

THE ILLINOIS STUDENT CHAPTER OF

AVSAB

AMERICAN VETERINARY SOCIETY  
OF ANIMAL BEHAVIOR

## Behavior Club



**College of  
Veterinary Medicine**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

# MYTHBUSTERS!

Behavior and Training Edition

# Myth #1 - Older dogs don't need toys to play with



# Myth #1 - Older dogs don't need toys to play with

# BUSTED



# Truth #1



- **Even older dogs need enrichment and something to keep their minds busy!**
- Many dogs may seem to lose interest in their toys, but they may just have grown bored with the same old toys.

When was the last time you bought your dog a new toy and got really excited to give it to them?

Tip: Try rotating your dog's toys so that they are getting an exciting "new" toy every month!

# Truth #1

Many dogs are more interested in the toys that YOU show interest in because you reward them for playing with it!

Tip: Sit down to play with your dog for just 10-15 minutes every day! You are the most important person in their life after all, they just want to play with you!!



# Truth #1



Safe toys and chewables are especially important for dogs because it allows for them to exercise their natural chewing behavior in a safe way that keeps their mind busy!

Providing appropriate chew toys and encouraging good chewing behavior may even save your table legs and shoes!

Tip: Have an edible chew or safe toy that your dog REALLY LOVES, but they only gets it when they are calm and you need to keep them occupied. They will start to look forward to alone time with their favorite chew toy.

# Some of our favorite toys include: (all of these are at pet stores and online retailers)

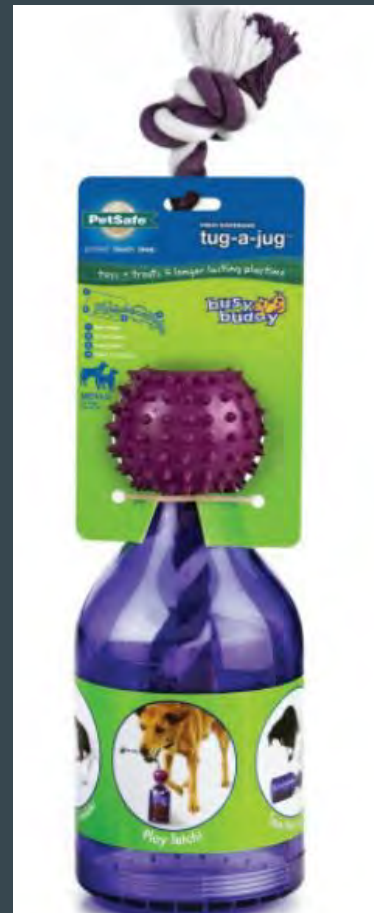
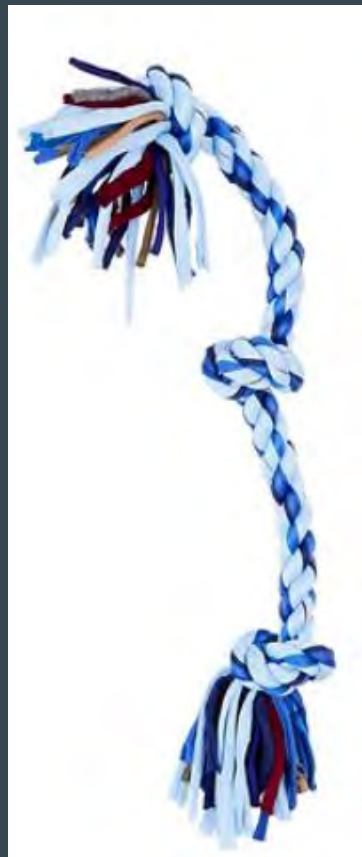
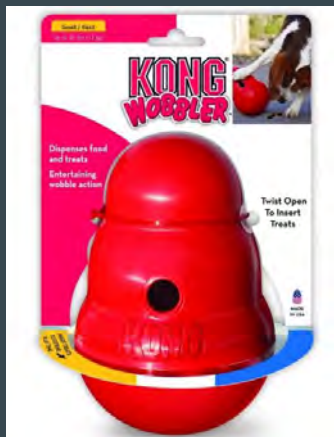


HIMALAYAN  
CHEESE CHEWS



BULLY STICKS

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**Myth #2 - Positive reinforcement will make my dog fat because they are getting a ton of treats.**



Myth #2 - Positive reinforcement will make my dog fat because he is getting a ton of treats

**BUSTED**



## Truth #2

While it is true that too many treats and overfeeding will result in your pet becoming overweight, which is a hazard to their health; positive reinforcement is not just about giving your dog a ton of treats!



