



## Behaviorist Lisa Hird Shares How She Helped a Troubled Puppy Mature into a Happy Family Member



**Jack's behavior concerns showed up early in his puppydom, but he is now a happy, well-adjusted family member.**

► **Tell us some background about your dog, Jack. He joined your home as a puppy. How soon were you seeing behavioral concerns with him?**

We were asked to collect three 7½-week-old puppies out of a litter of seven (two had been rehomed at 6½ weeks). They were in a tiny, top-floor flat with their dam and another female, and the couple asked the rescue to rehome them. Jack came to me as a foster, and we tried to integrate him into a new family that had a female Staffordshire terrier (also known as a Staffie). Jack at 8 weeks old was quite reactive toward her and the integration failed. Jack was a rather worried and under-confident puppy but made up for this with bolshy, pushy, over-the-top behavior.<sup>1</sup> He came back to me and our three other dogs. Our female Staffie acted as a foster Mum to him, and our older male crossbreed really took to him, keeping his behavior in check and showing him the ropes! Given his lack of confidence and his over-the-top behavior, we decided to adopt him, as we felt he might otherwise bounce through a number of homes.

When Jack hit adolescence, all his life skills seemed to disappear, and we had to carefully manage interactions with other dogs using lots of distance! We managed him well during this period, but several things happened to him that caused his already low level of confidence to drop even more. We had a tree come through the roof of our cottage at 5 in the morning and he had to have a number of skin scrapes and medicated baths due to a skin issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: "bolshy" is a British term used to refer to a combative, defiant, or uncooperative attitude.

► **What are/were his behavioral issues that worried you the most in terms of being able to help him?**

Probably his lack of confidence, his unpredictability toward unknown dogs, and the beginnings of noise phobia. Jack could easily become aroused and display over-the-top behaviors or suddenly be fearful of noises. He had started to air snap at other dogs if they got too close to him when out for walks.

To really compound matters, we had said goodbye to our older male dog who was diagnosed with cancer and a month later we moved from rural Scotland back to urban England. Suddenly there were lots of dogs and people around, fence-running dogs barking on either side of us, and a whole lot more noise. To make matters worse, Jack was attacked while on lead by a dog and then a cat. A week later, he ended up with emergency surgery for a blocked stomach! During his recovery at the veterinarian, they had building work and construction going on, which compounded his noise phobia. In short, he became a very fearful boy.

► **What do you feel out of your vast repertoire of canine behavior knowledge helped him the most?**

I talk about the Five Cs with my clients, and they worked for Jack!

**Calm:** lots of calming activities such as scent work and avoiding highly arousing games. Being over-stimulated does not feel good. If a dog is not calm, he cannot learn.

**Connection:** we worked a lot on connection. We looked at connection rather than control, dropping all the cues that are often used to “manage” behavior. This is fundamental to changing behaviors and to allowing dogs to be dogs.

**Choices:** providing dogs with choice in their lives is essential. The choice to interact, the choice to observe something, the choice to move away. If we try to force a dog to do something we can actually increase their fear and anxiety. Choice helps build resilience and self-confidence and as we humans control all the resources, we can easily provide choices. When we leave the house, which way does the

## Lisa's Five Cs

Lisa often discusses these Five Cs with her clients, and she was able to put them to work to help her own dog, Jack!

1. Calm
2. Connection
3. Choices
4. Consistency
5. Confidence

dog want to walk, left or right? Where does he prefer to sleep—multiple resting places and beds allows dogs to choose where to sleep. Dogs that are anxious about nail trimming, veterinary treatment, etc., can be empowered by using techniques such as Chirag Patel's Bucket Game or Chin Targeting, although we must ensure we are not using coercion. These dogs can cope better with their individual stressors, knowing they will be listened to, and they begin to feel more confident. Grisha Stewart's BAT training (discussed in more detail below) is invaluable for being around other dogs.

**Consistency:** consistency is essential and something we humans need to learn!

**Confidence:** all the above can lead to confidence and a more positive outlook!

In terms of reactivity and fearfulness around other dogs, BAT training was phenomenal (Behavior Adjustment Training is a confidence-building program created by American trainer Grisha Stewart<sup>2</sup>). Prior to using BAT, Jack would see another dog at a distance and freeze, tail tucked under, body tense, and changing his breathing. He literally could not move until the dog had passed by. Sometimes we reach for the treat pouch too quickly. Dogs need to be able to process the information around them. We used distance and lots of opportunities to observe other dogs at a safe distance.

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2 See <https://grishastewart.com/training/>.

► **Can you share with us a sample “day in the life” of Jack as you were helping him heal?**

First, Jack had a thorough veterinary exam to ensure there were no pain issues underlying his behavior issues. I also stopped using cues! I had trained Jack using clicker training as a pup and he had a vast repertoire of cues for various behaviors and performed them all perfectly. Did it make him better behaved? Absolutely not—so we ditched them a long time ago! Even now, if you are holding a treat, he may start to cycle through his trick repertoire!

After breakfast and a rest, Jack would have a session in our large garden. This might be ACE Free Work, Sprinkles, treat searches, scent work, or similar activities. Lots of calm sniffing activities. We used a white noise machine to mask some of the external noises to avoid triggering his noise sensitivity.

