



“What Planet are you on?”

**Introducing the Compliance
to Partnership Planet Model
for Living with Dogs**



S.A.H.S.D.A.

Entering the 'dog world' in 2019, I was met with an onslaught of information, as most dog caregivers are. Everywhere, there are those purporting to be the 'experts' and have 'the answer' but often the advice offered was polar opposites of each other, which leads to confusion and frustration for the human and, unfortunately for the dog, often an emotional experience far from wholesome.

In order to help me make sense of the array of philosophies, methods and opinions presented to me, in collaboration with my background expertise in supporting human survivors of significant trauma, I developed the Compliance to Partnership Planet Model for Living with Dogs. Originally, I developed this firstly as a tool for myself, to digest the vast knowledge I was consuming from some of the best and most well known leaders in the canine behaviour sector, however, after discussion with some of these wonderful individuals and with a lot of encouragement, I have made them public in the hope that they help others navigate their relationship with their dog(s) and together, we can all contribute to bettering the world for all of us, human and canine alike.

Within dog training and behaviour, two distinct philosophies have emerged, shaping the way humans interact with our canine companions:

- On one side lies the traditional, compliance-based approach, which is grounded in the perceived need to have obedience and control over dogs.
- On the opposite side stands the partnership-based approach, a philosophy that prioritises consent, connection, compassion, understanding, empathy and perhaps most important of all – understanding of what it means to 'be' a dog.

I have visualised these mindsets as those who sit within the 'Compliance Planet' and those who sit within the 'Partnership Planet'. However, it is often not as simple as being one side or the other and, now at least, many people will fall at some point between planets – a black hole so to speak. Often, I also hear people talking like they are living on Planet Partnership, when in fact if you look underneath the layers, they're actually on Planet Compliance. Just because you don't use negative reinforcement or tools, does not mean how you act or what you are asking of the dog is not rooted in a compliance mindset – this is the most significant paradigm shift that needs to happen in order for the world to evolve into a better place for dogs and humans alike.

The challenge of providing a united philosophy to living, and loving, dogs is compounded by the complex, and often, deeply ingrained beliefs, assumptions, and expectations by human beings about what it means to share our lives with a dog in the human world. I, and my colleagues, are asking people to challenge their mindsets in a landscape marked by conflicting advice and strong opinions, often relating to the need to 'train' dogs. This internal conflict goes beyond simple disagreement over techniques and tools, it reflects a larger debate on canine wellbeing, morals and ethics, and the role dogs play in human society. It demands very personal self-reflection, self-awareness and education in canine behaviour which will hopefully shift their perspective and inspire a willingness to confront and re-evaluate deep-rooted beliefs and behaviours about dominance, power, control, obedience, and the emotional lives of dogs.

So, I invite you to come on a journey to explore the compliance and partnership planets and find out which planet you are on.

