

COOL, CALM & COLLECTED

Calmness as a concept cannot be overrated.

If you're familiar with the AbsoluteDogs training resources for naughty but nice (NBN) dogs, you will know about the arousal bucket. How your dog's arousal level is made up of lots of little exciting, anxiety inducing or worrying events that all add up, until their bucket is full and all that 'naughty' behaviour comes spilling over as your dog tries to cope with the feelings that have accumulated.

“

Your dog's arousal level is made up of lots of little exciting, anxiety inducing or worrying events that all add up, until their bucket is full

”

Teaching your dog to have calm default behaviours, a calm existence, a generally calm way of being, keeps that bucket empty as a matter of course.

Then, when an exciting, arousing or challenging event happens, the bucket doesn't overflow; it tops up a bit and then, because your dog's brain knows how to be calm it empties right back down again. And because your dog has some great go to calm behaviours, they recover much more quickly when the inevitable exciting, arousing or worrying things happen in their life. Despite those inevitable events, there is minimal arousal stacking; perfect.



CAUSES OF AROUSAL

The causes of arousal can be positive and negative, but they still add to filling up that bucket.

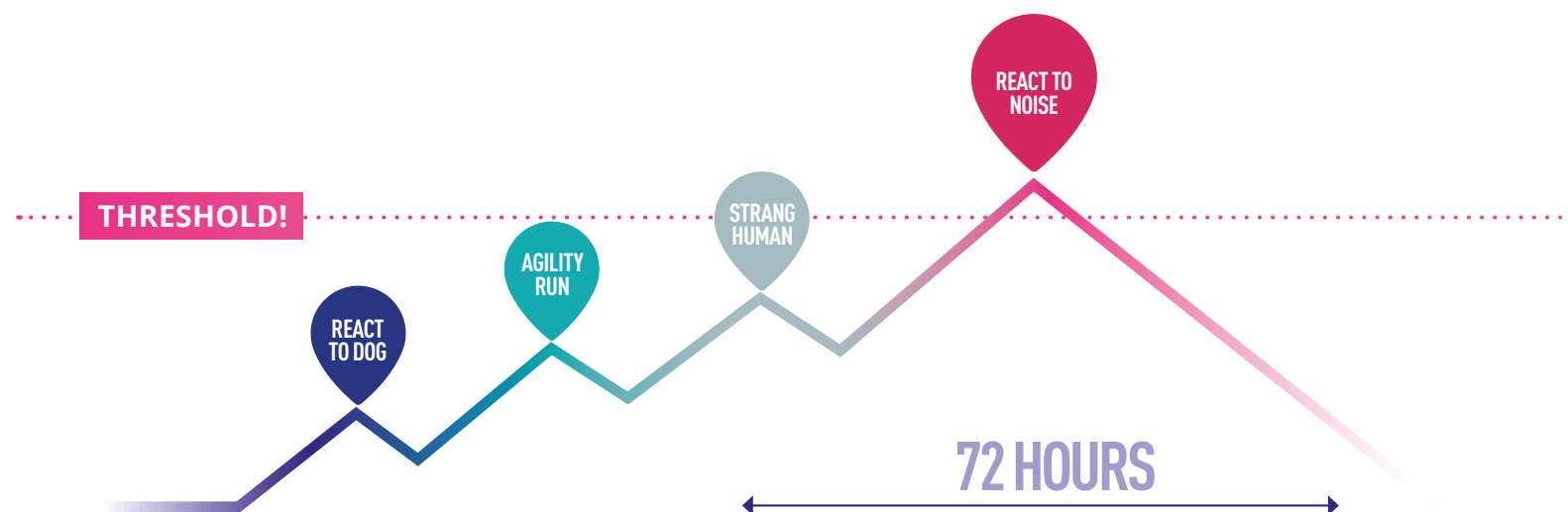
We realise that all dogs get crazy sometimes, they love to play and do the stuff that they enjoy, we love it when they greet us; when they are super excited to see us, that's part of the joy of having a dog. And sometimes we want our dogs to be crazy, right?

If they're working dogs or sports dogs they need the high drive that is essential to them doing a good job or giving a great performance. We don't want to kill the joy or inhibit the necessary drive; rather we want to give dogs the skills they need to chill out, calm down and to reduce the amount that normal every day life adds to the bucket so that when we need them to be 'on-it' they can give that activity their all – they haven't wasted unnecessary energy on things that didn't really need their attention.

If you teach calmness, then your dog's capability for sport or fun is preserved. They're rested, they're coming from a level base and they can channel all of their energy where you want it. They haven't wasted energy living on the edge. And what's more, calm dogs make good choices.

