight of these triggers may make your dog feel stressed, worried and reactive. To teach your dog to feel safe in these situations we want to teach your dog to look at them without reacting.

However, first they need to understand this away from the triggers.



Auto Check - In



Have a go at this exercise with your dog. Place neutral objects in front of them. Wait for them to investigate the object and then look back to you.

Treat and repeat !

We don't need a cue at this stage. We want your dog to be able to engage, disengage and re-engage on their own. This will help them to manage their own behaviour and feel more confident.

Monitoring your Check In Progress

How long does it take for them to look at you without saying anything?

How often will they look at you in a 10 minute period?

How long do they look at you for?

How does this vary? time of day? location etc.

How is this affected when they see things ?



Teaching The Auto Check - In

The thing to remember with 'auto - check in' is we want it to be voluntary. This means we can't talk to them, say their name, or ask them to look at us. This can be put on a cue later, but not yet. The whole theory of 'auto check-in' is to allow our dogs to be able to take their attention away from something in the environment, and back to us, **WITHOUT** us asking them to. It's all about self regulation.



This is important for 2 main reasons.



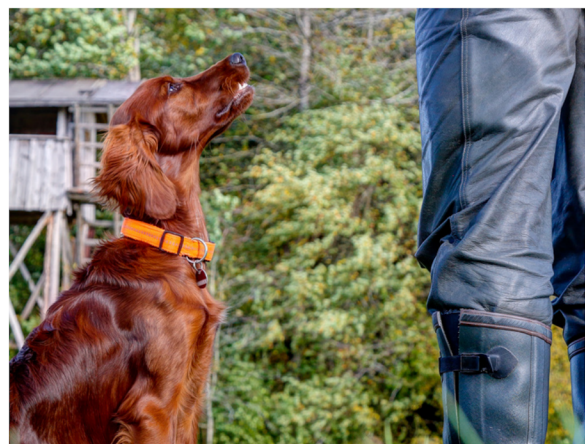
1. If they are always doing what we ask they're not really thinking they're just doing. This means that when we don't ask them, they don't always know what to do. By allowing them to work through the situation themselves they learn faster and become more confident in their abilities !!!

2. They're learning to self regulate ! For many reactive dogs, or those affected by trauma, sometimes the pressure to do what's asked can be a lot. They really struggle to listen to us. Learning something as simple as an auto check-in gives them confidence and teaches them gradually how to take their attention / focus from the environment and onto us.



The better they get at checking in, the faster they can respond to you. As you progress you'll find that your dogs will start looking at things and back to you just for fun !

This simple exercise can help dogs to regulate a range of emotions. The excitable dogs learn if they can calm themselves down enough to look at you they get to go play ! The Frustrated dogs learn to let it go. The anxious dogs learn to



pause and not to react as fast, giving us time to stop them getting hijacked by the meerkat ! The fearful dogs can gain confidence by checking in and checking out !

Teaching The Auto Check - In

Step 1 - Treat & Repeat

Take some food in your hands and wait for your dog look at you. At this stage, any kind of engagement with you will do. They don't have to give eye contact just look in your general direction.



Then drop a treat to the floor. We want that head down, looking back up, head down, looking back up movement.



It's worth checking out Leslie McDevitts pattern games, where many of our exercises are adapted from.

Repeat 6 times You want to go right in between their paws

Step 2 - Change Positions; Treat & Repeat

Next we're going to get the dogs to move away from us by throwing a treat out to the side. They move away, then have to come back for the next treat. When they come back they don't have to sit. They can stand, lie down, they can do whatever they like. The whole idea is that you encourage them to move around and move back to you.

Repeat 3 rounds of 6 treats. You should have a nice game going with lots of focus on you now.

Step 3 - Increase Duration and Distractions (slightly).

Once your dog is reliably looking away and then looking back at you we want to continue to mark that and gradually increase the distractions and duration. Try moving the treats to a different location, having them on a table or pocket rather than in your hand.



Teaching The Auto Check - In

Mark any orientation towards you, whether they look at you, or side glance, look in your direction, flick an ear in your direction anything like that. Ensure your hands are empty and ideally by your side until they do that.