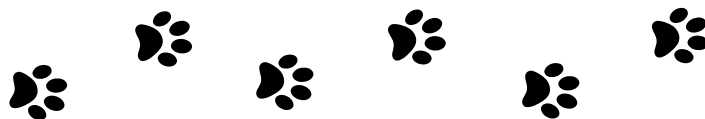


Characteristics of the Compliance Planet



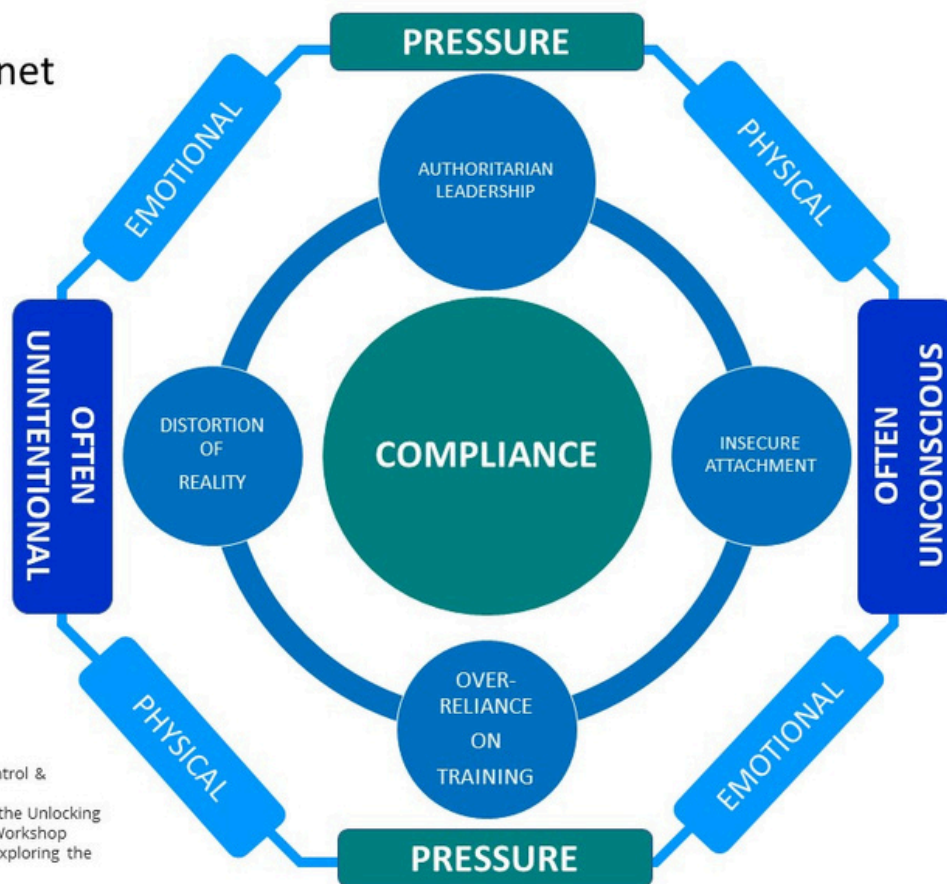
Those on the Compliance Planet want unconditional compliance from their dog, which is why compliance sits in the centre. They want compliance at all times, in all situations – regardless of the needs or comfort of the individual dog.

It is important to emphasise that those on the compliance planet often do not understand that what they are doing is damaging to their relationship with their dog – this is why you can see ‘often unintentional’ and ‘often unconscious’ on the outside of the planet. Compliance caregivers are following what they believe to be solid advice, often given by trainers using outdated methods or asserting old proverbs about the need to ‘dominate’ and have ‘authority’ over dogs, whom they see as lesser than humans. When you come to read the extended compliance planet, you can see just how entrenched beliefs we now know to be untrue about our dogs, permeate society and therefore influences how the general public interact with dogs.



Compliance includes an emphasis on physical and emotional pressure to achieve obedience. This pressure, whether intentional or not, can stem from traditional training methods such as using aversive tools or methods such as alpha rolls, kneeling in the chest, pushing, shoving or touching without the consent of the dog. Emotional pressure includes things like raising voices/shouting, pointing fingers or invading the space of the dog without their consent, putting pressure on them to perform or succeed at the detriment of the animals wellbeing and not being a safe or secure attachment/space for the dog.

Those on the compliance planet usually overlook the dog’s individual needs, communication style and natural behaviours, instead focusing on a transactional, one-way relationship based in submission and compliance.



References:

- Inspired by the Duluth Power & Control & Equality Wheel
- Andrew Hale - Dog Centred Care & the Unlocking the Emotional Experience of Dogs Workshop
- Tricia Hollingshead - Listen to Me: Exploring the Emotional Life of Your Dog

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The Compliance planet has four main dimensions, explaining ‘how’ compliance can be seen within the relationship:

Authoritarian leadership: Those on the compliance planet often hold the belief that they know best and the emphasis is on a hierarchical, transactional and one-way relationship where the dog’s emotional experience is not centred or heard.

