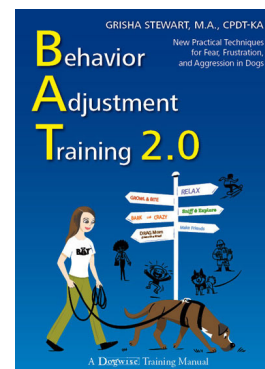An excerpt from

Behavior Adjustment Training 2.0 - New Practical Techniques for Fear, Frustration, and Aggression in Dogs
Chapter 1 - Understanding

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My mission is to help dogs have a voice in their care. **Behavior Adjustment Training** (BAT) reduces reactivity by giving dogs more control over their own safety. I know that can sound like crazy-talk, because it seems like that means the dog is in control of us. Entire television shows are devoted to creative ways to gain dominance, based on the idea that the only way to get control is to take it away from the dog. Decades of science tell us that it's not necessary. It's actually a lot more useful and healthy to let dogs have some control over their safety. Dogs need effective ways to meet their needs.

If you're reading this book, then you're here for some reason. Maybe your dog is barking, lunging, or running away. Maybe you are a professional who wants more strategies to help clients with reactivity. Perhaps you'd like to learn how to use BAT to socialize puppies or rescue dogs in your care, because you know how isolating and scary it can be to have a dog with reactivity.

Whatever your reason for reading, you probably have at least one connection to reactivity, as I did when I first developed Behavior Adjustment Training. My professional connection to reactivity was that I wanted a better way to help my clients. More importantly, I needed a way to help the dog under my own roof. You'll learn more about Peanut later, after I give you a quick overview of BAT, so that his story makes more sense.

With BAT, you create opportunities for your dog to interact with his environment in emotionally and physically safe ways. It is especially useful when the **triggers** for frustration, aggression, or fear are living beings, like other dogs or people. Whatever the trigger is:

• BAT gives dogs maximum control over their own safety and other significant events in their lives.

• BAT arranges safe scenarios where dogs can socialize naturally and interact with triggers in socially acceptable ways.

There are a number of other key concepts to grasp in BAT. This chapter will serve as a brief introduction to these concepts. The rest of the book will provide more details and examples, including the next chapter about how I began to use them when working with Peanut.

Control and empowerment
If your dog is exhibiting some behavior you don't want, you may have wondered, "Why is he doing it?" Does he not love you? Is he trying to dominate you? If he knows you don't like whatever it is he is doing, then why does he keep doing it? Is he not your best friend, after all?

Behavior exists to have some effect on a given situation faced by an animal. The applied behavior analysis (ABA) term for those situations is **setting events**: context clues from the internal and external physical environment that predict possible consequences of behavior. Your dog behaves the way he does simply because he has some goal that the behavior helps him meet, not that he doesn't love you. That's the whole point of behavior. He may not even find the behavior particularly fun to do, as is the case with most reactivity. *But if your dog has learned that a given behavior provides a way to get what he wants or needs then he is likely to repeat it.* You may think it's a problem behavior. Your dog just thinks, "It works." Well, he probably doesn't think that, in so many words. But on some level, he gets the contingency, the relationship between behavior and outcomes.

Controllability is how much effect the dog's behavior has on outcomes, especially the degree of behavioral control over stressors. Having one's of behavior influence external events is a basic need

all living beings. That's the whole point of behavior.

Empowerment-based training maximizes controllability by creating opportunities for the animal to meet his own goals. There's a balance, of course; we can't just let our dogs run around doing whatever they want. We have to make sure our dogs and families are safe. Whenever possible, however, we must empower animals to control their own outcomes.

Unfortunately, most training, even training without pain, emphasizes the caregiver's control of the dog's behavior. Exerting too much control disempowers the learner, whether it is done via threats or treats. It makes sense that we do it: we are animals, too, and control is a basic need for us! We just have to be careful not to get that control at our dogs' expense. When I need to stop specific behavior, I prefer to manage the environment from behind the scenes, rather than stepping in to micromanage each behavior. This helps teach them to make good choices independent of human intervention. For example, you could start by having only appropriate chew items in the room. Over time, add items that are inappropriate for chewing, but make them less desirable for the dog to chew on: harder to reach, bitter taste, etc. On the other hand, you could follow the puppy around to take precious items out of his mouth. With the first option, he is empowered and has a high degree of controllability (albeit within a controlled environment). The puppy develops a habit of chewing the toys that are available for him to chew and learns from the consequences of his behavior. Chewing appropriate toys becomes his **default behavior**.

In the second option, his behavior is thwarted at every turn as you follow him around taking inappropriate things away from him. Your items are equally safe, but the dog's controllability is low. Even using positive **reinforcement** can disempower the puppy in this scenario. For example, if you are cueing "Drop it" or "Leave it" and reinforcing his behavior with a treat, he does have some controllability, but his behavior only leads to access to the treat, which doesn't address the real issue: sore puppy gums. He may

be having fun, but he still has no clear way to get that need met. You also run the risk of creating a behavior chain of grab toy → drop toy to earn treats.

Reinforcement of a behavior is any consequence that makes that behavior more likely in the future. Reinforcers can include treats, toys, or relief from something unpleasant, like social pressure.

Grisha Stewart is a dog trainer and international speaker based in Alaska. Her dog training techniques, including Behavior Adjustment Training (BAT), use empowerment to build dogs' confidence, social skills, and manners. In addition to her rigorous travel schedule, Grisha teaches dog trainers and families worldwide in her online Animal Building Blocks Academy. She loves hiking with her dogs, reading, and rock climbing.