

"A day in the life of Drax:  
The essential principles of implementing a trauma-  
informed approach to recovery."

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APBC  
ASSOCIATION OF PET  
BEHAVIOUR COUNSELLORS





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Training & Behaviour

# How can understanding human trauma help us?

Terms, descriptions or concepts more widely used to describe trauma

- Fearful
- Anxious
- Shut down
- Learned helplessness

The concepts and research into human psychological trauma can help animal behaviour clinicians in cases involving fear and anxiety:

- Understand and appreciate the long-lasting neurological, behavioural & emotional effects of trauma
- Structure our treatment plans using key concepts of trauma recovery research
- Increase client compliance & empathy whilst ultimately informing & improving animal welfare



# Welfare assessment tools

## 'Five Freedoms'<sup>4</sup>

- need for a suitable environment
- need for a suitable diet
- need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- need to be housed with, or apart, from other animals
- need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

## Maslow's hierarchy of needs<sup>5</sup>



4. Animal Welfare Act. (2006).

5. A. H. Maslow (1943). Psychological Review, 50, 370-396.

# How do we ensure successful recovery?

Using the 4 R's of trauma-informed care . . .

Realise	Recognise	Respond	Resist retraumatisation
How trauma can affect behaviour	Signs & symptoms of trauma	Practice a trauma-informed approach	Avoid compounding trauma
Clinician & client understanding	Behavioural observation skills	Monitor & adapt. <i>Be intentional, not intense.</i>	'Normal' practices with animals are often detrimental



# Identifying trauma in dogs

- Anorexia
- Pacing
- Hypervigilance
- Insomnia
- Extreme fear
- Sensitive startle response
- No play
- Apathy
- Irritability or aggression
- Physical (social) pain
- Abnormal repetitive behaviours
- Panic
- Known history or clues from the environment:  
Neglect/abuse/lack of appropriate  
socialisation



# Identifying trauma in dogs



# Identifying trauma in dogs



# Treatment & recovery plans

Treatment can be as complex and long-lasting as the trauma itself.

*“Clinicians have learned to focus on issues of safety, affect regulation, coping and self-management skills as well as on the therapeutic relationship itself<sup>8</sup>”*

Key elements:

- Control
- Predictability
- Ability to moderate timing, duration & intensity of experiences<sup>8</sup>



# Stress



Unpredictable

Severe

Prolonged



Vulnerability



Predictable

Moderate

Controlled



Resilience



# “A day in the life of Drax”

How can we support traumatised dogs in a pet home setting?



# Drax the wolfhound

- 10 months old entire male Irish Wolfhound (as of August 2019)
- Ireland - puppy farm? Minimal history – with Many Tears rescue in Wales.
- Stressful transportation
- Kennelled with other dogs
- Withdrawn, avoiding eye contact, panting
- Minimal movement around kennel – sticking to corners/walls, lying or crouched
- Poor coat and skin condition
- Not wearing or able to wear collar and lead





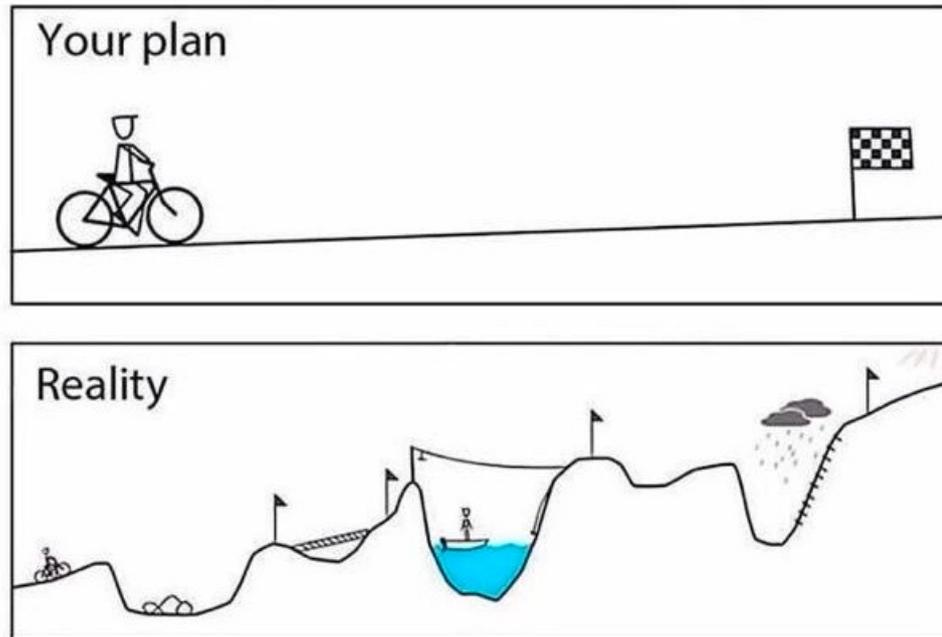
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# General principles . . .

