

**THE TELLINGTON TOUCH
THE TOUCH THAT HEALS
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Introduction

People and dogs get along so well because dogs like to be touched and humans find solace in touching another being. Petting a dog reduces tension and awakens joy and caring in people who are immersed in grief or depression, debilitated by age or disease, or handicapped by physical or emotional limitations. Stroking a dog helps us think, put things in perspective, and wile away a bit of free time here and there.

In the past, some dog trainers have encouraged owners not to pat their dogs in some training circumstances. "Constant petting transfers your nervousness to the dog," some said. "Petting should only be a reward for obedience," others claimed.

Then along came Linda Tellington-Jones and her Tellington Touch, a massage technique for reducing tension and changing behavior in dogs, and the pendulum swings back towards the fact we knew all along: touching the dog not only helps us, it helps the dog.

Tellington-Jones is a horse trainer and competitive rider who developed a method of circular touches to enhance traditional training methods and complement medical treatments. The techniques are based on a similar set of body awareness exercises for humans developed by Moshe Feldenkrais; the principle is that the exercises interrupt unacceptable behavior patterns and responses and allow acceptable patterns to develop. Today, as non-traditional medicine gets a workout, the TTouch is gaining acceptance.

Susan Spalter of Mason, Ohio, a photographer with a remarkable way with animals, is completing her training as a TTouch practitioner. Training includes several week-long workshops in which the physical underpinning of the techniques are presented; participants listen to sessions about the changes in brain wave patterns that stem from uses of the touch; discuss concurrent use of homeopathic essences and natural supplements, learn about animal behavior, and, of course, study and practice the techniques themselves.

But most pet owners really don't care about the details; they want to know if it works.

It does.

Spalter shared a testimonial from a cat owner whose adopted pet ran the household through intimidation of the other cats. The owner did everything she could think of and finally confined the cat to her bedroom. In her words: "We had two sessions wherein she taught me one of the touches. She then suggested we try using essences along with the touch. The blend was specifically for aggressive behavior. She encouraged me to develop a positive attitude and try again to bring him into the fold. I followed her advice and it worked! Simby has undergone a dramatic change and is no longer aggressive."

Spalter has had similar success with aggressive, timid, and sore animals. In a few sessions in her home studio, she evaluates the animal, begins the touches, and teaches the owner how to use the circular motions to calm the dog and redirect its attention. Our aloof and suspicious Akita was a tough sell on the techniques, but once she deigned to participate, she was captivated. Within a few minutes, her head sank to the floor, and she dozed. Now she enjoys regular sessions of ear slides, circular touches, and vigorous body rubs.

One technique in particular has been helpful; for several years, she has had periodic, non-specific bouts of intestinal upset accompanied by lack of appetite and oceans of motion in her gut. Since learning the touches, we use pressure on her abdomen to relieve the discomfort and the spells seem to dissipate within hours.

The Basics

The central TTouch motion is a circle inscribed on the dog's body. It is done by placing the fingertips on the body and tracing a clock-face circle from six o'clock around the dial past the starting point to eight o'clock. Practitioners adapt pressure, speed, and size of circle to the particular animal .

Circles are done all over the dog's body, including the face and even the gums. Circles on the gums are done with one or two fingers. If the dog resists, Spalter backs up to the most pleasant touch for the dog and tries again when the dog relaxes. In this way, she can accustom dogs to having their feet handled, to accept fingers in the mouth, and to other handling that they have balked at in the past.

TTouch has many variations of the circles, slides, and rubs, including the ear slide, in which the ear is methodically caressed in a sliding motion from base to tip, and the body rub, an invigorating, all-over stimulation of the senses.

With TTeam, human and animal relate as two autonomous thinking creatures with increased self-confidence, enhanced communications, and mutual respect. (In other words, both dog and owner benefit from the experience.)

TTeam does not change the animal's basic nature. (Our Akita is the same self-confident girl she has always been, but she is more relaxed.)

TTeam does not use force, fear, or pain for handling, treating, or managing animals.

Beckett uses TTouch as an enhancement to his practice, not a replacement for traditional medical protocols.

Tellington Touch sounds a bit like voodoo. Its practitioners and proponents often fall into one of two camps — those who embrace anything new, especially if it seems “natural,” and those who say “I was at my wit's end with this problem and nothing else helped.” Although the brain wave patterns of the animal can be tracked, there is little but anecdotal evidence that the techniques work. However, there is no doubt that mind and body are linked in mysterious ways; a technique that brings harmony between the two, seems to solve problems, and makes life with family companions more peaceful is well worth exploring.