

Distraction, Marker, Treat (DMT)

Let's face it. Distractions can be problematic, no matter if your dog views them as a good thing or not. So you are going to need a few effective tactics to help work through things that catch your puppy's attention. That is where DMT comes in. This protocol aims to:

- Build resilience to distractions
- Reduce arousal (excitement, frustration, worry, fear) in the face of distractions
- Change any negative emotional responses to more positive emotional responses.
- Promote optimism and confidence anywhere and everywhere!
- Grow calmness

Socialization

During socialization, you will use DMT to help your puppy handle the world - with new things in the environment, exciting things, suspicious things, and so on. Teach your puppy to handle novelty in the world through positive associations, confidence, and calmness. You will DMT new sights, sounds, smells, and even tactile experiences, including new surfaces or things touching your puppy's body (super handy for handling and grooming). Your goal is for your pup to "conquer" the experience and feel confident. But you also want your dog to carry the attitude that it is not a big deal - no reaction is a good reaction. A dog that handles the world with calm behavior is well-behaved in public.

Distractions

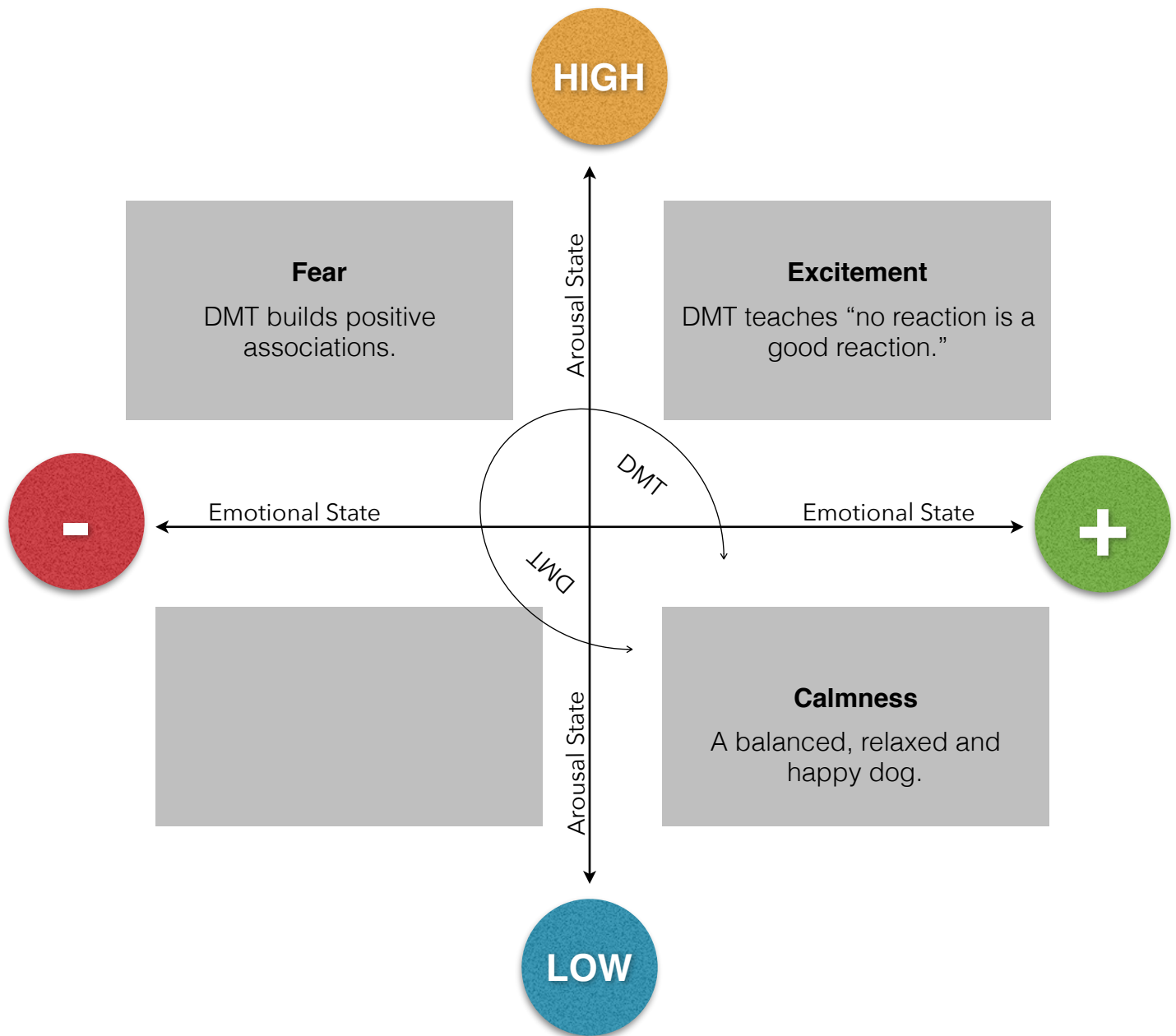
Any element in the environment can increase arousal. That affects your dog's emotional state. In situations where there are lots of distractions, arousal and emotions can increase dramatically, leading to over-arousal or reactivity. If your dog has started to react to something specific, you will want to change the association to something more positive and calm. Sometimes, you will even have to separate elements of the distraction (sound, sight, distance, interaction, etc.) The time you take for each component will be dependent on the emotional level attached to the distraction. Make sure to take the appropriate amount of time for each element; better to take too long, than to rush it.