- Have knowledge, understanding & empathy for the traumatic experience *"Fear & trauma have to be transformed or they will stay in the mind like an unsheathed knife"*
- Have low expectations & be prepared to lower them *"Be intentional but not intense"*
- Have patience & focus on feelings, not doings *"Trauma treatment isn't training"*
- Create a consistent, predictable environment *"Be a companion not a captor"*
- Prevent re-traumatisation *"Build trust & resilience by providing choice & control"*



# General principles . . .



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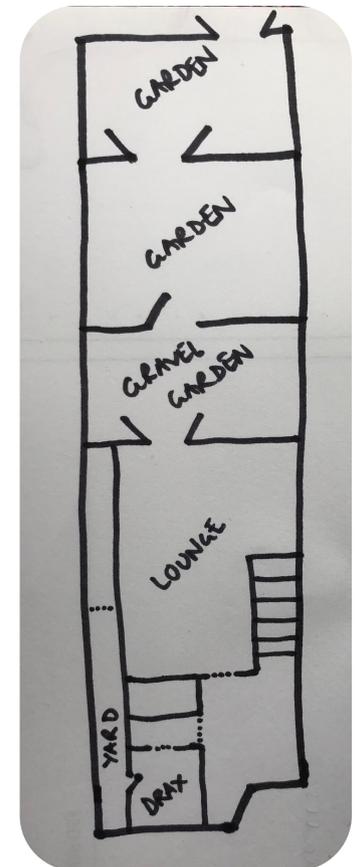
In order to monitor progress, you need to be able to identify progress. Recovery signals can be hugely subtle with dogs that have undergone trauma. Aim to observe the following:

- Sleeping – duration, location & position
- Body language on approach
- Learning ‘the routine’?
- Locomotion – speed, locations & proximity
- Physical condition



# Before you consider adopting . . .

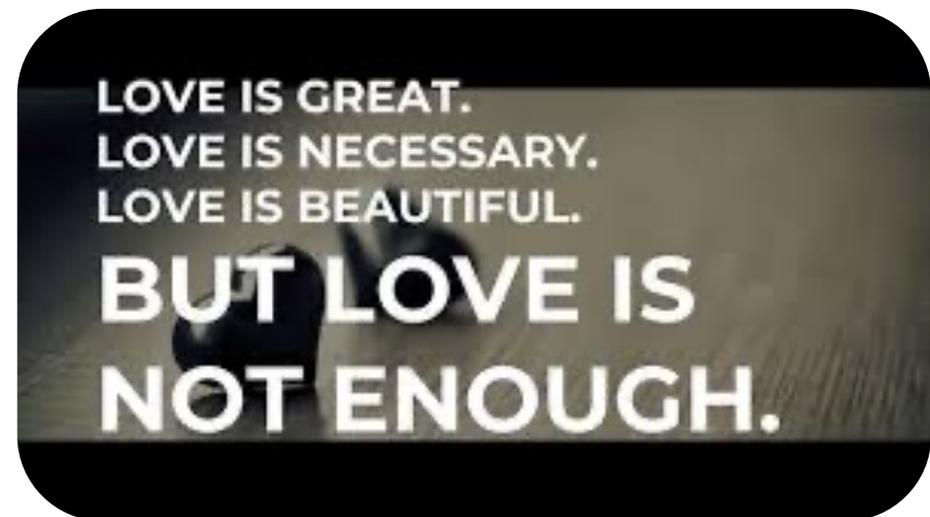
- Do your research
- Are you comfortable with the potential timescale of recovery?
- Consider how you can set up your home for the new routine & consider the impact on existing residents (human and non-human!)
- Send scent packages if possible
- Secure and adapt your property



