

Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

Episode 072 Transcript – How To Stop the Feeling that Training is Taking Over Your Life

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-72/>

You if you got up this morning and jumped up and down with glee, that, yay, today's the day I'm going to do separation anxiety training. And I need you to know two things. First of all, I'm not sure I believe you because honestly, who does jump up and down with joy because it's time to do separation anxiety training? And two, second, it's not, not, not usual. You'll be very, very exceptional if that were the case. Why is that? Well, because as much as separation anxiety training is good for us and good for our dog, it's not the most fun training you're ever going to do with your dog. It's not trick training. It's not agility. And also added to that, not only is it not rewarding and fun in the moment, the reward is in the distance.

So yeah, you might have a brilliant session, and you might get to 1 minute 30, or twelve minutes 45, or whatever it is your target duration was for that day. But the ultimate goal of that one golden hour, or the 2 hours that allows you to go out to dinner or meet up with friends, those are in the future, so they are way off. And our human brains are not programmed to like and want to do things where the reward isn't instant. It's an evolutionary thing.

We have these brains that are hardwired to be attracted to, things that give us instant hits, and that's why we get addicted to social media, that's why we get addicted to slot machines. Our brains like immediate rewards. So stuff that's good for us, like saving for the future, like eating healthily, typically have a longer term payoff, and we're not very good at picking up those things. But having said that, we know we need to do this training, and we know that we have to do a lot of training with each dog in order for the dog to recover.

Because separation anxiety is all about training, is all about changing fear. And to change fear in our dog's brain, we need to have a lot of repetition of the new non scary association. It's a lot of training. It's training over and over and over. So it's lots of training on many days of the week for many weeks and months. It just is. And I never sugarcoat it. I don't tell anybody.

This is a quick fix. It's training where you're in it for the long haul. And the problem with that is that it can SAP your energy as much as you're committed and you want to do it, it just can start to just drain you. And if you're not careful, if you're too driven, it can start to take over your life. You're so focused on, okay, we just got to keep doing this training. I don't want to do it. I don't love it, but I know we have to do it. It ends up being your life, taking over your life rather than being something that's going to help you get back your life.

And it's challenging enough having a dog with separation anxiety without you having to have the training take over what's left of your life. So in this week's episode, I want to talk to you about how we can make training fit into our lives, rather than it be the thing that takes over what little bit of freedom and free time we have left. Let me dive into five tips that I hope are going to help you.

First of all, I want you to think about training when you can train, not training when you feel you should. Now, you'll often have heard me say, if you've listened to any of my other podcasts or read my books, that when we work with a dog with separation anxiety, especially when we're starting out, it really pays to train at times when it's going to be easiest for them, because that's motivating for you, because you see results. But it's also easier for the dog. What do I mean by find a time that works for them? Well, some dogs train better in the evening, some dogs train better in the morning, some dogs do better at weekends or when it's raining or when it's sunny and so on. And it can really pay to pick to train during those times because you start to see your dog build home alone confidence more quickly than if you pick off really difficult contexts.

But the problem with always cherry picking, as much as I think it's worth doing, pick the time that's going to work for your dog, set your dog up for success. The problem with that is that your very inflexible life because you've got a dog that you can't leave, has now another dimension of inflexibility that, okay, we must train at 4:30 every weekday because that's when he does best and there are no concessions. We've got to train 4:30 every weekday. And I think that can become burdensome.

So as much as I'm not going to stop saying train when it's easiest for your dog, set your dog up for success because you'll feel better, your dog will feel better. I do want you to say, but sometimes it's okay to flex that. So if you're trying to train five times a week, but you've been invited somewhere on, I don't know, Friday afternoon, because it's a day off and you've been invited to somebody's garden party, barbecue, whatever, and it's a nice day and you can take the dog. I don't want you to think, yeah, but we've got to be back for the training or we've got to train before we leave.

I want to give you full permission to say, sometimes it's okay just to be normal and just to be human and not to be a person who's on this drive to get their dog over separation anxiety. So give yourself a break. Train when you can sometimes rather than when you feel you should every single time. The second tip, I want you to become joyous about meeting easy goals. Embrace easy goals. Easy goals are exactly what it sounds like they are. Things that are so easy to achieve that there's almost no doubt that you're going to get them. There's been a culture for a long time.

It's kind of come from the business world and the self help world that we should all be setting big, ambitious, lofty goals because that's how high performers get ahead. That's how people make it in this world. Actually, the behavior science says something different. There are a few people who can be consistently motivated by really big goals. But for mere mortals like you and I, easy goals

work better. Here's why. When you hit a goal, you feel great. You get that instant reward I was talking about, right? You get that dopamine hit.

But when you miss a goal, you feel really you feel flattened. And that demotivating feeling can linger and it can affect your desire to do the training. Again, as someone said, I read this quote yesterday and I thought it was, yeah, this separation anxiety training, it's easy to be committed when things are going well, right? It's easy to keep doing the training when it's going well. It's harder when you're not meeting those goals. And so if we say to ourselves, I'm going to focus on easy goals, we'll always be meeting our goals and we'll always be feeling positive. So set yourself easy training goals. And here I'm not talking about the time that you give your dog to do in a training session, because by the way, that should always be easy. You should go into every training session thinking that your dog can ace the time that you've given them.