Try throwing a few treats to encourage sniffing then 'auto check in', mark and treat again. The throwing and sniffing helps make the game more engaging.



Step 4 - Step / move & Check In



Now we're going to stand up, or if you have been already, start to walk around, if you're able. If you're not, if you're in a wheelchair, or have mobility issues manoeuvre your chair or move to different areas where you can. We want to see if we can get our dogs to follow. If they do and auto check in mark, treat, repeat.

·This way we get a dog that starts to follow you and regularly looks in your direction

WITHOUT YOU ASKING THEM.

Then build up a bit of duration, 1 second, 2 seconds, 3 seconds. For a check in we don't need longer than 5 seconds, as the idea is to allow our dogs to check in, go check something out and check in again. For duration focus that's a different exercise but this builds a great foundation. Distractions can start with just objects on the floor, can they look at something new and back to you, like a box? can they walk with you and check in?



Auto Check In, In The Real World



Now our dogs understand looking at you and paying attention to you is a good thing, we can start to utilise this to help them to manage themselves!

This requires a lot of patience from us. It's all about them taking the time to assess the situation for themselves, with you there as back up support.

For **anxious** or **fearful** dogs we need to help them to feel safe enough to take their attention away from the object and back onto you!

For our **excitable** and **frustrated** dogs however, they need the ability to manage and control themselves to look away. This is a huge ask for any dog and it takes time and practice.

It can be done anywhere with anything, you just have to think where to start. Take into account the distance from things and how long you're there. For nervous dogs a check in and retreat then try again can help build confidence. For others it's check in and evasive manoeuvre out of there.

Is there a pattern? Is it always less than a certain distance?

Or when something is present for longer than a certain amount of time?

Is it stationary or moving?

Male or Female?

Does clothing or colour make a difference?



Auto Check In, In The Real World

When starting, practice in the house and garden first. Utilise external noises or even place objects in different locations. You'll be surprised by your dog's reaction when you place a pan in the garden. **Can they check in, then check it out?**

Don't underestimate the power of sitting down and 'doing nothing' with your dog. They learn so much about emotional regulation, trust and safety in these little moments with you. Enjoy their company, monitor their breathing rate and let them show you how much support they need. Remember, we



can't train trust and safety, it takes time.. For many dogs it will start with some check in's and more response in the garden. When they check in, reward. We're capturing behaviour we like when it's freely offered. The rewards are often best being high value treats like chicken, cheese, sausage. However, some dogs, like the ones here, really enjoy high



pitched 'good boys' and continuing with the walk. They're learning that checking-in gives them a break and a pause to think before reacting. They won't be perfect, no dog is, but they are learning.

Auto Check In, In The Real World

The more you practice the faster they learn to manage themselves rather than reacting straight away, as they are less likely to get hijacked by the meerkat; they're able to pause. This is the best foundation to build from. Stop and think, don't react. This also helps you with your lead work.



This is something that you can practice out on the walk.

So as you're out there with your dog how long does it take them to look at you without you saying anything ?

Now play the game, has it changed ?



They walk ahead, glance at you we mark, treat, repeat. They keep walking, look at you - we mark, treat, repeat. They voluntarily come back - we mark, treat, repeat.

Then once they get used to what the idea is, we're then going to start to introduce objects because we want them to start to check in, or check it out, depending on whether we've got an excitable / frustrated dog or one that's a little bit cautious. So with our excitable dogs we are going to want them to check in, before they check it out. Our fearful / cautious dogs however, are going to want to check it out and then check in.



Auto Check In, In The Real World

The more you practice the faster they learn to manage themselves. Rather than reacting straight away, they are less likely to get hijacked by the meerkat; they're able to pause. This is the best foundation to build from. Stop and think, dont react.



Check In's are such a versatile thing to teach your dog and can be useful in all situations, for all dogs. Remember direct eye contact isn't the goal just engagement in your direction, we want that connection. If you find that despite following the advice here your dog is struggling to check in, let us know, as there's often a reason for it. We can help you to find that root cause!



WHERE CAN MY DOG AUTO CHECK - IN?



WHERE DOES MY DOG STRUGGLE TO CHECK IN?