# Before you consider adopting . . .

There are several skills that are non-negotiable and essential for all caregivers of dogs affected by trauma. If these cannot be learnt and adhered to, there is a high risk of re-traumatisation occurring. Caregivers must be prepared to create a trauma-informed environment by:

- Planning the environment and considering whether their home & lifestyle is suitable
- Being willing to consider psychoactive medication as a first priority not a last resort
- ‘Ask’ questions, give choices and listen to/act upon the answer
- Fluency in identifying how the dog communicates ‘yes’ and ‘no’
- Ability to avoid short-term decisions that have a long-term consequences
- Acceptance that ‘normal dog things’ may not be possible or appropriate (short or long term)
- Having patience
- Observing & adapting



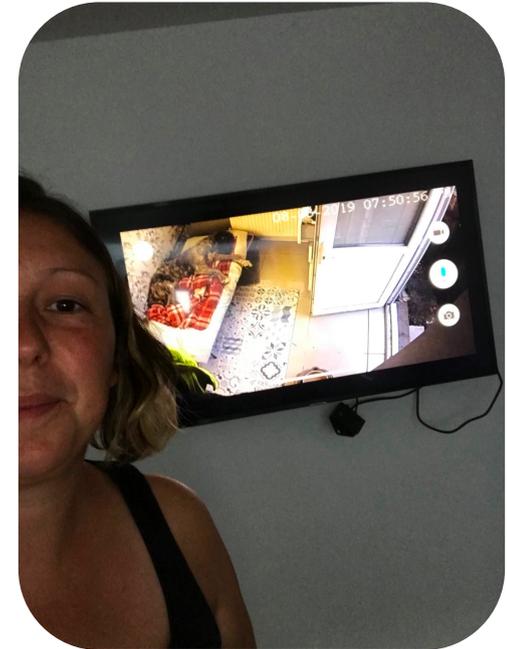
# Arriving 'home' & settling in . . .

- **Travel & logistics:** Secure & safe handover with no stops
- **Sleep:** Likely sleep debt, comfort, raised bed option for crate/corners, warmth, mask noise & light
- **Safety:** Predictable routine, regular opportunities to explore, own space with no 'traffic', feeding/resting/toilet/exploring not contingent on interactions



# Arriving 'home' and settling in . . .

- **Nutrition:** Small & regular meals, CC, chews (not puzzles), gradual introduction to new ingredients
- **Observation:** Dog cams, baby gates, filming & documentation
- Change your usual routine in the short term to allow calm & quiet



# A few weeks in . . .

It is important to have realistic goals to avoid disappointment and to ensure that you are moving at the pace of the dog, not a speed that you think they should be moving at.

- When it comes to creating a trauma-informed environment, access & provision isn't enough, teaching is required
- Work with an experienced, accredited & qualified behaviourist from the outset
- Beware of training mindset
- Learning life skills vs 'training'



