

Your Chase-Driven Dog

Dogs who have a drive to chase things need both training and management. Your dog will need to be kept on leash and kept away from areas heavily populated by whatever your dog likes to chase. It is also important to use the right tools. Consider a front attach harness or head halter, as they will give you more control while out with your dog. If you have the triggers in your home (cats for example), it will be extremely important to be able to safely separate the dog from the trigger and have the time and patience to work on the desensitization and counter conditioning (DSCC) plan outlined below.

Steps for Your DSCC Plan

Desensitization and counterconditioning works by exposing the animal to a weak version of the trigger (desensitization), and pairing it with delicious treats (counterconditioning). Desensitization is often combined with counterconditioning because it's almost impossible to teach a positive association to something if the animal is up close and already trying to chase.

For this scenario, we are using a dog that chases cats. You can insert whatever it is that your dog is driven to chase. Some dogs chase cars, kids on skateboards, bicycles, etc. The procedure is the same, no matter what the trigger.

- Write down a description of what your dog chases. Include the way they move, sound, look, smell, and how far away they have to be to **not** trigger a response.
- Look at these attributes and identify when they're least and most likely to trigger a response from your dog. Your dog may be slightly tense seeing cats at a distance, but once the cat starts to run, he reacts by barking, lunging, chasing, etc.
- Rank your list of attributes: 1 being the least likely to trigger the chase and 6 being the most. For example:
 1. Cat in the distance, stationary
 2. Cat at 20 yards, slight movement
 3. Cat within 10 yards, starting to slowly retreat
 4. Cat close up, hissing
 5. Cat running or jumping up on a fence etc.
 6. Cat playing/ more than one cat playing and running/vocalizing etc.
- Start your DSCC treatment session with your dog **on a leash**. Begin with the least-stimulating level of exposure for your dog (number 1 on your list of attributes). If you have a cat in your home, remember that slow, controlled and on-leash exposure to the sight of your cat is necessary. Always start with one cat at a distance, quiet and still.
- In brief, your DSCC session involves:
 1. Bringing the cat into sight at a distance.
 2. Treating your dog in a steady stream of pea-sized, high value morsels as long as the cat is in sight.
 3. Moving your cat out of sight (or moving you and your dog away).
 4. Stopping the treats as soon as the cat is out of sight.
- End your session on a success: when you notice that your dog is more relaxed, isn't worried, and has stopped paying attention to the cat.

- Start your next session at the same level of exposure that you ended on in your last session. You might find that your dog is back to being alert about the cat. That's okay. Just keep repeating the gentle exposures with treats. Stay at that level as long as it takes for your dog to handle it well. He should be unworried and relaxed. This may take many sessions across several days or weeks.
- Move on to the next exposure level on your list only when your dog is relaxed and is enjoying getting treats in the presence of the cat **at the beginning of a session**. Don't start a new session at an exposure level that's higher than the last session.
- AVOID overexciting your dog. Expose him to a tolerable version of the cat, without evoking any reaction. If he shows attempts to chase, quickly **increase the distance** from the cat.
- AVOID exposure to the cat between your treatment sessions. Ideally, your dog should not experience the cat at all except during treatment, when the exposure is controlled and you're actively counterconditioning with treats.
- When training, vary the length of time, the time of day, the location of your sessions, and the kind of treats you use. Avoid carrying your treats in a special bag, or, if you need to use a treat bag, carry that bag with you around the house sometimes, even when you aren't in a treatment session, and don't give any treats. This will help your dog learn the right association: **the cat predicts treats, not the appearance of the treat bag.**
- Once your dog has learned to relax in the presence of the cat, do maintenance sessions at least twice a month to prevent the chase instinct from returning.

Many dogs can learn to not chase cats indoors. If your cat goes outside, you will have to do all the above training inside the home and then again outdoors. Use caution and keep your dog securely on leash. It is usually much harder for the dog to resist chasing a cat outside. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or need help.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.