

# ***Info shared by Pitbull SA.***

***Manjaro APBT kennel.***

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## ***Desensitization & counterconditioning.***

Systematic desensitization and counterconditioning are two treatments that are often used together in a single procedure to reduce or resolve behavior problems that occur as reactions to certain triggers and situations.

Systematic desensitization is designed to decrease (desensitize) a dog's overreaction to something in a step-by-step (systematic) way.

It helps the dog to habituate to, or become more comfortable with, a thing, person, other animal, place or situation that upsets them.

Counterconditioning, performed together with desensitization, involves giving the dog things they really likes, such as delicious treats or favorite toys, while they being shown or exposed to whatever upsets them.

This process changes (counters) the dog's feelings about the trigger. Changing their emotional response to the trigger leads to changes in behavior.

If the dog feels differently, they will act differently.

For instance, a dog who fears being handled reacts by tensing the body, cowering and growling when they sees a hand reaching toward them.

One way of changing those learned responses is to teach the dog to feel good about a hand reaching toward them.

You could teach the dog to expect a tasty treat or a game of chase (good things he likes) right after hands reach toward them, and the dog's emotional reaction to hands reaching for them would change.

Alternatively, you could teach the dog to perform a specific behavior, such as touching the nose to or backing away from the outstretched hand, for a reward.

Changing the dog's behavior can lead to changes in their emotional response as well. It's possible, however, that the dog will remain frightened while still performing the new behavior.

In most cases, it's best to treat the dog's underlying emotional state first (through desensitization and counterconditioning) and then focus on teaching him a specific, alternative behavior.

For a thorough explanation of these combined treatments,

*{See related articles about desensitization and counterconditioning on this website}.*

**Desensitization and counterconditioning** are complex and can be tricky to carry out.

Fear must be avoided or the procedure will backfire and the dog will get more frightened.

Because treatment must progress and change according to the dog's reactions, and because these reactions can be difficult to read and interpret, desensitization and counterconditioning require the guidance of a trained and experienced professional.

For help designing and carrying out a desensitization and counterconditioning plan, please find a qualified professional in your area.