Being approached with the harness

Wearing the harness

Putting on the harness

Being approached with the lead

Attaching the lead

Wearing the lead

Walking close to a human

Being attached to a human

Going through a doorway

Having a door shut behind them

Approaching the car

Travelling in the car

Coming back to the human

Unpredictability

Scent

Traffic

Noise

Novelty

People

Dogs

Weather

Cats

**Required learning:**

*Trust & choice*

**Ability to cope:**

*Resilience*

**Risk assessment & mitigation strategies:**

*Management & safety*

**Safe, positive experience:**

*Empowerment*

Escape

Injury

Fleeing

Panic

Aggression

A safe, enjoyable walk



# Building foundations of trust, safety and confidence: A case study of 'Drax's Galactic Adventure'

## HANDLING & TOUCH



# Building foundations of trust, safety and confidence: A case study of 'Drax's Galactic Adventure'

## MAGIC BOWL



# Building foundations of trust, safety and confidence: A case study of 'Drax's Galactic Adventure'

## FOLLOW THE LADY



# Continuing longer term plans . . .

- A support network is vital
- Celebrate small wins as if they are massive milestones
- Don't be too goal orientated
- Don't feel guilty about 'maintenance' vs progression



# Continuing longer term plans . . .



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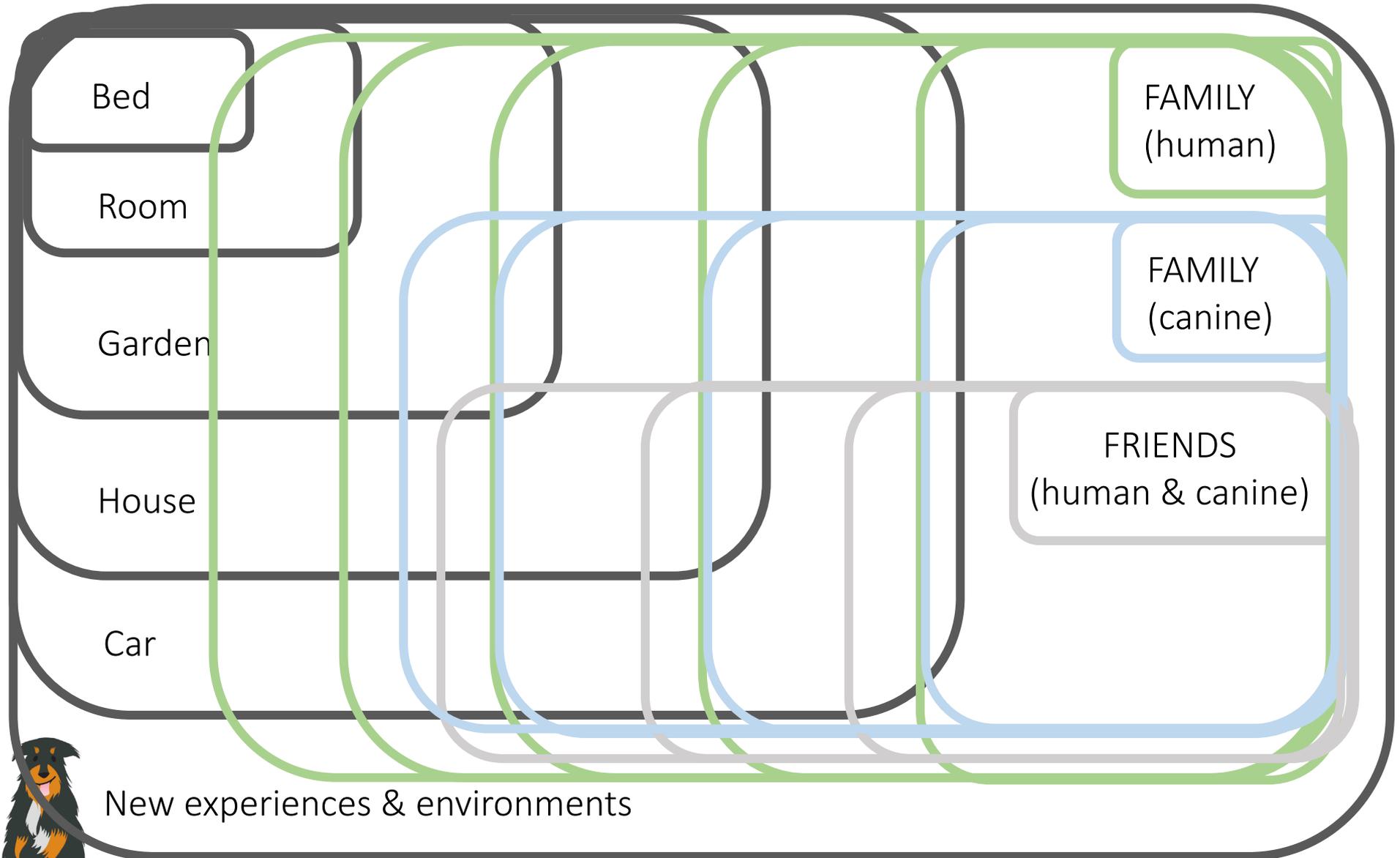
# Continuing longer term plans . . .