Distortion of reality: Dog behaviour is interpreted through a human perspective only and the human places expectations on the dog without attempting to understand the dogs wants/needs. This extends to often having a view of dog behaviour as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’, labelling how well they can conform to the human expectation and environment. Often, we classify dogs as ‘bad’ for displaying natural canine behaviour that does not integrate well to living in captivity with humans.

Over-reliance on training: The priority is in training the dog rather than meeting underlying needs. This is not an attack on training generally, but we must honestly look at the appropriateness of training in many situations where the dog is trying to communicate a deeper discomfort or need to safety – when we respond with training only, we do not do justice to the human-animal bond and the deep-rooted emotional need for security, love, trust, consistency and benevolent leadership. When training is required, it should be force free, follow ‘do no harm’ principles and at the centre it should provide choice, autonomy and be conducted with the consent of the animal. (Hierarchy of Dog Needs, Linda Michaels, 2024).

Insecure attachment: Unrealistic expectations are set for dogs based on their age, breed, or individual capabilities, neglecting the emotional bond and security that are crucial for a mutually beneficial and holistic relationship.

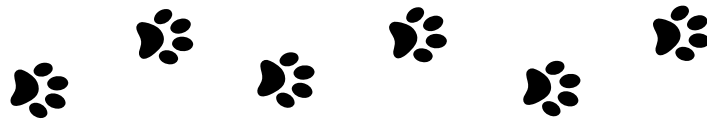
Compliance Planet

| AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP | DISTORTION OF REALITY | OVER-RELIANCE ON TRAINING | INSECURE ATTACHMENT |
|---|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Doesn’t appreciate the dog as an emotional being.Doesn’t listen to the dog or ignores dog communicating physical or emotional discomfort, instead believing they know what’s best.Expectation of unconditional compliance /obedience at all times, in all situations.Can use the dog as an ego boost/tool where dogs needs come second.Limited to no understanding of natural canine behaviour/body language. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Expectation of dogs to understand our language and expectations without attempting to learn theirs.Believes the dog should ‘respect’ them & when they don’t conform then they’re ‘naughty’, ‘stubborn’ ‘manipulative’ or ‘should know better’Reliance on myths and outdated knowledge e.g. Dominance Theory, Use of ‘balanced training’, Earn to Learn training, rejects dogs as having emotional needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Prioritises training rather than meeting underlying need.Uses Tone/Body Language the dog may perceive as threatening e.g. raising voice, pointed fingers, invading their personal space without their consent.Focus is on commands, cues & artificial behaviours plus focus on ‘outcome’ e.g. wait for food, tricks, winning/ribbons.Focus is often on ‘quick fixes’ or getting outcome as fast as possible.Training methods used often punishment, pressure or coercion based. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Unrealistic expectations e.g. for their age, their individual ability, breed.Not fostering an emotional connection with the dog.Preventing access to companionship.Not providing safety and security so the dog feels unsafe.Placing pressure on them to perform and achieve.Rejecting requests for comfort/connection.Inconsistency |