HAVE A THINK ABOUT WHERE THEY STRUGGLE TO CHECK IN AND COMPARE IT TO WHERE THEY CAN. WHATS THE DIFFERENCE ? ARE THEY OVERWHELMED? EXCITED? HAVE YOU PRACTISED HERE OFTEN? THEN NOTE DOWN THE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO BREAK IT DOWN TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR THEM



Checklist

Tick off when your dog can 'check in' at each step

STEP ONE:

- *My dog can 'check - In' in one room*
- *My dog can 'check - in' in different rooms and the garden*

STEP TWO:

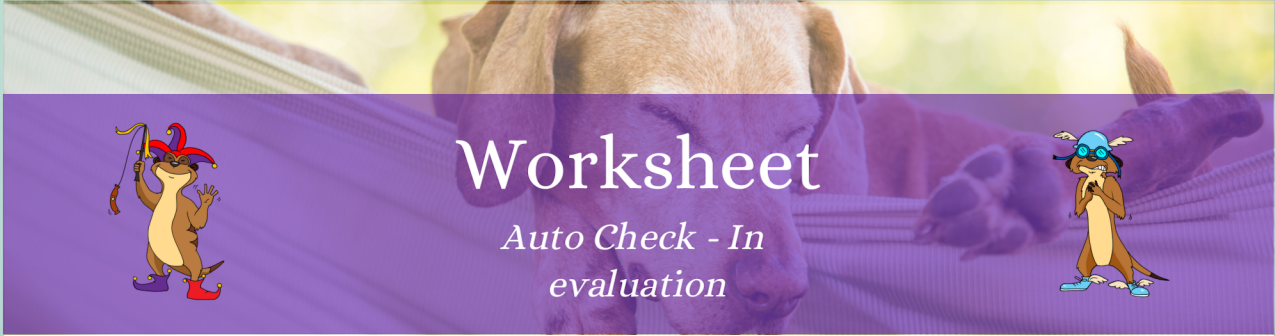
- *My dog can engage with me then 'check in' when taking part in the least exciting activity*
- *My dog can play really exciting activities , then pause for a break, check - in and go back to playing*



STEP THREE:

- *My dog can 'check in' when we go outside in quiet places*
- *My dog can 'check - in' in busier environments !!!*





Worksheet

*Auto Check - In
evaluation*

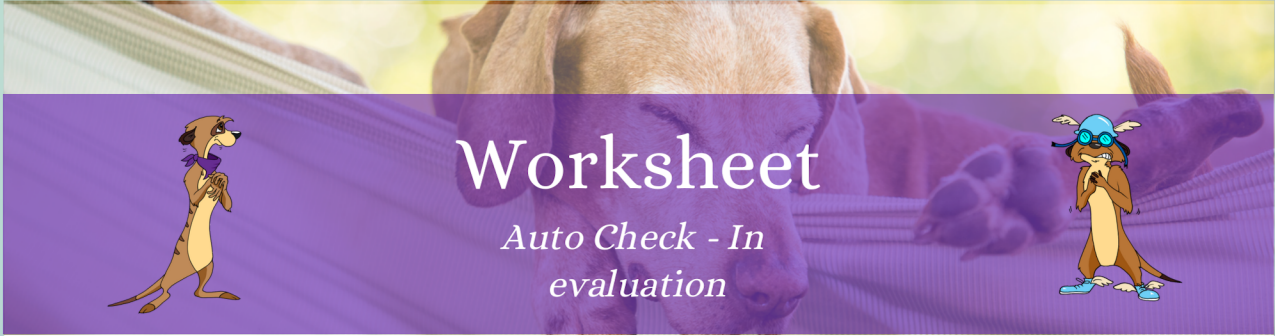
NO 1: Where are you practicing your 'check in'?

NO 2: How long does it take for them to look at you without saying anything?

NO 3: How often will they look at you in a 10 minute period?

NO 4: What can you do to make it easier or more challenging next time ?





