

What is Tellington TTouch™

TTouch is a method of gentle bodywork and movement exercises that work with the emotional components that drive behavior. It can be added to enhance any training you do.

We have all met that cool confident dog that strolls into any situation with self-confidence and a smile. He, or she, walks into a training facility or a new situation taking it all in stride. He is happy and comfortable with the goings on. He is at ease with the sights, sounds, and movements going on around him. This dog is confident and comfortable with life and his surroundings, able to adjust to new situations easily and rebound quickly from stimuli and settle.

On the other hand you have seen the dog that gets overly excited and aroused. He is unable to control himself in situations. He barks and barks or jumps around responding to every sight, sound, and movement and possibly is reactive to other dogs or people. These are dogs whose emotions run high. Some are very busy dogs and seem to be on the move much of the time. These dogs are more reactive and influenced by their surroundings.

Then there is the dog that is fearful, timid, or seems worried.

Cool Dude Dog, or Over the Top?

What is the difference between the cool dude dog and the one that seems influenced by every movement, sound, and sight in its proximity? Why is learning easy for some and not others? It is so hard for some dogs to be well behaved. Why are some dogs stressed out, fearful, or reactive?

One way to explain these emotional differences is to look at the nervous system of the dog. The limbic system is the portion of the brain considered to be the control center for the emotions and the gateway to learning. This system is divided into two parts: the sympathetic nervous system, which is the “fight, flight, freeze, or faint” response, and the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes relaxation and is where learning occurs.

Let’s create a scale from 1 to 10. Number 1 is the cool, calm, collected dog. The slang for this side of the nervous system is the “rest and digest” side. This is the dog that is able to make behavioral choices and has good impulse control; this side is where learning happens more easily. On the other end of this scale we have the 10. This is a dog in what’s called the fight, flight mode. Dogs in this mode are over the top of reason. They are in a reactive state where they cannot think to make behavioral choices and learning is difficult. They react rather than reason. They are not aware of themselves as much as they are of what is going on around them. The more stress we add into the situation, the more the dog will go into the no-thinking mode. A dog living close to the 1 side of the scale has a long way to go to get to the reactive 10 side. On the other hand, a dog who is already living on the more stressed side of the scale, let’s say a 7 or 8, does not have very far to go to be at 10, over the top, not thinking, and shut down or reactive.

Dogs living at the upper end of the scale are concerned with every noise and movement. They are busy, not hanging out and enjoying the scenery. In this way we can say that their attention is more “out of body” than in their body. We humans actually experience this occasionally. Have you ever been in the shower or bath and looked down to see a bruise and wonder when and where you were when it happened? If you were to bump into the corner of the table with the same force when paying attention it would hurt like crazy, but the fact that your mind was busy, making lists or thinking urgent thoughts, means the blow did not register.

How does a dog become tense and stressed? There are many ways. Dogs can be born with it or have experiences that result in them becoming fearful or reactive. Pain from physical problems is often a cause. Tension and stress can show itself in other ways than behavior. Dogs often have and hold tension in their

body. Their skin is literally tight in certain areas. There are areas of their body that they don't like to have touched and in some cases will guard those areas. They often tuck the tail or hold it high or stiff. Their mouths are held tightly.

I often ask my clients or groups I'm teaching if anyone has ever walked up and put their hands on their shoulders when they are having a hard time and are stressed. Through touch the tension and tightness comes into your awareness, and your shoulders may drop a bit and you realize that you are wound up. People can go take a hot bath and do things to de-stress themselves. Unlike people, dogs live in the state that they are until we can show them a different way.

TTouch: Reeducating the Nervous System

Being stressed out is a very physiologically expensive state to maintain. A dog that is living at a more stressed level does not have the ability or know how to calm himself. We have to show them what not being stressed feels like in their body. Sometimes I think we are introducing a dog to the other side of their nervous system when we begin TTouch.

Linda Tellington-Jones developed Tellington TTouch Training 30 years ago. She was a top-level international equine performance competitor and trainer. Trainers came from across the United States and around the world to learn advanced techniques at her Pacific Coast Equestrian Research Farm and School of Horsemanship, a nine-month residential school for riding instructors in Badger, California. She had learned from her grandfather and studied with many of the world's top trainers.

Linda then studied with Moshe Feldenkrais, developer of a method that builds self-awareness through movement, and started to look at performance and behavior differently. She realized that his concept of reeducating the nervous system without fear or force could be applied to horses and other animals to overcome resistance, stress, and tension and improve coordination and learning ability. Feldenkrais offered the possibility of finding new ways to teach animal learning by using non-habitual movements to activate unused neural pathways to the brain. Much of the resistance and poor performance she saw in horses was related to stress.

The Three Techniques of TTouch

Linda subsequently developed the three techniques that together are TTouch. These three components work together.

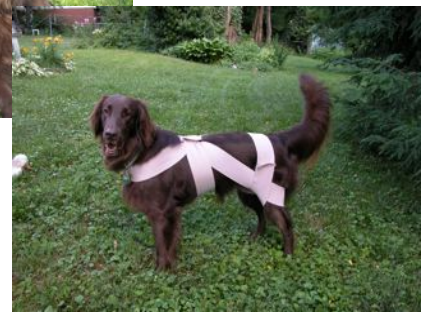
- **Bodywork**, the first component, is done in a circular manner to find and release body to find the areas where there is specific areas like the mouth that is connections to the emotions. Mouth work also stimulates the salivary glands, which helps with relaxation. Mouth and ear work help by releasing endorphins that calm and activate the relaxation-promoting parasympathetic nervous system. We also work the tail and feet. We work carefully to get the dog over any area that he finds difficult being touched by going back to areas that he



Ruby Dee enjoying Body Work



done in a specific tension. We explore the tension. We focus on one of the closest



enjoys. As he becomes comfortable being TTouch all over and his skin becomes loose and relaxed, his behavior and attitude will improve. In the case of physical injury, pain seems to lessen and movement is enhanced.

- **Body wraps**, the second technique, help with gait, balance, touch sensitivity, and self-confidence issues. Wraps also help the dog who has no idea where his body is in space or who seems clumsy by increasing body awareness, therefore helping with confidence, speed, and overall performance. Body wraps are also very helpful in agility and all other dog sports. Body wraps also seem to have a calming effect on the nervous system.
- **Groundwork**, a third technique, also called the “Confidence Course,” works to build balance, self-control, self-confidence, and hence the focus and learning ability of the dog.

When doing TTouch, look for these signs to know if your animal is starting to relax, release, and calm down: taking a deep breath, yawning, stretching, doing a shake, eyes softening and blinking.

TTouch is well known throughout Europe and is taught as part of the curriculum at several university veterinary schools

To find out more about Tellington TTouch go to the main website, TTouch.com, or to my website, WoodsideTTouch.com

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Ruby Dee in a Wrap



Ruby Dee doing the Confidence Course