Twice a week we would practice some connection skills on and off leash in the garden or games like Scottish Trainer Chirag Patel’s counting game<sup>3</sup> or American Trainer Suzanne Clothier’s breadcrumbs game.<sup>4</sup> These are both great management games if another dog comes out of nowhere or comes too close, too fast.

Jack would then sleep until lunchtime. His walk in the afternoon would be somewhere quiet, with plenty of space. Some days we would just sit at a bench to watch the world go by, other days we would just observe at the edge of a park.

Jack developed interest in a neighbor’s male Akita, pausing as we walked past to observe him at the window. We did a number of parallel walks with him, and this really bolstered Jack’s confidence. Any time we saw dogs on a walk, we would do an impromptu BAT session, gaining sufficient distance for him. After his dinner, he would have some form of enrichment.

Twice a week we worked on chin targeting and handling skills as he had developed a fear of anything veterinary-related following his emergency operation. We did happy visits to the vet’s office, starting in the car park without going in, building up to seeing his vet, then introducing handling with her.

► **Can you share his current day in the life?**

After breakfast and a rest, Jack still has a session in our large garden. This might be ACE free work, Sprinkles, treat searches, scent work, or similar. Lots of calm sniffing activities. Jack still sleeps until lunchtime, but we no longer need the white noise machine. He has a calm sniffy walk in the afternoon. We now hope to meet other dogs rather than trying to avoid them.

We sadly said goodbye to our senior female Staffordshire terrier. She had been his foster Mum, so the bond was deep, and Jack became very depressed and lethargic when we lost her. We have since adopted and integrated a young, troubled female Staffie and they adore each other. Jack is now back to his happy, confident self again.

Whenever we see dogs now, his body language is much more confident, and he has play bowed at a number of different dogs when we meet them. If a dog reacts toward him, he just observes them and then walks by. We do still parallel walk with the neighbor’s dog when we meet them and have lots of off-leash sessions at the local park. After his dinner, he still has some form of enrichment.

Jack recently had a suspected mast cell tumor removed at the vet. Thankfully it was benign. The veterinary staff were amazed at how happy and confident he was. Jack is so much more confident, much less reactive to noise, and is generally a much happier, relaxed boy at the age of 10.

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3 See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra8TKCwTDbk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra8TKCwTDbk).

4 See [www.suzanneclothier.com](http://www.suzanneclothier.com).



## British Canine Behaviorist and Training Expert Lisa Hird Explains What to Look for and What to Avoid When Hiring a Trainer



UK Behaviorist Lisa Hird's lovely dog Jack began life as a troubled pup. With her compassionate guidance he is enjoying his senior years as a peaceful family member.

- ▶ **It can be so confusing for dog owners seeking qualified, professional help for their troubled dog. Beyond looking at credentials, what traits do you advise dogs owners to look for in a trainer?**

Be wary of statements such as the number of years' experience working with dogs. This does not necessarily mean the person has up-to-date knowledge, or indeed any knowledge at all. Statements that someone studied with an organization is not the same as completing and passing a course. Do check out what courses the professional has completed and how recent their learning record is. Most professionals will belong to a membership organization and their membership will be monitored to ensure they keep up to date with their knowledge and carry out a specified number of hours of professional development.

The training plan should be tailored to you and your dog. If you are not comfortable with any of the suggestions within the behavior or training plan, ask questions. Ask yourself whether you feel comfortable and happy with what the trainer is suggesting for or doing with your dog. Have a search for videos on any of their pages and websites. Watch how they interact with your dog.

- ▶ **What professional or volunteer experiences do you feel create an excellent trainer?**

This is always a difficult question. Many trainers gain their practical experience helping at rescues. I would be looking to see if they help with any rescue centers or charities,





**Look for trainers who don't use aversive tools like shock collars—they don't work and usually just cause even more trauma to already troubled dogs.**

but not everyone has the time to do volunteer work. Also look or ask for evidence of CPD (Continued Professional Development) training and certification.

► **What marketing terms do you look for when searching for a truly positive trainer?**

Some of the words I look for are fear-free, non-coercive, reward-based, and relationship-centered training.

► **What marketing terms do you seek to avoid when searching for a truly positive trainer?**

There are a few words that are red flags to me, including balanced, reward-based balanced trainer, “dogs will learn that their choices and behaviors can result in either pleasant or unpleasant results,” pack leader, dog listener, alpha trainer, and LIMA. LIMA is an acronym for the phrase “least intrusive, minimally aversive.” LIMA describes a trainer or behaviorist who uses the least intrusive, minimally aversive strategy out

of a set of tactics likely to succeed in achieving a training or behavior change objective. This means that punishment and negative reinforcement can still be used.

► **What are the most important questions to ask of any professional who will be handling your dog?**

When considering enlisting a professional to work with you and your dog, ask them what happens if the dog gets the request correct, and what happens to the dog if they get the request incorrect. The answers you get will help you determine whether they use fear-free, reward-based, relationship-centered training, or whether they use aversive methods or coercion.

Aversive tools, coercion, and punishment are not necessary and have no place in dog training. If the person you are going to employ mentions shock collars, citronella or water sprays, Halti® headcollars, etc., please look for someone else who does not use force or coercion.