Worksheet

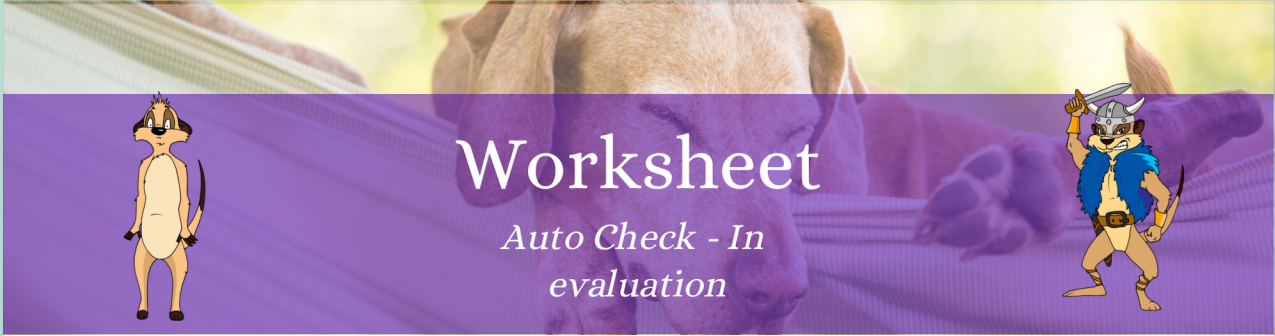
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Worksheet

Auto Check - In evaluation

NO 1: Where are you practicing your 'check in'?

NO 2: How long does it take for them to look at you without saying anything?

NO 3: How often will they look at you in a 10 minute period?

NO 4: What can you do to make it easier or more challenging next time ?



Remember all of these foundations are self management – we're not asking them or cueing them, we're capturing what we see and like. This allows our dogs an element of control within their training to boost their confidence, and allow them to regulate themselves – exactly what we want from a well-behaved dog.



**You get the idea! Now give it a go with your dog !!
want to learn more? Join our community !
After-all, it's often the underlying emotions that
drive their unwanted behaviours.**

The Secret?



The secret to effective rehabilitation is understanding which emotions are driving your dog's behaviour. The consultation enables our Clinical Animal Behaviourists to do just this! Once we understand what is driving your dog's behaviour we can help them to cope, and set them up for success!

We start by managing the environments they're in, to prevent their Meerkat from taking over when they become too scared, frustrated, or overwhelmed. Then we help them to learn how to 'Control The Meerkat', through games, relaxation exercises, and teaching them alternative behaviours and coping skills.

We need to avoid any situations that cause your dog stress in the short term, so they are able to start to relax. So this is where we will start. Until your dog can feel safe and relax they will find it difficult to learn, and utilise their new skills.

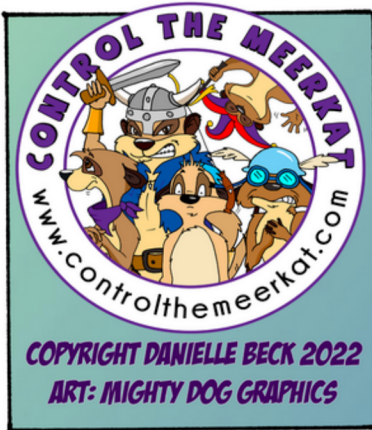
Everything starts at home, they need a safe B.A.S.E. to start from. Then we can create that space with you and you can become their safe place. Once they can control the meerkat in safe environments we can gradually start to expand this to new situations to help them relax and control the meerkat.



Danielle Beck

Danielle Beck, BSc (hons), PGDip, MSc
Clinical Animal Behaviourists &
Rehabilitation Trainer
Founder of Control the Meerkat

IT'S all ABOUT their B.A.S.E!



BONDING

SPEND TIME TOGETHER. NO NEED TO DO ANYTHING, JUST RELAX. IT MAY NOT SOUND LIKE MUCH BUT IT CAN HELP YOUR DOG FEEL CALM AND SAFE WITH YOU WITHOUT ANY PRESSURE TO DO ANYTHING.

ADVOCATE

LEARN HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR DOG WHEN A MEERKAT SUDDENLY HIJACKS THEM! GET THEM AWAY FROM THE POTENTIAL THREATS AND SAY NO TO OTHERS LOOKING TO PET OR PLAY IF NEEDED. **BE THEIR VOICE.**

SUPPORT

HELP THEM MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES IN A SITUATION. GIVE THEM TIME AND ALLOW THEM TO BUILD CONFIDENCE IN THEIR DECISIONS.