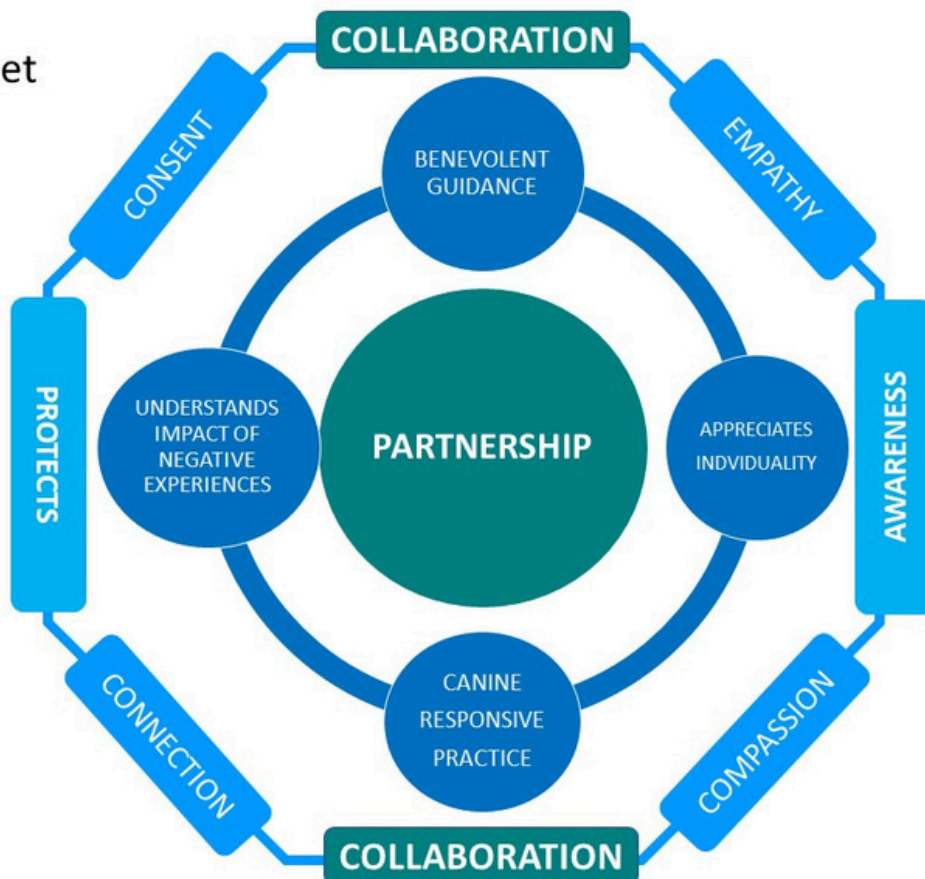
Characteristics of the Partnership Planet



The Partnership Planet represents an essential paradigm shift that must happen in the human-dog relationship in order to improve the bond for us all. It asks us to move away from traditional mindsets of one-sided, transactional interactions rooted in dominance and hierarchy to an approach grounded more in authenticity, compassion, communication, and connection.



Partnership Planet



References:

- Inspired by the Duluth Power & Control & Equality Wheel
- Andrew Hale - Dog Centred Care & the Unlocking the Emotional Experience of Dogs Workshop
- Tricia Hollingshead - Listen to Me: Exploring the Emotional Life of Your Dog
- Hierarchy of Dog Needs by Linda Michaels
- Rachel Leather - PLACE for Dogs Model
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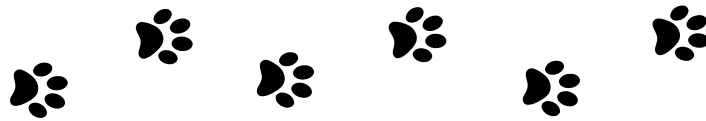
The Partnership Planet has four quadrants, being a mirror opposite of the Compliance Planet.

- **Benevolent guidance:** Firstly, recognising and appreciating that dogs are emotional beings with individual needs and communication styles – they do speak, but do we really hear? A partnership-based approach centres active listening and respecting what the dog is telling us. Instead of authoritarian leadership, the emphasis here is on benevolent (well-meaning or kindly) guidance, similar to gentle-parenting approaches, which centres offering choice and agency and encouraging natural behaviours. Avoids pressure and coercion at all times and has awareness that positive training does not inherently mean the dynamic is not coercive.
- **Understanding the impact of negative experiences:** Those on the partnership planet acknowledge the potential causes of trauma in dogs, understanding that trauma is unique to the individual and does not have to be what they would label as 'enough' to cause trauma. Trauma occurs when we experience stressful, frightening, or distressing events or situations that are out of our control. Being subjected to trauma can damage a dog's sense of safety, self and ability to regulate emotions, maintain positive attachments, and navigate relationships with humans and/or other animals.
- **Canine Responsive Practice:** It is important we use a dog-centred, trauma informed approach when working with dogs with trauma histories. We do not label dogs exhibiting trauma responses as 'bad', instead we open a dialogue to explore what is happening for them inside. CRP emphasises accepting the dog's current emotional state and any limitations they may have. Central to CRP is offering protection and support through adverse experiences, focusing on providing safety, minimizing re-traumatisation, building resilience and regulation, setting realistic expectations, providing relief and doing all of this through empathetic engagement.
- **Appreciating the individuality of a dog:** Those on the partnership planet value each dog as an individual being with unique needs and personalities. They will have their own preferred learning style, resilience level, learning history, trauma histories, environmental preferences, breed and genetic heritage characteristics, age, health and wellbeing needs as well as being influenced by their sex and ability (e.g., they may be deaf or blind). Appreciating the unique identities and components of the individual animals is crucial to tailoring responses and training to fit that dogs specific needs and preferences.



