



Ask the trainer

Optimism — the gift that keeps on giving

A human's tendency towards optimism or pessimism is referred to as judgment bias. We're probably all familiar with the glass of water test. Present a human with a glass partially filled with water and ask, "Is the glass half full or half empty?" Optimists claim the glass is half full, while pessimists claim the glass is half empty. That perception or bias is how individuals perceive events in their world.

Optimism and pessimism are not fixed traits though; rather, they're on a spectrum. These traits can shift based on positive and negative life experiences and in specific contexts. Optimism and pessimism are also tied to emotion. So judgment bias can give us a window into a human's emotional state at any given time.

Judgment bias also applies to dogs. And training methods can have a big impact. Researchers have learned that dogs trained using positive methods (rewarding desirable behaviour) were found to be more optimistic than those trained using aversive methods (physical or verbal punishment for undesirable behaviour). The dogs trained with physical and verbal punishment had higher levels of stress hormones and stress behaviours.

The good news is we can influence where our dogs sit on the optimism/pessimism spectrum. And while this is important for all dogs — puppies to seniors — it's of particular importance for rescue dogs.

Optimism games

Playing optimism games with your dog helps them learn that something ambiguous (is it good or is it bad?) or novel (I've never seen *that* before!) is nothing to worry about. By playing the right games, dogs learn that ambiguous or novel things result in a good outcome/make good stuff happen.

Optimism games are particularly important for puppies. Not only do these games get puppies off to a good start, they also help maintain an adult dog's optimism. Let's face it, things can happen over our lifetime that chip away at our confidence and optimism. The same applies to dogs and in some cases, more so for rescue dogs. Playing and

topping up optimism throughout their lifetime is a gift you can give your dog. Many senior dogs love and benefit from the mental stimulation that optimism games bring. Plus, optimism games are easy and low pressure for your dog. They're also perfect for young children who want to be involved in your dog's training. And if your dog tends to eat quickly, optimism games can also be used as an alternative to bowl feeding.

Playing, observing and adapting the game

By observing your dog's body language while playing an optimism game, you'll be able to better understand your dog by gauging both your dog's optimism and progress when you play these games multiple times.

Watch your dog's reaction and body language when presented with an optimism game. Does your dog jump right in with confidence and enthusiasm? If so, then it's time to increase the challenge. But if your dog is hesitant, perhaps he seems to stretch to 'sneak' a treat or retreat from the game, your dog is showing a lack of optimism. No need to worry though because you now know that optimism games can help shift your dog's spectrum toward optimism.

Cardboard Chaos is an excellent introduction to optimism games. Begin with a low-sided box your dog can easily step into. Remove the flaps. Toss a handful of kibble or treats into the box, then bring your dog into the room. Now observe as your dog investigates the box. As tempting as it may be, avoid luring or verbally encouraging your dog to play. For some dogs, especially those on the pessimistic side, this amounts to too much pressure. As mentioned above, if your dog avoids the box, this is information you can use to adapt the game the next time you play — simplify the game by using a flat piece of cardboard. As your dog's optimism grows, you can re-introduce a low-sided box and gradually increase the level of challenge by adding more boxes.



If your dog dives right in with gusto, it's time to make the game more challenging. Add more boxes in different configurations. Place treats in boxes, around boxes and under tilted boxes. Use large paper bags. Toss in some crumpled newspaper or packing paper, empty egg cartons, etc.

Noise Box is another easy optimism game. Place empty plastic water bottles, balls, empty drink cans with duct tape covering the opening, clean empty deli containers, etc. in a large container such as a kiddie pool, large Tupperware container or under-bed storage container. Sprinkle in some kibble or treats, then let your dog have at it! As with

Cardboard Chaos, observe your dog's behaviour and body language, adapting the game to your dog as needed.

To maintain the novelty factor, it's important to regularly change the set-up of these games — different objects, different boxes, different placement.



Cardboard Chaos and Noise Box are just two of many optimism games. Playing optimism games and growing your dog's optimism is truly a gift you can give them, one that keeps giving.



Written by

Teddy Green

Teddy and her husband Lane own and operate [Daytripper Dog Training](#) in the south end of the Kawartha Lakes, between Port Perry and Lindsay. Daytripper offers games-based family dog training, agility lessons, private lessons and behavioural consultations. Teddy is a certified dog trainer who has been actively training dogs for 30 years and has a passion for continued professional development.