EMPATHIZE

TRUST YOUR DOG IF THEY'RE TELLING YOU THEY ARE SCARED OR UNSURE. THEY NEED TO KNOW YOU UNDERSTAND HOW THEY FEEL.

WHEN YOUR DOG FEELS THREATENED OR OVERWHELMED THEIR BRAIN GETS EMOTIONALLY HIJACKED WE CALL THIS THEIR **MEERKAT**

HELP YOUR DOG CONTROL THE MEERKAT WITH A SOLID

B.A.S.E



TO BE CONTINUED...



IT'S ALL ABOUT THEIR B.A.S.E.

CREATING SAFETY & BUILDING
CONFIDENCE



BONDING



It can be difficult at times to stay connected with our reactive dogs. Every day things happen. We struggle to leave them, walks become a chore that we now start to worry about; it's exhausting. That's ok and it's normal to feel this way, help is here! The first step is stop doing the things that you and your dog find difficult. Then start to enjoy your time together again. Spend time relaxing in the same room, capturing calmness, understanding your dog's body language, playing together with no pressure to actually do anything. Sharing space and relaxing together is a great way to bond and help your dog start their rehabilitation journey.

ADVOCATE



Our dogs need us to use our voice and actions to help them. They're not ready to make the right choices on their own when we keep putting them in situations where they struggle, as they can panic. Their meerkat takes over and accidents can and do happen. Advocating for our dogs means to stand up for them, often to friends and family. Their walks will be different for a while and we need to be more hands off rather than hands on. Many reactive dogs have a history of trauma; therefore pressure and suppression won't help them. We need to ask other people not to approach, keep their distance, and keep their friendly dog away. This is easier said than done but our dogs rely on us to help them in these situations and to get them out of the situation ASAP

IT'S ALL ABOUT THEIR B.A.S.E.

CREATING SAFETY & BUILDING
CONFIDENCE



SUPPORT



Although we can greatly reduce their exposure it's a sad fact of life that there will be times where it's not always possible to avoid everything that will trigger or overwhelm our dogs. A situation can't be avoided, or you get closer than you would like, and your dog will react. It's these moments our dogs really need our support to feel safe. They can't learn while they're reacting and having their handler react at them, jerk their collar/harness or shout. This will only affect your relationship, or make them more overwhelmed. We can support them by not making the situation worse. This is not the time for training. This is the time for distractions, comfort, or increasing distance. What ever they need to feel safe.

EMPATHIZE



Trust your dog when they're telling you they're scared, worried, or overwhelmed. Our dogs don't lie. They tell it how it is and it's up to us to listen and show compassion. If they're tensing up their muscles, looking around constantly, holding their ears tightly back, showing the whites of their eyes, or refusing to walk, they are telling you they're not comfortable and need support. So let's put ourselves in their shoes and show some compassion. Yes the scary thing could be a plastic bag, we know it's harmless - they don't. Let's not invalidate them by thinking we know what they're feeling better than they do. Let's guide them and support them to safety.

Meet your Dogs Meerkats!



TO BE CONTINUED...



Meet The Meerkats?



The Meerkat is an analogy developed by Clinical Animal Behaviourist Danielle Beck, MSc, to help caregivers to understand how the brain affects your dog's behaviour. Often our dogs react so quickly we lose control, they're like a different dog and the treats just don't work. This emotional hijacking we refer to as 'The Meerkat' and we can show you how to 'Control The Meerkat' so you can train your dog.

All dogs have a meerkat hanging out on their dog collar and it's able to hijack them and take over whenever they feel threatened.

Why do some dogs seem to have active meerkats and others calm? This depends entirely on your dog, their personality, genetics, development and breeding history, socialisation, their environment, any trauma they may have faced, and many more factors.

You can find out how active your dogs meerkat is by taking our Meerkat Quiz on the website!

Each Meerkat is based off the fight/flight responses available to your dog when they feel threatened. For many dogs when they are in a situation which they feel is threatening their brain literally changes and they get hijacked by their emotional brain – their Meerkat. Each dog will have access to all Meerkats, however there is often a primary meerkat that will be the main Meerkat for your dog, and understanding which Meerkat hijacks your dog can really help boost their rehabilitations.