“Positive reinforcement is not just about giving treats for good behavior, it’s about moving and performing the exercises in a manner and speed that make it fun. It’s also about using everything your pet likes or wants, to your advantage—toys, petting, attention, access to go outside or come in, fetch..... and more.”

- Dr. Sophia Yin, internationally renown behaviorist

## Truth #2

We often make sure our dog knows when they are doing something bad. How else would they know it was bad if we didn't tell them?

**When was the last time you told your dog every time they did something GOOD?** After all, how would they know it was good if you never tell them?



## Truth #2

Positive Reinforcement Training is about balance.

Discouraging or redirecting negative behaviors is important, but reinforcing the good, positive behaviors is **EVEN MORE SO!**



# CHALLENGE! - Finding the Good Things in Life

**Spend one whole weekend taking time to tell your dog every single time they do something good, even things that you haven't specifically asked for.**

If you want your dog to be good, start by *showing* them all the ways that they are already good!

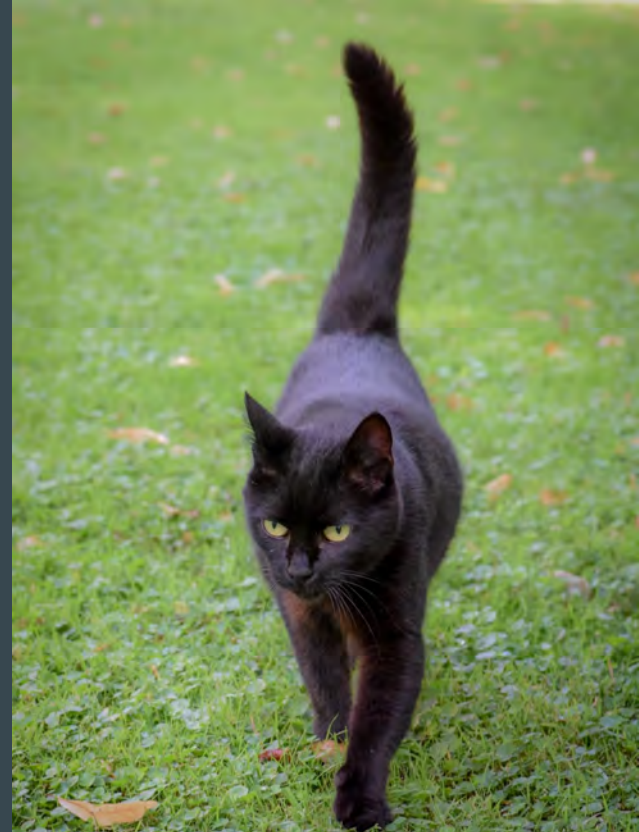
Positive reinforcement makes your dog WANT to please you and succeed! You will be amazed at how many opportunities you have to praise your dog when you think, "Is what they are doing bad?" If the answer is "No", praise them!

# CHALLENGE! - Finding the Good Things in Life

Examples - pay attention to what your dog is doing when you're not involved

- When your dog makes a good decision - sniffs the edge of the counter, but walks away instead of jumping up - say "Whadda good DOG!!!!" and give them a pat on the head.
- Chews on a safe-to-chew on toy, a happy "G'dog, buddy!"
- They just looks at the cat instead of chasing it, "Good Pup!" and reward them with a 2 minute game with their favorite toy!

# Myth #3 - A cat wagging its tail means it is happy!



Myth #3 - A cat wagging its tail means it is happy!

**BUSTED**



## Truth #3



Unlike dogs, cats will swing or thump their tail around when they are irritated, angry, or annoyed. It is not always indicative that they are happy!

If your cat is swinging their tail while you are approaching, it might be best to give them some space so they can decide when they want to come say “Hi”!

# Truth #3

A cat whose tail is puffed up is a frightened or angry cat!

It is best to allow these kitties to have their space and calm down before trying to interact with them again!