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# The ultimate aim: Expanding trust



# A reminder of the general principles . . .

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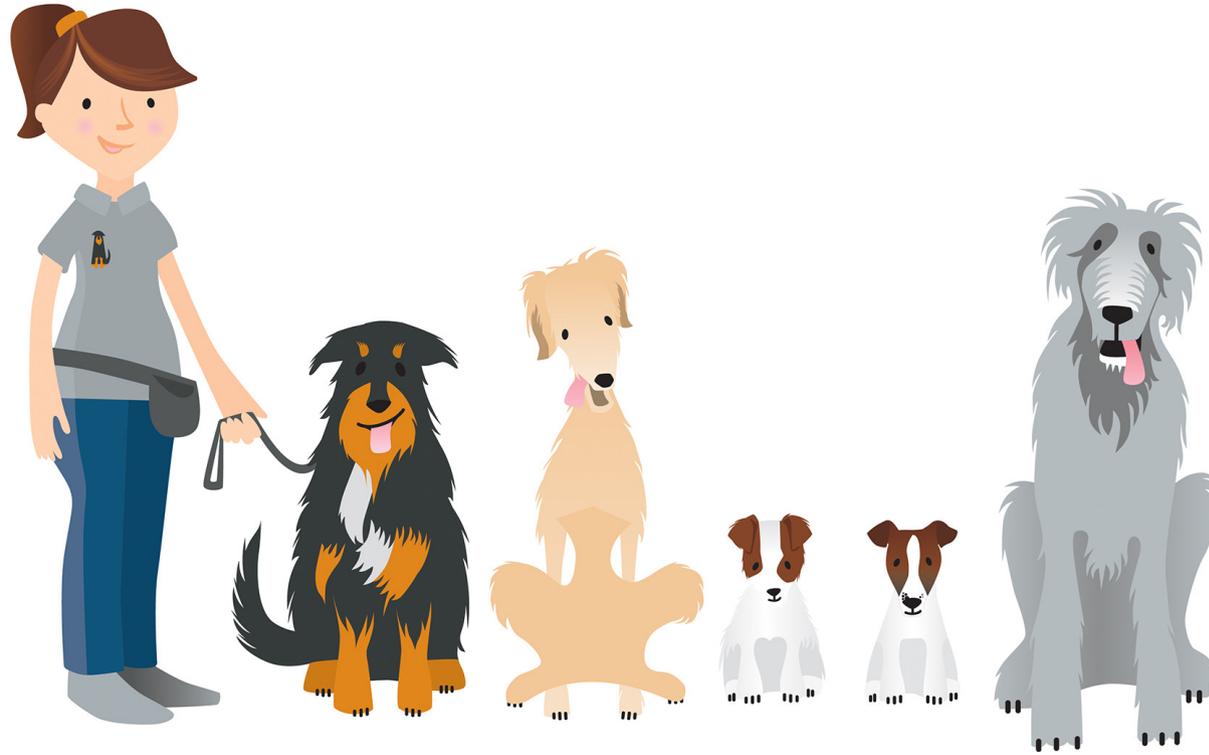




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Thank you

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