Dogs looking for homes

Without a doubt, a dog is a real friend. Our dogs come in all shapes and sizes and they all have one thing in common — they all need loving forever homes.

Open your heart and home to a rescue dog. You'll be glad you did.

[Learn more about our adoption process](#)

Meet March's featured dog – Harley

Young at heart



Harley is a sweet, gentle, 35-pound, 12-year-young "doodle" whose world was turned upside down when her beloved guardian sadly passed away. This lovely girl is ready to fill someone's home with warmth, loyalty and plenty of tail wags. She's the perfect blend of laid-back cuddle companion and backyard superstar. One minute she's your devoted couch buddy, happily soaking up snuggles, and the next she's outside, chasing a ball and barking at squirrels with surprising enthusiasm. She has the

most endearing personality and isn't shy about showing it, especially when you come home or someone visits. Expect an exuberant greeting and a stuffed animal presented to you to celebrate your return.

Harley has been thoroughly checked by the vet and is in good overall health with no mobility issues. She is spayed and current on all vaccines. She's a perfect lady at vet visits and grooming appointments. Nail trims aren't her favourite activity, but she tolerates them like a champ.

In the car, Harley can be a little nervous but travels well overall. She's housetrained, knows basic commands and walks well on leash. She even knows a few tricks that she's happy to show off for a tasty treat. Although she is crate trained, she doesn't require one and can be left alone without issue. She has lived with older children (ages 11 and 12) but is untested with very young children.



Harley is good with other dogs. She's currently sharing her home with another dog who prefers to be left alone, and Harley is an obliging housemate. She will growl and snap if she's lounging with her human and another dog invades her space; Harley's good communication skills let the other dog know she's not pleased and have never resulted in anything physical like a bite. Managing her environment to make sure she has her own space deters this behaviour and helps her feel secure. She has stayed with a cat before and ignored the cat.

Harley's young-at-heart spirit shines bright. She's waiting for a cozy home to live out her golden years and a forever family to shower with all her love!

If you're looking for a sweet, young-at-heart cuddle companion, Harley is the dog for you!

[Complete our adoption application](#)



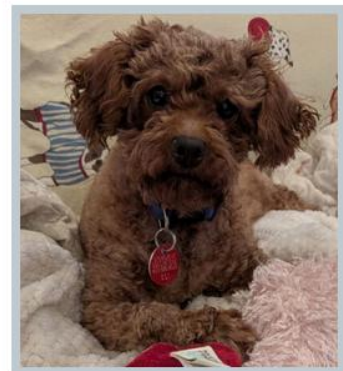
Matty

Poodle (Toy) mix
Small, Adult, Male



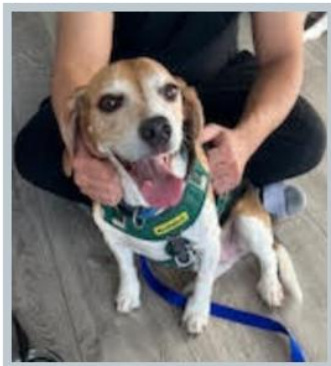
Allie

Golden Retriever mix
Medium, Adult, Female



Ruby

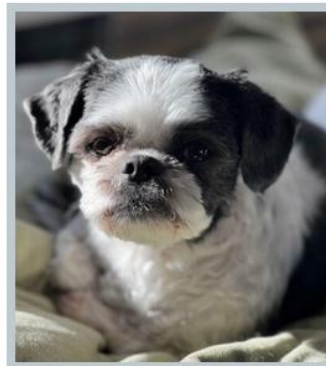
Poodle (Toy)
Small, Adult, Female



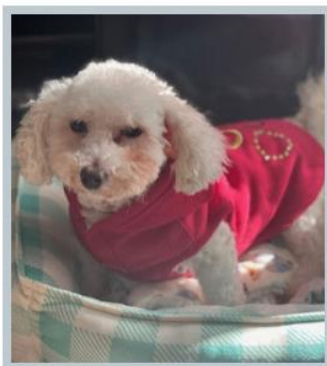
Charlie
Beagle
Medium, Senior, Male



Nick
German Shepherd
Large, Adult, Male



Panda
Shih Tzu
Small, Senior, Female



Bonnie
Bichon Frise/Poodle mix
Small, Senior, Female



Tala
Labrador Retriever mix
Large, Young, Female



Piper
Labrador Retriever/Greyhound mix
Large, Adult, Female



Sadie
Great Pyrenees mix
Extra Large, Adult, Female



Lola
German Shepherd Dog mix
Large, Adult, Female

amazon wish lists

Want to help our dogs?