# Truth #3

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## Body Language of Feline Anxiety



Slight crouching



Major crouching

### More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety



Dilated Eyes



Ears Turned Back,  
Furrowed Brow



Staring,  
Focused on Object



Hiding,  
Looks Half Asleep



Laying on Side,  
Tail Flicking



Hair Raised, Staring,  
Ears Turned Back



Walking with Flat Back,  
Tail Down, Head Down



Ready to Jump Off Perch



Suddenly Grooming,  
Excessive Grooming

**Myth #4 - When a cat rolls over, it wants a belly rub!**



Myth #4 - When a cat rolls over, it wants a belly rub!

**BUSTED**



## Truth #4 - Not always!



Cats roll onto their backs for many different reasons!

A cat might have an itch on its back that can only be scratched by rolling over - they might not want to be interrupted.

Maybe the cat is sleepy and wants to rest - they might not want belly rubs if they are trying to take a nap!

## Truth #4

A frightened cat may roll on its back to show you that all of its weapons (claws and teeth) are ready to go if you get any closer!



## Truth #4

And some cats might actually just want to play or get a belly rub.

Don't forget that some cats like to play with their mouth and paws so be careful!



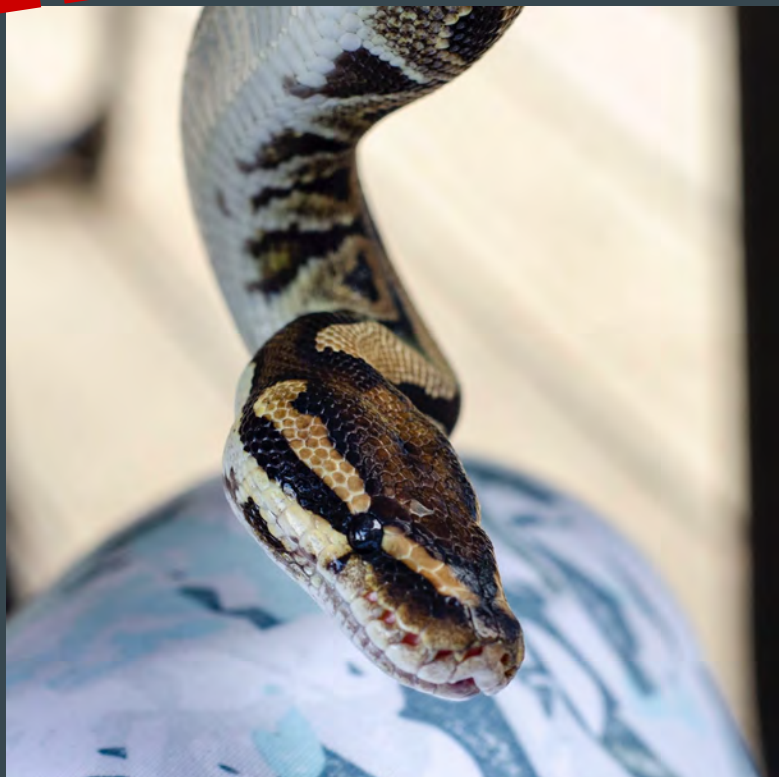
**The best thing to do is to be careful and only touch a cat's belly if you know FOR SURE that they want a belly rub.**

## Myth #5 - You can't train reptiles... they don't do much...



Myth #5 - You can't train reptiles... they don't do much...

**BUSTED**



# Truth #5

While your ball python or bearded dragon might not learn to fetch you a drink from the fridge, reptiles are intelligent and trainable creatures!

(If they *do* learn to fetch a drink from the fridge, please call us because we want to see that!)



# Truth #5

Zoos frequently use target training to teach reptile to accept medical treatment, or move around so keepers can care for them.

Just like other animals, the behavior that is desired is positively reinforced using the animals favorite treat!



Visit:

<https://brevardzoo.org/target-training-iris-the-snake/>

For a peek at how a snake is target trained at the Brevard Zoo in Florida!

# Truth #5

Some reptile keepers will use positive reinforcement to teach their animals to move into crates for transportation by giving the animal rewards for going into the crate!

This can come in handy especially if your no-so-furry friend needs to see his doctor!



## Myth #6 - Rabbits make good pets for kids and don't need much training



Myth #6 - Rabbits make good pets for kids and don't need much training

**BUSTED**



# Truth #6 - Rabbits are very time consuming pets!

Some rabbits might be more work than owning a dog! Rabbits need lots of toys, room to run, and things to chew on for enrichment.

