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Marc Bekoff Ph.D.
Animal Emotions

A Hierarchy of Dog Needs: Abraham Maslow Meets the Mutts

Linda Michaels' dog training stresses gentle care, rewards, and choice

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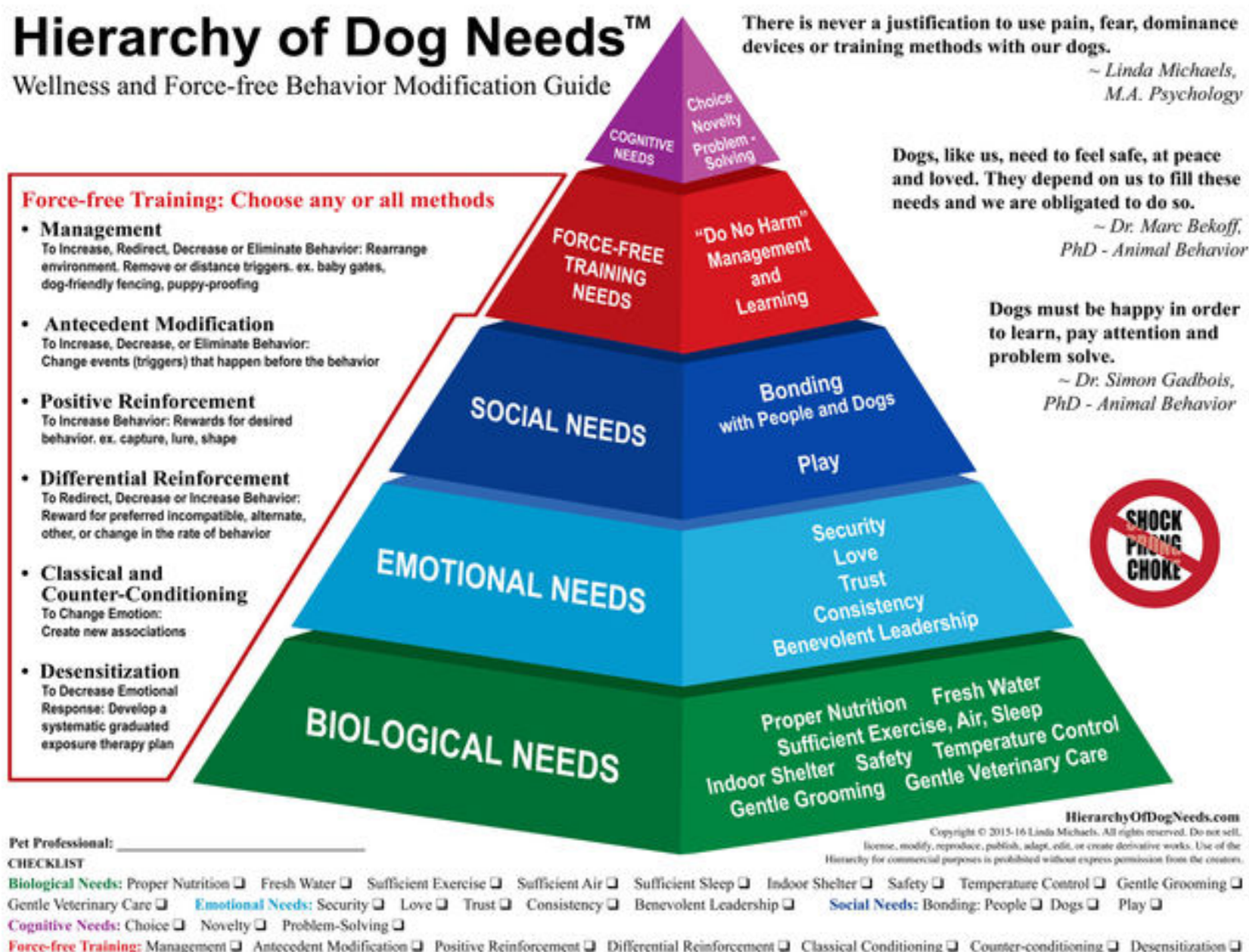
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Abraham Maslow goes to the dogs

I recently read about Linda Michaels' Hierarchy of Dog Needs (HDN) and was very impressed with her "positive training" approach to working with dogs and their humans. As Ms. Michaels notes below, "The HDN is supported by scientific evidence and makes no apologies for embracing protective ethics concerning our beloved dogs. The No Shock, No Prong, No Choke logo is loud and clear."

I reached out to Ms. Michaels because I wanted to learn more about the background and application of her Hierarchy of Dog Needs, and was thrilled that she could take the time to answer a few questions. Our interview went as follows.



Source: Courtesy of Linda Michaels

Why did you develop the Hierarchy of Dog Needs®?

focused on dogs' real needs and non-punitive training methods that they can easily access and explain to their clients and followers. [The Hierarchy of Dog Needs](#) (HDN) was created for our dogs who cannot speak for themselves, and for the people who love them.