Partnership Planet

| BENEVOLENT GUIDANCE | UNDERSTANDS IMPACT OF NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES | CANINE RESPONSIVE PRACTICE | APPRECIATES INDIVIDUALITY |
|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepts dogs as emotional beings. • Communication (knowledge of dog body language and behaviour). • Giving our dogs agency/choice and respecting their decisions. • Focus on fostering bond/connection. • Encourages dog to fulfil natural behaviours. (e.g. sniffing, digging, chewing, sufficient time resting, play etc) • Encourages Experiential Learning. • Based in Consent – asking not telling. • Avoidance of pressure/coercion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the potential causes of negative experiences. • Knowledge of the different types of trauma (e.g. Acute, Complex, Chronic, Developmental, System Generated). • Knowledge of the common responses to negative experiences/trauma (Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn, Fool) • Language focuses on describing the behaviour rather than labelling dogs. | <p>ACCEPTANCE of where the dog is at & their limitations.</p> <p>PROTECTS against/supports through negative experiences</p> <p>Provides emotional/physical/environmental SAFETY & SECURITY</p> <p>Minimises RE-TRAUMATISATION</p> <p>Builds RESILIENCE</p> <p>Builds REGULATION</p> <p>Has realistic EXPECTATIONS</p> <p>Provides RELIEF</p> <p>EMPATHY</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs have individual Personalities. • Understands behaviour as an expression of need and self. • Preferred Learning Style. • Recognises individual resilience level. • Recognises previous learning history. • Recognises previous traumatic experiences. • Appreciates their environmental preferences. • Appreciates Breed & Genetic Heritage. • Age, Health & Wellbeing. • Sex (& hormones). • Ability. |

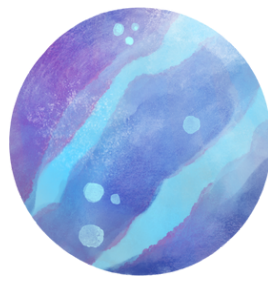


The Extended Planets: Societal & Cultural Influence on How we Live and Love Dogs.

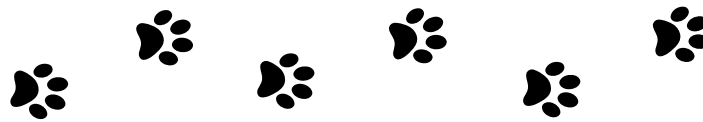
Nothing happens in a vacuum, all of our beliefs and behaviours are influenced and underpinned by wider societal and cultural norms and values which often tout outdated and damaging rhetoric about how to live and love dogs.

The extended Compliance Planet captures the speciesist notion that our wider culture (at least in the West) breeds, reinforces and supports; the notion that humans are hierarchically superior to animals.