You can find out which alert or active meerkat hijacks your dog by taking our new quiz!

We want to take the pressure off the dog when training as we can't train our dogs until we can control the Meerkat, and often we can't do that through conventional training. That's where we are different. We can help you to teach your dog how to help themselves!

Meet your dogs Meerkats

FIGHT



For most species this is a last resort as it's very costly, but if all else fails you may be left with no choice. For many dogs with fight, they charge first and ask questions later. The best defence is a good offence. Many appear confident and some are, as this technique has often been tried and tested. These dogs are not nasty and many have a false sense of confidence and bravado as shouting at everything is a reliable way to keep threats at bay,

FREEZE



These dogs are too scared to move so they freeze, hoping the threat may see they're no threat and leave. This response can be misinterpreted as calm and ok. However, their body will be very stiff, you may see lots of nose licks, small lip curls and low vibrating growls. These dogs are not 'fine' or 'calm', they are shutting down and withdrawing. They are often highly tolerant but will react if pushed, which appears to come 'out of the blue'.

FOOL



Dogs that fool are goofy by nature and often unaware if a threat is 'real'. They're often confident in situations they know and 'play up' in others. They will try to avoid conflict through play and distractions, which generally gets them into trouble. They may appear over excitable, or over friendly. They often zoom and start interacting with their environment in a fast way with little thought behind their actions. They are often seen as 'thick' or 'stubborn' when they're actually overwhelmed

Meet your dogs Meerkats

FAWN



These dogs try to calm situations to avoid threat and conflict. Often the play police in group situations, they are often seen being over the top wiggly, often with their bellies close to the floor or rolling onto their back and repeat this. They will lick their nose / mouth, to appease the 'threat', to try to calm them and avoid punishment. They are seen as very biddable and compliant when often they're unsure and have a high need to 'people please' to avoid conflict.

FLIGHT



Avoid the threat, run away and/or hide. These dogs will try to move away, often bolting with their ears back and tight against their head, tail tucked, and panting heavily with large eyes. If they can't run, as they're on a lead or cornered they get scared and frustrated and will start to display more fight type behaviours as they try to intimidate the threat. These dogs are often better off lead and will choose to avoid situation.

How do the meerkats affect your dog?

Take the quizzes at
Controlthemeerkat.com
to find out !

4 Phases & 4 steps



01

CREATING SAFETY & BUILDING CONFIDENCE ✓

- Safety
- Relaxation
- Confidence building
- Foundation skills

02

FOUNDATION BEHAVIOURS & EMOTIONAL REGULATION ✓

- Foundation exercises
- If In Doubt; Chill Out
- Check -In
- Emotional Regulation - impulse/self control & Frustration tolerance

03

DRESS REHEARSAL! PRACTICING IN SAFE PLACES IN THE REAL WORLD ✓

- *Can they listen and relax in the home?*
- *Can they listen and relax in the garden?*
- *Can they listen and relax in quiet areas?*
- *Can they regulate themselves?*