The concept of the Hierarchy of Dog Needs as a holistic system of care was brewing within me for many years. My disappointment and frustration with the dog training field's direction toward shock collars and other punitive methods inspired me to sit down and finally figure out how get the ideas into a visual form. I dreamt about it a lot too! We need a straightforward, force-free/Do No Harm alternative to the existing teaching paradigms in the unregulated dog training industry. The HDN is supported by scientific evidence and makes no apologies for embracing protective ethics concerning our beloved dogs. The No Shock, No Prong, No Choke logo is loud and clear.

I found myself in what I felt to be a unique position of responsibility to speak out on behalf of the dogs. My academic background in experimental psychology and learning, graduate training in behavioral neurobiology, plus hands-on experience training dogs and wolfdogs, prepared and inspired me to create a one-page teaching tool in the form of a hand-out that would be easy-to-understand and easy-to-use for all.

Can you please briefly summarize them?

The Hierarchy of Dog Needs (HDN) is a novel adaptation of renowned psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of (human) Needs that emphasizes strengths, positivity, free will/choice, and a belief in the wholeness of animal nature. Research shows that when biological needs, safety, and belongingness needs for social animals are met, they are far less likely to display abnormal behavior.

Biological Needs

Our dogs' Biological Needs are the foundational base for a happy and healthy life. The use of choke and prong collars exacerbate breathing problems, particularly in our brachycephalic breeds, and may cause medical injury to the trachea, which is essential to breathing. The HDN includes Gentle Grooming and Gentle Veterinary Care as essential biological health needs. Force-free training and fear-free veterinary and grooming care go hand in hand. Positive interaction between these professionals and our dogs is critical to their emotional and physical fitness.

Emotional Needs

Psychological and emotional health is every bit as important as physical health. Physical and emotional wellness go hand-in-hand. The insight that dogs lead rich emotional lives can be traced back to Charles Darwin who believed that all animals experience pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness...and fear. Today scientists and researchers, such as yourself, the late Jaak Panksepp and Karen Overall, provide evidence that this is indeed so. In *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, you tell us, "It's bad biology to argue against the existence of animal emotions."

It is our job to teach our dogs that the world is a safe place. The need for a sense of Security and protection from danger is basic to all mammals. The need to establish and maintain Trust with our dogs could not be more important to their emotional health. Sadly, Trust once broken, damages the relationship and is often irreparable. The HDN includes Love as an emotional need: Love is an action word. Taking care to attend to our dog's emotional needs nurtures the relationship between pet parent and pet and helps prevent behavior problems. Assessing our dogs emotional and Trust levels often leads to a better understanding of fearful or aggressive behavior. The need for Benevolent Leadership, as opposed to dominance tactics, is imperative for a sense of security, trust, and love to grow.

Social Needs

resources. Play has numerous important roles in behavioral development and should be encouraged.

The risk of developing behavioral problems from the lack of proper, early, and continuing frequent socialization opportunities is now known to be significant.

Cognition

The cognitive exercise of choice, problem-solving, and experiencing novelty at home and in the environment caps our pyramid.

Force-free Training Needs

Once we have insured that the foundational needs are met, the Hierarchy describes the behavior modification methods that “force-free” behavior modification consultants and trainers advocate. These techniques are used to increase, decrease, and redirect behavior and change emotional response. Being nice to your dog is good science.

We nurture and develop social skills and confidence in our dogs by meeting all of our dog’s real needs. We set the stage for optimal well-being by using force-free training, as opposed to instilling fear and thereby potentiating aggression.

Why do you think your hierarchy will make the lives of dogs better?

There is an increasingly strong dog-human bond in our society and it makes sense that a more dog-friendly dog-needs paradigm was developed. Too often basic needs are not met or are under met. Do No Harm training will make dog lives better because it is more effective, safer, has longer lasting effects, and moreover, is truly dog-friendly compared to punitive training.

The [Do No Harm Dog Training and Behavior Manual](#) lists the many ways various professionals can use it in their practice. For example: Posting a laminated copy of the HDN infographic on the gate to each and every shelter kennel helps remind everyone who enters what to do and how to do it force-free. A copy of the HDN infographic can be inserted in the take-home packets for each foster parent and used to educate shelter staff. It has been used in speaker presentations and lectures in local humane societies as well as at veterinary conferences.

There is a cry from rescue and shelter facilities to veterinary offices, for a new understanding of how we can successfully modify behavior without physical or psychological harm to the dogs. My hope is that The Hierarchy of Dog Needs might speak in some way to every dog, every pet-related professional, and every pet parent.

How can dog guardians use them from day-to-day?

Anyone who interacts with or studies dogs, or any animal for that matter, can use it successfully everyday. The HDN lists dog needs hierarchically and methods of behavior modification as mix-and-match. I encourage the choice of any or all of the training methods used in any order, dependent on the situation and context.

The Hierarchy of Dog Needs force-free training methods may be used for both the most common behavioral problems and the most difficult ones, such as housetraining, excessive barking, jumping, separation anxiety fear, dog-dog aggression, human aggression, resource guarding, and more. It can help to identify the primary, secondary and other problems affecting the dog and help guide the path of training.