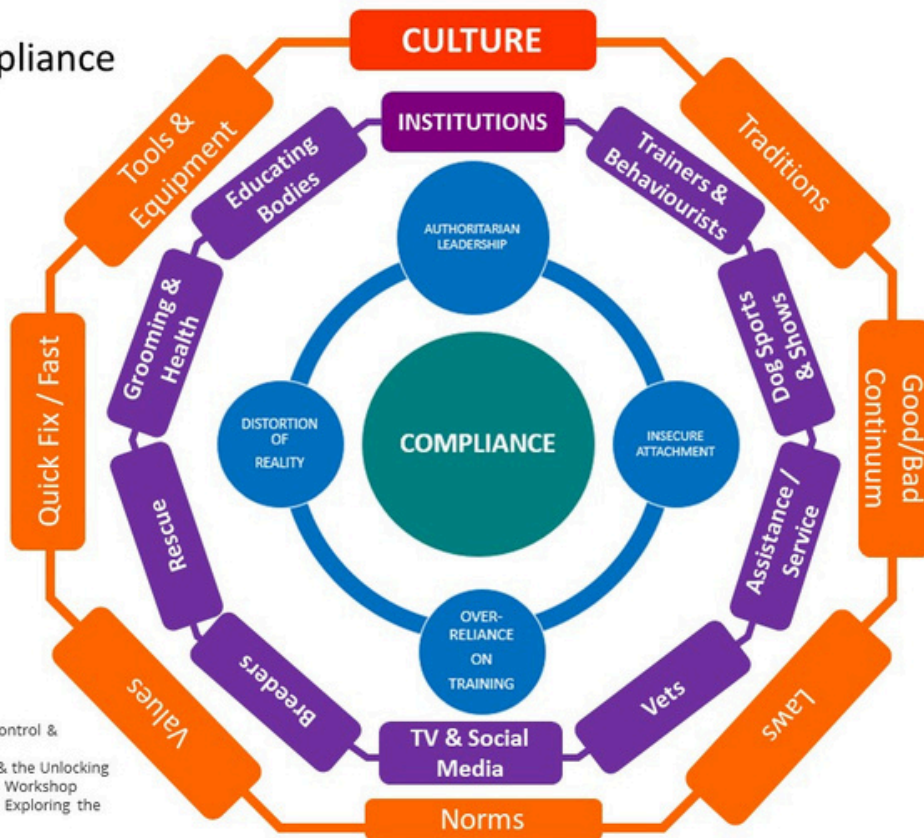
This can be seen in the tools and methods used in dog training, to the language of 'good and bad dogs', to the unfair and unrealistic expectations humans put on our dogs, to the inherent want of humans to have issues fixed quickly as well as the fact that many people still don't believe that animals/dogs are capable of having emotions, or certainly not complex emotional lives, at all.



These beliefs spill over into our peer conversations around dog ownership, education, medical and legal systems, social media, and institutions – creating structural and ideological barriers we must overcome in order to solve the misalignment and move to a truly partnership-based approach. The fundamental emphasis on obedience and compliance, normally at the expense of the emotional and physical needs of the dog, illuminates the black hole gap in recognising and appreciating dogs as sentient beings, interacting with the wider world with an emotional life that is uniquely their own. The role of social media dog trainers and an unregulated industry must not be underestimated in terms of influence and impact either – these factors contribute to general caregivers misunderstanding of their dogs, leading to training and care practices that significantly misalign with a trauma informed, canine centred response.



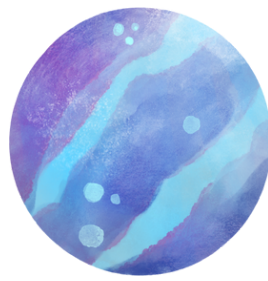
Extended Compliance Planet



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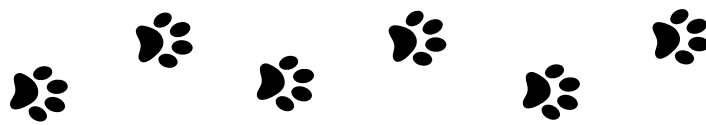
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The Extended Partnership Planet asks people to critically examine their beliefs and, more importantly, where they have come from and hold themselves accountable for improving their approach. In the last few years, we are seeing some significant improvement in people challenging long-held, entrenched beliefs and instead aligning more in a partnership-based approach – valuing empathy and compassion. It is dog-centred which means at the core of everything we do is the dog, and every decision we make we should be asking "how might this effects my dog? "Is this in the dogs interest or mine?", "why am I asking my dog to do that?" – it is encouraging us to be self-aware and reflective.