Consider making a donation from our Amazon wish list of priority dog supplies.

[Click here to view list](#)

Happy tails (recent adoptions)



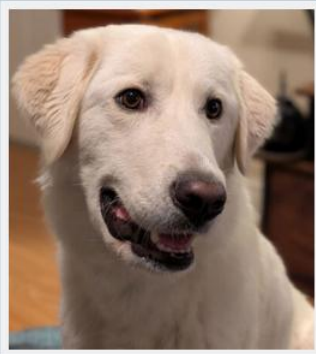
Bree



Karti



Devon



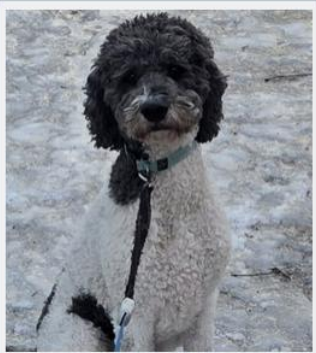
Emma



Leo



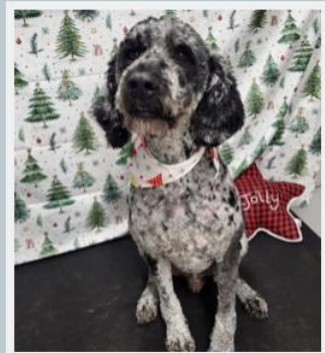
MacTavish



Levi



Nini



Willie



Nacho

Adoption update



Dear Speaking of Dogs Rescue,

Scooby continues to be a real pleasure. We have him in classes and he is a hit there as well. He is a smart boy and loves to learn. His leash manners have improved dramatically and he's now mastered sit and down commands. He loves the snow and always comes in with a snowy face, a prance in his step and a smile!

He has met a few other dogs and many people — he absolutely loves everyone he meets (they love him as well). He's a very social boy.

We have a good friend whose dad was not able to care for his four-year-old lab/mastiff mix (Rex) and he asked if we could take him. Scooby and Rex met and got along famously from day one. So Scooby now has a brother. They both absolutely adore each other, play together, cuddle, share bones and toys, and are the best of friends. It's so wonderful to see them both living their best lives.



Thank you again for choosing us. We cannot express how thankful we are to have Scooby (and Rex) in our lives.

Sincerely,
Wendi and Mary

Volunteer spotlight



When I retired, I asked my long-time vet (Dr. Luc Lavoie at Cedarbrae Vet Clinic) if he could suggest a good dog rescue, as I was interested in volunteering. He recommended Speaking of Dogs Rescue. I can't thank him enough for introducing me to such a dedicated and amazing organization and group of volunteers. I have also learned how important Dr. Lavoie is to the rescue and how much he is appreciated by all involved. For my part, I have volunteered for meet-and-greets, home visits, staffing booths at different events (Woofstock, etc.), transporting dogs and supplies, locker organization, auction write-ups, application reference follow-ups, yard sales and more. And, for the first time, I am a Forever in Foster mom for Piper, a ten-year-old yorkie mix. Volunteering with Speaking of Dogs is so rewarding!

Karen Grasley

Save the date!

Step Up For The Pups



Our annual walk-a-thon returns **Sunday, May 24.**

Look for more details on our website in the coming weeks and in April's newsletter.

In memoriam



Charlie

Adopted December 2017
Loved by Diane Jermyn and family



Maverick

Forever in Foster
Loved by Billie Lyn, Jim and fur-sister Molly



Ollie

Adopted August 2022
Loved by Jean and fur-sisters Penny & Phoebe



Zoey

2012-2026
Loved by Michelle Colasuonno and family

About Speaking of Dogs

Speaking of Dogs Rescue Program is a Canadian registered charity established in the Greater Toronto area with foster homes across Ontario. Launched in 2001, we are a foster-based, all breed rescue with a focus on senior dogs. We are run solely by volunteers with a mission to help homeless dogs in need by providing shelter or sanctuary, necessary medical care, adoption and education.

Newsletter team

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