Once basic needs are met, a pet parent with dog who jumps on guests, for example, can use Management to contain their dog in the kitchen with a baby-gate away from the guest so the opportunity to jump on the guest is not possible. They can then toss treats on the floor using Counter-conditioning and Desensitization to help their dog calm down in the face of new people in the house. Later, if safe, the guest can approach the dog and ask the dog to sit, providing Differential Reinforcement to help extinguish jumping while reinforcing sitting.

is in use by veterinary behaviorists, [integrative](#) and holistic veterinarians, dog trainers of all stripes (including working-dog and police-dog trainers), gentle groomers, shelters, rescues, foster pet parents, dog walkers and pet sitters, animal welfare advocates, service dog organizations, in college and master's level thesis papers, as well as by pet parents. It has been translated into French by Dr. Simon Gadbois, and we have received requests for more translations from our international friends and partners. Dr. Katrina Ward, DVM and behavior specialist, presented the HDN to the Australian Veterinary Association conference, saying, "The Hierarchy of Dog Needs was very well received and hopefully will be taken up as a routine method of assessing needs and applying humane behavior modification." Dr. Lynn Honeckman, DVM and behavior specialist in Orlando, uses the HDN to teach pre-vet students and at "Lunch and Learns" to veterinary clinic presentations. Everyone from national crisis response manual writers to goat dancing trainers are using it!

By design, the Hierarchy encourages force-free professionals to refer to and support other force-free professionals for the well-being of the whole dog. It also asks both pet parents and pet professionals to look to science for guidance from experts in [animal behavior](#) such as yourself and Dr. Gadbois -- experts who are quoted on the HDN and whose words are an important feature of the guide.

Is there anything else you would like to share with readers?

Oh yes! I believe we need to strengthen our animal welfare laws and increase penalties for dog abuse and [neglect](#), and increase regulation in the field of dog training in order to ensure trainer competency and Do No Harm ethics for our dogs. We call on scientists, legislators, celebrities and all dog lovers to take a stand to prevent both physical and psychological harm to our pets and help create the cultural change we need to provide a truly dog-friendly environment for our beloved pets. I invite them to contact me: LindaPositively@gmail.com

What are some of your future projects?

I have recently released the [Do No Harm Dog Training and Behavior Manual](#) that features the Hierarchy of Dog Needs. The manual was initially designed as my own personal guide for teaching basic manners classes, and has evolved into a reference manual for my private behavior consultations. This manual now includes many of my published articles and also introduces the Hierarchy of Dog Needs as a training tool for animal lovers. It is my hope that it sheds light on some of the mysteries of dog behavior while providing practical step-by-step protocols and bullet-point explanations of things pet parents need to know. It was written with love for the heartbeats at our feet.

Currently, I'm working on the fully scientifically cited Hierarchy of Dog Needs Handbook that I hope to have on the shelves within the year, and consulting on serious behavior cases in my private practice.

Thank you so much Linda, for taking the time to answer these questions and to tell readers about your positive approach to working with dogs and their humans. Dogs are constantly being challenged, and many are highly stressed, as they try to adapt to a human-dominated world (please also see "[Dogs Want and Need Much More Than They Usually Get From Us](#)"). They need all the help they can get to learn how to coexist with other dogs and their humans. As you say, nothing is lost, and everything is gained, by being nice to your dog and by paying very close attention to what each and every individual needs.

Linda Michaels, creator of the Hierarchy of Dog Needs, was recently rated one of the top ten dog trainers in the United States, by Top Ten Magazine. Linda holds a master's degree in Experimental Psychology (With Honors) and conducted laboratory research in behavioral neurobiology, earning the University Scholar Award from the Psychology Department of San Diego State University. Linda's unique combination of scientific training and hands-on experience with dogs and wolfdogs creates a bridge between the worlds of research, dog trainers, and pet parents. Linda is a certified fear, aggression, and reactivity consultant, who focuses on both the behavioral and psychological aspects of dog behavior that often mirror human psychological conditions, such as

Marc Bekoff's latest books are *Jasper's Story: Saving Moon Bears* (with Jill Robinson); *Ignoring Nature No More: The Case for Compassionate Conservation*; *Why Dogs Hump and Bees Get Depressed: The Fascinating Science of Animal Intelligence, Emotions, Friendship, and Conservation*; *Rewilding Our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence*; *The Jane Effect: Celebrating Jane Goodall* (edited with Dale Peterson); and *The Animals' Agenda: Freedom, Compassion, and Coexistence in the Human Age* (with Jessica Pierce). *Canine Confidential* will be published in early 2018. Marc's homepage is marcbekoff.com.

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Marc Bekoff, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

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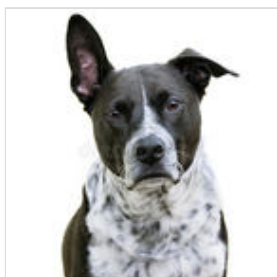
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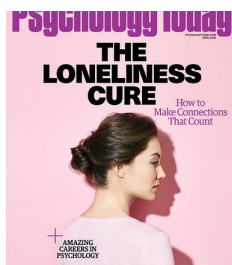
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