

Why behaviour change takes the time it takes

A guide for owners starting behaviour work, and for anyone wondering why week one feels like nothing is happening.

The thing nobody says out loud

Most people arrive hoping we will come to the house, do something clever, and leave them with a different dog.

We understand why. You are tired. The walks have become something you dread. The doorbell makes your stomach drop. You want it fixed, and you want it fixed soon.

We are not going to be able to do that, and anyone who tells you they can is selling you something that does not exist.

What we can do is get you there properly. It just does not happen on the timescale most people expect, and the reason why is worth understanding.

Your dog is not being difficult.
Your dog is running a nervous system.

Three things slow it down

Behaviour is not a decision your dog is making. It is the output of a body and a brain responding to their environment, history, genetics, health and level of arousal. You cannot reason with a nervous system. You can only change the conditions it is operating under, repeatedly.

ONE

Stress does not clear when the moment passes

When a dog goes over threshold, stress hormones do not vanish once the situation is over. They stay in the system for days. This is why a dog who had a difficult walk on Monday is still edgy on Wednesday, and why one bad encounter can undo a fortnight of careful work.

It is also why the first phase of almost every plan we write is not training at all. It is reducing what goes into the bucket, so there is capacity to learn something new. A dog who is already at capacity cannot learn. There is nowhere for the learning to go.

TWO

Learning is physical

New behaviour means new neural pathways, and pathways are built by repetition, rest and sleep. There is no shortcut around that, in dogs or in people.

The old pathway does not get deleted either. It gets outcompeted. Which means the old behaviour is still available to your dog, particularly when they are tired, unwell or stressed. This is normal, and it is not a sign the plan has failed.

THREE

Dogs do not generalise the way we assume

A dog who can settle beautifully in your kitchen has learned to settle in your kitchen. Not in the hallway, not in the car, not outside the school gates.

Every new context is, to a degree, a new learning problem. It is one of the biggest reasons plans are built in stages rather than handed over as one document. We cannot sensibly write stage three before we have seen how stage one landed in your actual house, on an actual Tuesday.

What it actually looks like

Progress is not a straight line, and we would be worried if it were.

THE FIRST FORTNIGHT

Management, decompression, taking pressure off. It often feels like you have paid for very little. You have not. You have changed the conditions, and nothing else works until you do.

WEEKS THREE AND FOUR

Foundations in easy places. Small, unglamorous wins at home. This is usually the first point where you think, actually, something is different.

WEEKS FIVE TO EIGHT

Taking it into harder contexts. This is where most people get wobbly, because this is where it can look like it is going backwards. It usually is not. Adding difficulty temporarily costs you fluency. That is expected, and it is the stage we plan around most carefully.

BEYOND THAT

Consolidation, and building your confidence rather than just your dog's, so you can handle the new thing that will inevitably come up in eight months.

Plateaus are normal. Occasional bad days are normal. A week where it all seems to unravel is normal. None of these mean it is not working. They mean you have a real dog rather than a diagram.



Why we sell packages

We want to be straightforward about this, because we know how it can look.

We do not sell single sessions, and the reason is about you, not about us.

A one off session is the easiest thing in the world to sell. Someone in distress will pay for hope. We could come out for an hour, tell you what is going on, hand you a plan, take your money and leave. You would probably feel better that afternoon.

And then week three would arrive, the difficult bit would start, something would go sideways, and you would have nobody. Most people in that position quietly stop doing the plan and conclude their dog cannot be helped. That is not a failure of the dog or of the owner. It is a failure of the product.

The package exists because the middle is where the work happens. The assessment tells us what is going on. The plan tells you what to do. But the change comes from the adjustments we make together over the following weeks, when we see what your dog does with it, and when we catch the thing that is about to derail you before it does.

Charging for the diagnosis and abandoning you for the treatment would be the exploitative model. We are not willing to run it.

What happens if you stop halfway

We will not pretend this is neutral, because it is not.

Stopping at week four means you have paid for the assessment and the setup, and left before the part that produces the result. It is closer to stopping a course of antibiotics on day three than it is to getting half the outcome for half the money. You do not get half a dog. You get an unfinished process, and usually a dog who is now slightly confused about what the rules are.

It also tends to leave people worse off in a way that is hard to see from the inside, because they now believe they have tried behaviour work and it did not help. They have not. They have tried the first quarter of it.

If you are struggling partway through, whether that is with time, with money, with confidence or with the sense that it is not moving, please tell us. We can adjust the plan, change the pace, or focus on fewer things. There is almost always a version that works. What does not work is quietly disappearing.

What we ask of you

Not perfection. Fifteen minutes and a hallway, done consistently, beats an hour of brilliance once a fortnight.

What we do ask is that you go in understanding this is a process with a shape to it. The early weeks will feel slower than you want. The middle will test you. And the dog who settles at your feet on a Tuesday evening while the kids do their homework is built out of a lot of unremarkable days in a row.

That dog is achievable. It just is not achievable by Saturday.

Who you would be working with



Tanya Hodgkiss

Behaviour plans and case work. Tanya holds a Level 6 qualification in Clinical Canine Behaviour from the Canine Behaviour College, which is Ofqual regulated, and comes to this work from a former police background.



Matt

Face to face training across Newark and the surrounding villages. Matt is the one you will usually see in your garden, your hallway, and on the walks you have been avoiding.

We are a force free, science based practice. We use reward based methods, we work alongside your vet, and we will always tell you honestly what we think is achievable.

Ready when you are.

If you have read this far, you are already the kind of owner this works for.

Get in touch and we will talk honestly about what is going on, what is realistic, and whether we are the right people to help.

Paw Patrol Training and Behaviour

Newark, Nottinghamshire

07309 063310

pawpatroltraining.co.uk

Where trust meets training.