BHARCS
Learning to learn from dogs

Quiz Discussion

Section 1 : Canine Communication
CC15 : Freezing

Our recommendation is that you first attempt the quiz before reviewing the discussion on the next page. The discussion sometimes recaps what was in the video and sometimes it adds new insights.

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True or false : Freezing may be used in multiple contexts to mean different things.

Freezing may be used to communicate that an individual is not a threat or as a physiological response to very high stress.

True or false : Dogs may use freezing to communicate that they are not a threat

Dogs do use freezing to communicate to other individuals that they mean no harm or to diffuse tense situations. This is not to be confused with the "fight/flight/freeze response" that is also seen as a "long freeze".

True or false : We too could use freezing to communicate that we are not a threat to a dog

If there are dogs around us that are nervous, then we can freeze and avert gaze. That seems to have a placating effect on dogs. Once the dogs are a bit calmer, we may be able to gradually remove ourselves from the situation or let the dog move away. But it is a great first response to quickly diffuse tension.

True or false : A "long freeze" suggests extremely high levels of stress in the dog

While freezing is used as part of communication, freezing is also a physiological response to a threat. It is part of the fight or flight response. These days, neuroscientists recognize that what we see is in fact "fight / flight / freeze response". This state is indeed indicative of the highest levels of stress and what may happen right after the freeze may be a bite. So it is important to not ignore this type of a freeze.

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What is the right thing to do when we see a “long freeze”

A dog that is in a long freeze is likely to be under tremendous stress. It would not be right to do nothing. Something must be done to ease the stress. If not, it may either lead to a bite or have a negative impact on the welfare of the dog.

Physical contact with such a dog may trigger a bite. While the intent to reassure the dog is right, the way to do it is not by petting or making physical contact.

A dog that is in a long freeze is likely to be under tremendous stress. It would not be right to further stress the dog out with loud noises. Such an action may either lead to a bite or have a negative impact on the welfare of the dog.

One needs to identify the stressor and remove it from the dog’s presence or remove the dog from the stressor’s presence or introduce some kind of a barrier between the two. Sometimes, we ourselves may be the stressor so we may have to move away or change the way we are interacting with the dog. If we are handling the dog, we may have to find a way to slow down, calm down or stop the interaction altogether. But immediate action is required.