They need to be groomed, have their litter box changed, fresh salads made, water changed, and 30+ minutes of training and attention every day!



# Truth #6



While rabbits are automatically cute, they are NOT automatically cuddly!

It can take a lot of training and trust building (sometimes even years!) before a rabbit may want to be cuddly with its owner.

Some rabbits may NEVER want to, just like people, not all bunnies like getting hugs!

# Truth #6

That doesn't mean that they can't be good pets if you're willing to put in the work!

Rabbits can be clicker trained, can learn to do tricks, come when they are called and so much more!



# Myth #7 - If your horse is aggressive you need to punish the behavior and take charge.



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# Truth #7 - Horses just don't speak our language!

While aggressive behavior can be dangerous, it is important to understand why the behavior is occurring in order to resolve it.



# Truth #7

When a horse decides to kick or bite, it is often because we aren't "speaking horse" well enough and are not listening to their body language, such as, ear positions, facial expressions, and their body stance.

They then have to intensify their cues to get our attention when we are not listening close enough.



## Communication with the Tail Position



*Contented*



*Startled*



*About to strike*



*About to bite*



*Excited*



*Galloping*



*Swishing insects or  
annoyed*



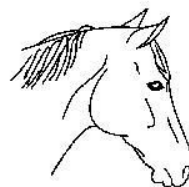
*Afraid*



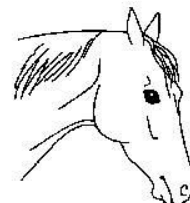
*Hunched against  
the wind or of low  
social status*

## Reading a Horse's Ears

The horse's ears and actions are the key to his emotions. He can tell you what he is paying attention to and how he feels by the way he uses his ears and the way he acts. Following are some tips to his emotions.



**Ears forward but relaxed**  
interested in what's  
in front of him



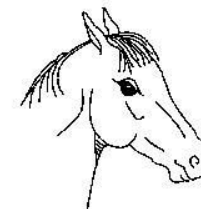
**Ears turned back but relaxed**  
listening to his rider  
or what's behind him



**Ears pointed stiffly forward**  
alarmed or nervous about what's  
ahead. Looking out for danger



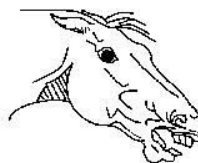
**Ears pointed left and right**  
relaxed, paying attention  
to the scenery on both sides.