Even if the time is longer than the last training session, it should still be easy. I'm talking about things like the frequency of when you train, what type of training you do, and linking back to point number one, it might be, I'm going to give myself a bit of a break this week, and we're actually going to take two days off because we're going to do stuff on those two days. So embracing easy goals is about giving yourself some kind of process goal. So you might say, I'm going to do one training session this week and anything else is a bonus or I'm going to do two doors of bore sessions. The way our brains work, because we're always trying to keep ahead of our brains, is that when we hit an easy goal, we get that motivation, we get the dopamine, and we're more likely to continue on. When we miss a goal. The demotivating side, that feeling, that lingering feeling that it gives us, is more likely to make us stop. So embrace those easy goals.

Three drop scheduled sessions in favor of as and when sessions. What the heck is an as and when session? I know that many of you like to say, I'm going to train at 4:30 today. That's when I put it in my diary, my calendar, that's when I'm going to train. But that doesn't work for everybody. And again, kind of coming back to this concept of easy goals, if something gets in your way at 4:30, because even though you want to train at that time, because you think you should, if something gets in your way and you end up not training, then you feel flattened by that. Again, another way, we feel demotivated. Instead, what you might say, I'll train at that time if I can, but if I can't, I'm just going to sprinkle in some training sessions throughout the day. And that could be the kettle is boiling at 10:00 a.m..

So what I'm going to do is I'm just going to go out and do let me look at my exercise. I've got five steps. I'm going to do step one and two of my exercise. That's okay, you can split the exercise up however you want to split the exercise up, so do that. If that works for you, do it. And also, you don't necessarily need to stick to your exercise plan throughout the day. Oh, my goodness. What's Julie saying? She's all over you training with a plan.

And yes, I am, but sometimes it's okay to say, you know what, I know my dog can do two minutes comfortably. I've got 30 seconds now. I'm just going to pop out for 30 seconds. So these little ad

hoc as and when sessions, we can sprinkle them throughout our day so that we don't have to wait for that, okay, now's the time to train. Let's train. Sometimes doing little sprinkled sessions when we can, can actually be motivating because they don't seem as onerous. It doesn't feel like, okay, it's all or nothing. I've got half an hour, I'm going to train, train, train.

So think about doing some as and when sprinkled throughout the day. Four, stop waiting for the perfect time to train. If you feel like you have to train at a set time with everybody else at the house, when you know your dog has had two long walks that day and I don't know, you feel in the mood as well, all those conditions might never come together. You might never have that perfect storm. So, yes, it really pays to train under the right conditions, but if you're never going to meet them, you're never going to train. And a big one there is what happens with other people in the household. If you've got family at home or you've got roommates, housemates waiting for them not to be around or waiting for them to get involved even harder might mean you're never going to get round to training. So it's okay sometimes to say, all right, it doesn't matter, everybody's in, but I'm still going to do some training.

Maybe it's Doris a boar. And by the way, Doris a boar is brilliant to do in the kind of as and when way of training that I was just describing under point number three. But don't wait for perfect. If you wait for perfect, you wait forever. Train in as good a context and with the best conditions that you can, but don't put it off if you think you have to wait for perfect, especially if you know it's going to be really hard to get your housemates out of the house so you can train. Or if you've got teenage kids to get the teenage kids to disappear or go up to their room when you want to train. So don't wait for perfect. It's always better to try something.

And with that in mind, I think number five is probably the most important point of all of these. Don't put up a zero. What do I mean by that? I mean do something. Even if you do two minutes of training and back to that easy goal concept, that's going to be better than doing nothing. If you say, actually, today is my day off, I want you to reward yourself for that. Because that isn't putting up a zero. That's saying, I recognize that days off for me and my dog are just as important, so I'm going to consciously take a day off. I think it's more important, though, to consciously take a day off, which is going back to point number one.

Train when you can, not when you feel you should, than to skip the training because you feel overwhelmed or you can't set an easy goal or you can't find two minutes to do it. Honestly, if today is the day that you want to train, you feel it's the right day to train, but you're out of time. Just train for two minutes. Train for two minutes. If you miss a day where you said, this is the day, I'm going to train today, if you miss those days, you just feel worse the next day because now you're feeling like you're going to play catch up. So just think about that concept. It's something that I stole from James Clear and Atomic Habits, whose book I'm obsessed with. He talks about not putting up a zero.

For me, it's things like if I'm going to work out, I want to work out for 45 minutes. But I know that if I have ten minutes, then it's better to work out for ten minutes than for zero. That's what James Clear says. Sometimes if you only have ten minutes, it's okay. And don't beat yourself up about that. Just take the ten minutes. You've done something. You've done more than most people with the dog, with separation anxiety.

However big caveat about don't put up a zero, I don't want that to conflict with all the other points I've made about giving yourself breaks, being kind to yourself, setting easy goals. Because this is a mind game. It really is. We're changing our dog's emotion. We're working on their brains. But our emotions and our brains are critical to the success of this training. Anyway, I hope those points have helped you remember this training is important, but it is never going to be fun. And I definitely don't want it to be just another chore and another burden in your life.

I want you and your dog to get over this, and I'm hoping these tips will help you. That's it from me. I'll catch you soon.