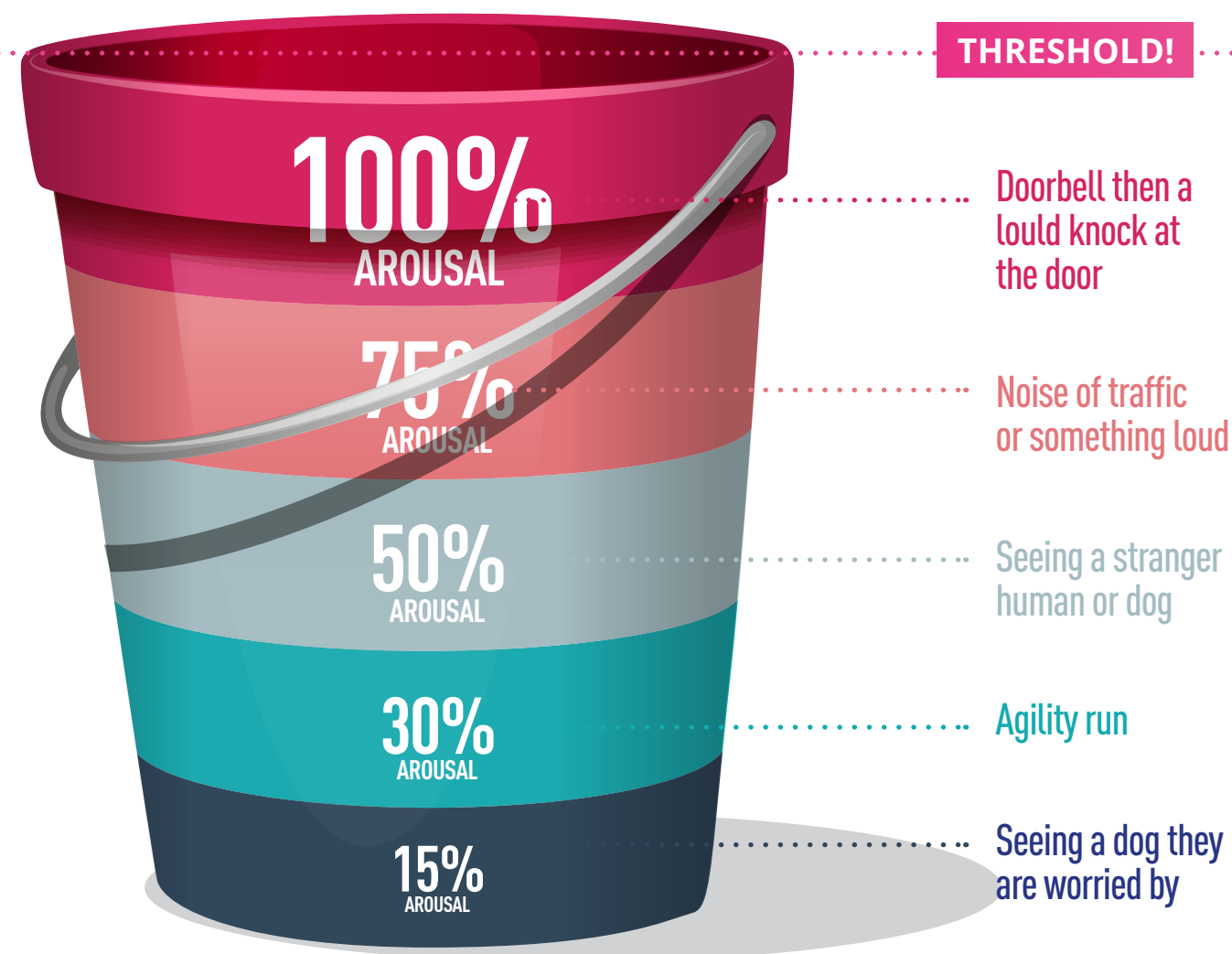
We cannot tell you how amazing it is to have a dog that understands how to be calm; nor how awesome it can be to have strategies and go-to games for managing excitement levels.

If you teach calmness, then your dog's capability for sport or fun is preserved



The Arousal Bucket - small positive or negative triggers of arousal, e.g. an agility run or seeing a dog they are worried by, act as additions to the bucket, pouring a glass of water in. As water is added to the bucket, dogs get closer and closer to threshold.

Beyond this threshold, we may see overarousal or fear responses to relatively mild triggers of fear and anxiety. Further to this, it can take a long time for the bucket to empty, anything upto 72 hours after the initial exposure!