**Ears stiffly back**  
annoyed or worried about what's  
behind him; might kick if annoyed.



**Droopy ears**  
calm and resting,  
horse may be dozing.

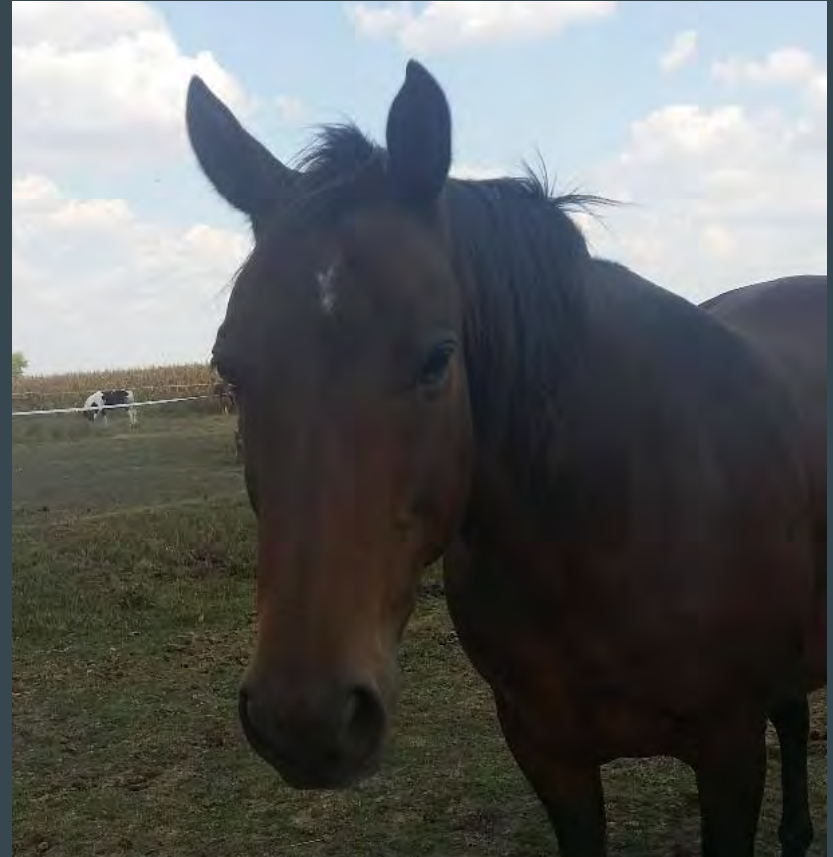


**Ears flattened against neck**  
violently angry, in a fighting mood.  
May fight, bite or kick.

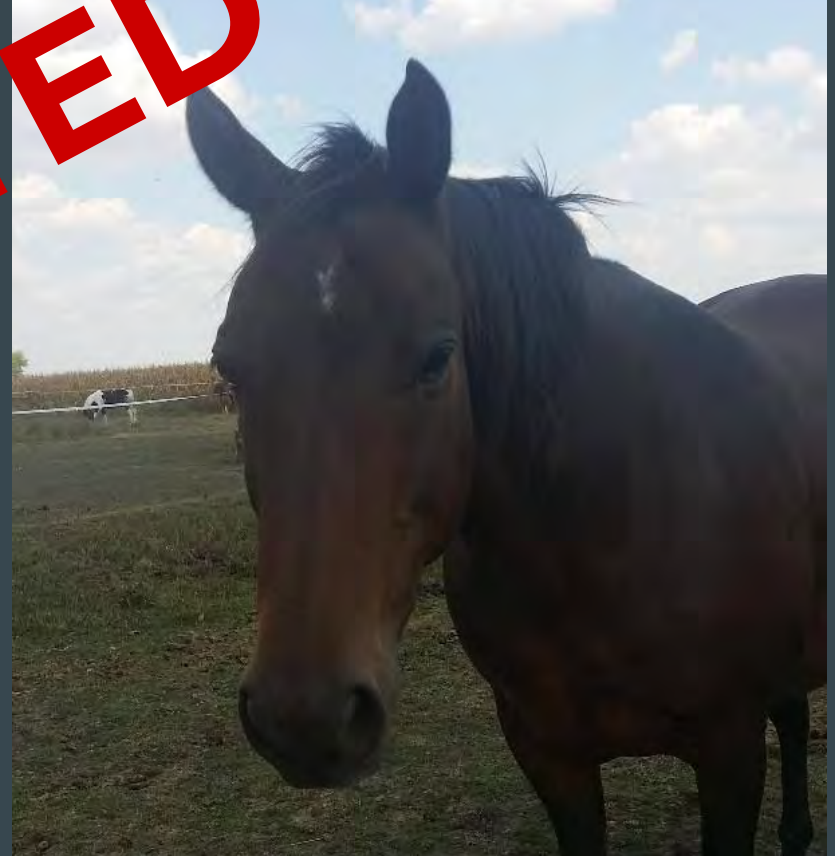
### OTHER SIGNS YOU SHOULD NOTICE ARE:

- **Tucking the tail down tightly.**  
Danger to the rear.  
Horse may bolt, buck or kick.  
Watch out if ears are flattened too!
- **Switching the tail.**  
Annoyance and irritation:
  - at biting flies, stinging insects or tickling bothersome actions of a rider or another horse.
- **Droopy ears and resting one hind leg on toe.**  
Calm and resting, horse may be dozing.  
Don't wake him up by startling him!
- **Wrinkling up the face and swinging the head.**  
Threatening gesture of an angry or bossy horse.  
Watch out for biting or kicking.

# Myth #8 Mares are harder to train than geldings.



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# Truth # 8

It is true that SOME mares can be temperamental during their heat cycles, however this does not mean they are harder to train or handle.

Every horse is a unique individual and must be treated as such.



# Truth #8

Mares can be more responsive to training aids, but often expect you to ask correctly in your cues. They enjoy working and pick up on new tasks quickly.

Geldings are more predictable and tolerable of mistakes in training cues.



# Truth #8

Whether you are a mare person or a gelding person you should always work with a trainer when picking the right horse for your personality, skill level and discipline.



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