DMT Involves Three Elements:

1. **Distraction:** This could be anything in the environment – e.g., a person appearing in the distance, leaf falling from a tree, dog barking in the yard next door, etc. It is anything that catches your puppy's attention.
2. **Marker:** A marker is a word or sound that signals to your dog that a treat (or reward) is on the way. In this protocol, I recommend the word "nice" or "good." Calmly talk to your puppy. Say the word FIRST, THEN food next.
3. **Treat:** When working with distractions, kibble may not be good enough. Try to use kibble as much as you can, but there may be situations that call for something better.

When the distraction in question occurs (e.g., dog barks in the distance, a person appears, etc.), you will mark the event as something positive ("nice" - a calm reward marker) and follow with the treat. It's that simple! Repeat marking excellent decisions of not interacting or reacting to distractions.

Distraction, Marker, Treat (DMT)



DMT - Beginnings

1. Choose a calm reward marker (CRM) like "Nice" or "Good" or "Clever" and deliver the food calmly. Practice this at home first. Say the word FIRST, THEN deliver the food. You will use this in situations where you want to promote calmness, unlike the traditional Reward Marker (RM), where you want some drive and enthusiasm.

Distraction, Marker, Treat (DMT)

2. Practice with mild, positive distractions first. Set up something that your dog has good associations with, but can also calm around it, knowing your puppy won't overreact to it.
3. As soon as the distraction appears, mark it with your Calm Reward marker, "Niiiiice," or "Gooooood," in a calm tone, and treat your puppy.
4. Practice with this distraction a couple of times and then change the distraction to another positive distraction, e.g., ball rolling past, your own shadow, a singing bird.
5. Then, begin to practice DMT in more real-life situations.

Distraction → Mark → Treat

Once you are comfortable with your timing, and your dog is responding well to DMT, begin applying it in real situations with your puppy.

DMT for Emotion

DMT can work for any and all situations and triggers. If your dog is nervous about new places, do DMT. If your dog gets excited when she sees another dog, do DMT. Timing will be important! You will want to start DMT BEFORE any reactions occur, and use DMT to maintain calmness throughout the presence of the distraction. That means you will need to pay attention to your surroundings and be proactive in your approach.

Levels Of DMT

There are two different levels for you to use DMT with your puppy.

Level 1: Pairing

- You notice the distraction first.
- Your dog has not seen it yet.
- You will start DMT while your dog's focus is still neutral.
- Mark and Treat your dog to get him engaged with you.
- If your dog then notices the distraction, you may need to increase the frequency of your treats.
- You might need to move away from the distraction to get enough distance to keep emotional levels and arousal lower.

Level 2: Classic (Classical Conditioning)

- Your dog notices the distraction first.
- The moment you see your dog go "on alert," ears perk up, head lifts higher, he might be leaning forward a bit or on the toes, start DMT.
- Sometimes a puppy will sit, curious about what he sees or hears. That is the moment you will say your CRM and deliver a treat.
- Don't cue a behavior your dog could ignore (don't start bad habits).
- Don't wait for your dog to do something, either.

Limitless Pawsibilities

Distraction, Marker, Treat (DMT)

- Just talk to your pup calmly and place the food in front of his nose.
- If your dog doesn't take the food, you need to move and get farther away. Not taking food means that arousal/emotional levels are too high and need to be brought down. Distance helps with that. You might even need to pick your puppy up and leave, depending on what the distraction is and the situation.

DMT is your first go-to game for when you are out socializing your puppy. It is a wonderful technique to use during the observational stage of socialization. It allows you to learn what grabs your puppy's attention and what your puppy can ignore. It also teaches your puppy to bring his focus back to you.

I LOVE this game! Distract, Marker, Treat has so many applications and is truly a gem when it comes to building socialization skills in your dog. It teaches your dog how to look forward to things, familiar and new, and supports the optimist in your pup.

Some dogs are natural-born optimists. They look at the bowl is half full and handle new situations and things in stride because they trust in a good outcome. That is not the case for all dogs. Some dogs can be pessimists and see new things as potential threats, or at the least, suspicious. It is a good survival response - "the rustle in the bush is a scary snake and can threaten my life" is a good survival response. But in our human world, this type of thinking can be a challenge or problematic. So by implementing DMT with your pup, you can help facilitate autonomous associations and a more positive outlook on the world.

© 2017 Limitless Pawsibilities
All Copyrights Reserved