OVER-AROUSSED BEHAVIOURS

Let's think about some of those over-aroused behaviours for a moment - the behaviours that mean that your dog is having trouble with arousal levels or is struggling to relax:

***Lunging; *barking; *biting and mouthing; *destruction; *separation anxiety; *pacing; *whining; *nagging; *humping; *zoomies; *not eating; *counter surfing; *not listening.**

So, excitement is good, and drive and desire great, but only when you want it, seriously, not all the time! That's not good for your dog's health, your peace of mind and the relationship between you.

Do you want a dog that will play and train when you're ready and chill when you want to chill?

Some dogs don't know calmness. They can't do it. Whether they are anxious, worried, over stimulated or their bodies haven't got access to the off switch. This is not good for them and the more that you can teach calmness, the more they will be able to implement it for themselves.

“

Do you want a dog that will play and train when you're ready and chill when you want to chill?

”



CALM- NESS TRIAD

Teaching calmness is hugely powerful, but how can you teach your dog to be calm?

Well let's start with some strategies.

We like the CALMNESS triad. Basically, we rotate our dogs through CALMNESS. Time for calming activities: to chew; to find food in a snuffle mat or other food puzzles; to investigate a stuffed chew; or to find scattered food in the garden and, of course, time for quality rest. Our dogs' lives should NOT be all about go, go, go, high arousal games and activities, we need to make sure we include great downtime!



PASSIVE CALMING ACTIVITIES

- Scatter Feeding
- Meaty Bones
- Filled Kongs
- Treat Balls
- Filled Tracheas
- Dehydrated Treats
- Scenting
- Puzzle Feeders

CALMNESS PROTOCOL

Feed whenever calm, time feeding with external distractions and if you want to not train at any time pop them in a crate or give them a passive calming activity. Don't get frustrated.

REST

- Crates
- Pens
- Rooms
- Experienced dogs on raised beds

CALMNESS STRATEGIES

Calm zones:

For a dog that needs to learn calmness, thinking about having some space in your house that is just calm space is super important.

Think about having rooms for training and play and rooms where you chill. If you frequently play crazy tug or throw and fetch in the lounge and then want to sit down to a relaxing movie in the evening, there is no distinction for your dog who may sit throughout the film staring at you waiting for you to play. We call this rehearsing the room! Practise the energy that you want your dog to choose when being in there. Calmness creates more calmness!

Game-on and game-off:

Having a cue for when it is time to train, time to ask your dog to focus, is a great idea: then your dog knows that it is 'game-on' and time for work. At the other end of the session, you need to let your dog know that it's time to switch off; now we can relax and it's ok to chill: game-off.

Time-out:

This is a part of the calmness triad but it bears separate emphasis. Making sure that your dog gets enough rest is so essential to his ability to be calm. If that means popping him into a safe space where his choices are limited then that is the way to go. You might use a crate, a pen, a suitable boundary (remember, you need to limit choices for anything except rest) or a smaller room in the house.

Making sure that your dog gets enough rest is so essential to his ability to be calm

It's important to build up value for the spaces that you are going to use for time out and for the independence that your dog needs to be happy and relaxed in his time out area. Do this by initially keeping sessions short, staying nearby (visit often) and making the area super rewarding by providing calm feeding opportunities.

Exercise is arousing. Fitness doesn't need to be.

It's easy to give our dogs a chase game or allow them to play in the expectation that it will wear them out. It's a typical response to an overactive dog isn't it? Give them more exercise. But if your dog is reactive or overactive because he can't relax and his arousal bucket is full, then exercise is going to increase that arousal level, not alleviate it.

After an arousing or over stimulating event, we recommend 72 hours of calmness, and that includes avoiding arousing and stimulating exercise. That doesn't mean no exercise at all and we have a great programme of fitness strategies that includes a lot of activities for your dog to do that are calming but still build fitness.

Activities for your dog that are calming but still build fitness

Ditch the Food Bowl

If you really need to focus on calmness, then you need all the help that you can get to communicate to your dog that calm is the way to be. The best way of doing that is to use as much of your dogs daily food allowance for rewarding and encouraging calm behaviours.

Calmness feeding can include a snuffle mat, a stuffed hoof, kong or other toy, or scatter feeding. Scatter feeding is a really awesome and super easy method of feeding to encourage calm. You can use it at home and out on walks. The activity of snuffling on the floor and searching out the food is super calming for your dog – especially when you time the scatter feed with outside distractions.

Ditch the routine.

Dogs are born predicting. It's a survival skill – learning to predict where the food will be and when there's danger is essential for survival. Increasing flexibility and limiting opportunities for prediction will truly enhance calmness for your dog.