04

LIVING WITH THE MEERKAT ✓

- Have a plan
- Be prepared
- Support
- Advocate



PUT IT ALL TOGETHER AND GRADUALLY TAKE ON THE WORLD

Final Thoughts

aaaaaand relax

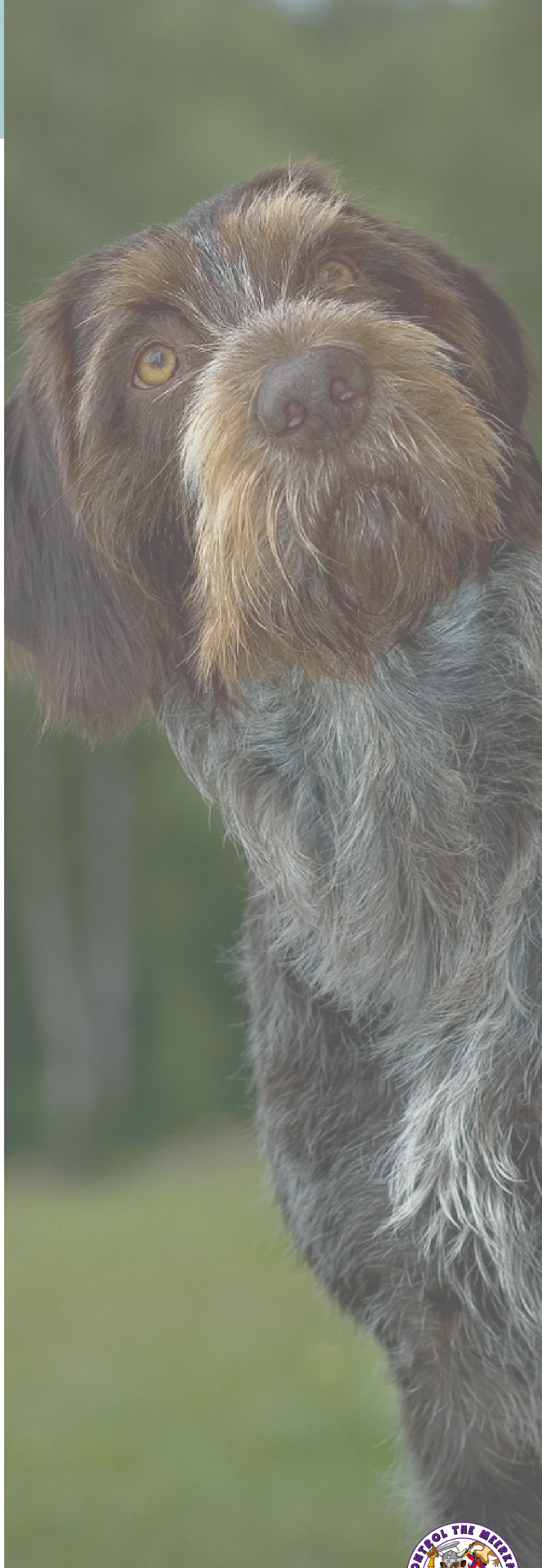
You did it, you reached the end! Your dog should be well on their way to being able to **#ControlTheMeerkat** and 'check in' in lots of situations rather than barking at you, chewing their lead, jumping up, and anything else they did when they were overwhelmed.

If you are still struggling, there may be more going on than we originally thought, and your dog may be experiencing more emotional difficulties than previously believed or even something worth discussing with your vet.

There's lots of advice and courses to try in our learning empawrium at controlthemeerkat.com plus a community forum where you can meet and talk to other owners with reactive dogs, and get some peer support, or book a session with Danielle or a member of the Control The Meerkat Team :)