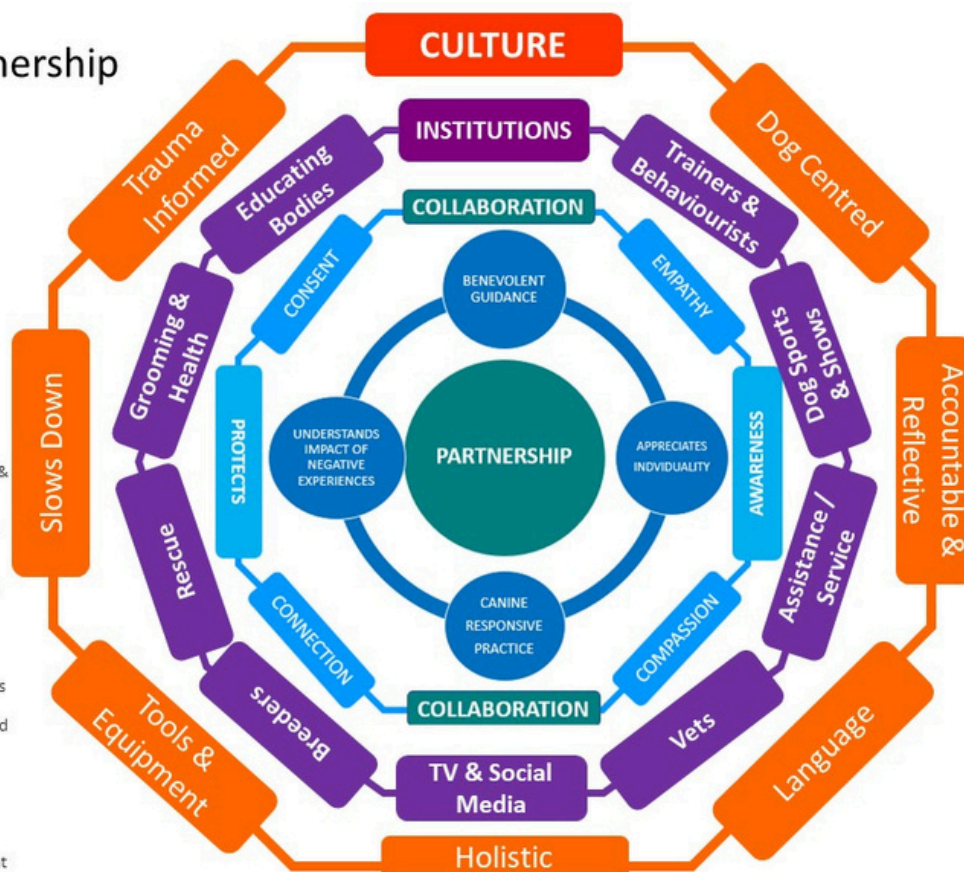
It also encourages us to work holistically – understanding the whole and appreciating that may elements are interconnected and without them all in balance there can be negative knock-on effects. For example, in terms of pain and gut health, trauma and neuroscience plus the environment etc all combine to give our dogs the 'best life possible' so any behaviour management plan must also look at all parts to be successful AND that includes looking at the family dynamic within the home.



Extended Partnership Planet

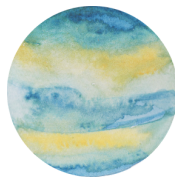
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The Partnership Planet and Extended Partnership Planet really presents us with a visual map for where we all should want to be and how we can get there.

I hope you will come on the journey with your dog – no one is asking for perfection, we are all learning all of the time, but together, through listening, fostering safety and connection, we can create better relationships.



Watch this article on YouTube!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clzPFUkYLBi&t=3536s>

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- Laura Dobb – Slow Dog Movement
- Janet& Michelle– HeartDog Trainers