Take A JOURNEY
WITH ME →



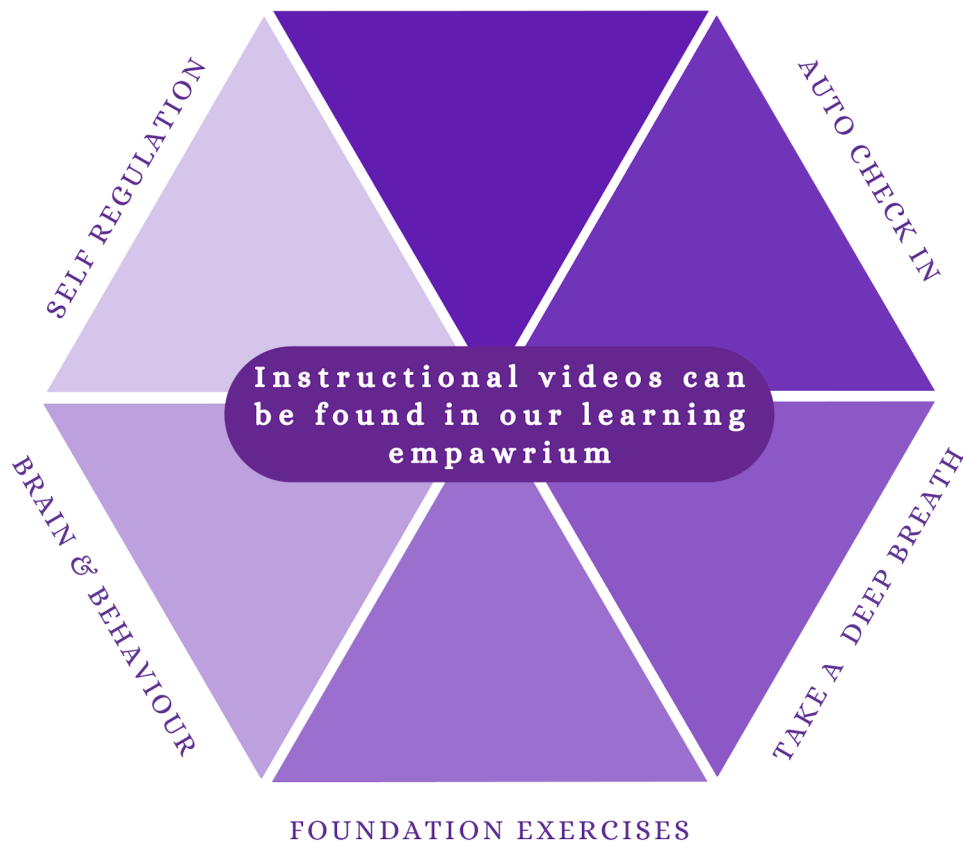
CONTROL THE MEERKAT



collection



IF IN DOUBT; CHILL OUT



The management strategies and games within Control The Meerkat are to help you and your dog to learn new coping strategies, and remain as calm as possible. These techniques will not fix the problem, but they will make it easier to manage your dog whilst you are working through the program to have more long term results. As we go through the rehabilitation journey your dog will learn new ways to 'Control The Meerkat', which will help change their behaviour into something more manageable to make your life with your dog easier.

After-all, it's often the underlying emotions that drive their unwanted behaviours.

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"Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life."



MOVING FORWARD

Sooo, what should I do next ?

Well you've come such a long way, are you curious what else you can try with you dog? Would you like them to be more responsive? Are you still struggling and finding your dog can settle inside, but struggles outside as they are reactive on their lead? Do you just want to be able to take them out for a walk without them barking and lunging? Or be able to actually leave the house, as they struggle when left or even take objects off them without conflict? Then the 'Control The Meerkat' series is for you!

I love it! Who is this for exactly?

Control The Meerkat is for all people who want to understand and help the reactive dogs that share their lives. It's a community built to help owners to meet others in the same boat, and learn how to help their reactive dogs, help themselves. There are private forums, learning resources like this, instructional videos and webinars too



Sounds AMAZING! How does it work?

Simply visit the website and choose the course or membership subscription that's best for you! You can even book a consultation with a Registered Clinical Animal Behaviourist; and join our 6 or 12 month rehabilitation program.

Click here to get started: controlthemeerkat.com

Notes



MEET THE *Author*



Danielle is an enthusiastic and passionate clinical animal behaviourist, rehabilitation trainer, and mum of one. Her mission is to help, and inspire dog owners to create an easier life with their dogs. She aims to help caregivers to understand their dogs and enable them to manage themselves; by sharing her knowledge and experience with you. She currently lives in Greater Manchester, UK, with her partner, 9 year old son, 2 dogs, and a cat.

"Define success on your own terms, achieve it by your own rules, and build a life you're proud to live."



-Anne Sweeney

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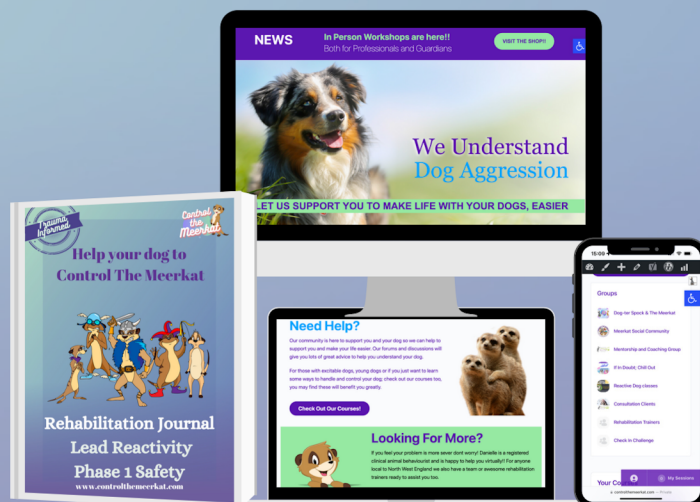




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