

The Trager Approach
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The Trager approach was developed by Milton Trager, MD. He began to develop his approach when he was 18. The idea behind the approach was to rediscover the ease of movement in our bodies similar to when we were children. The sessions involve a mind body approach in which gentle movements, stretching and rocking can bring a client back to a feeling of wellbeing.

The body holds onto pain both mentally and physically. This is our way to protect ourselves and move on post trauma. Muscle tension, pain, stress and poor gait patterns are just a few survival methods developed post injury and can be corrected by using the Trager approach. As a therapist, we must be aware of these tension patterns and help guide our clients to release them during their journey to recovery.

How does the Trager approach apply to dogs? I'm really not sure but I did have a "light bulb" moment while reading an article about Trager. One of the techniques Trager uses is called "taking out the slack." He is referring to the skin as slack and how to avoid just sliding over the skin and moving it around. As you move the skin gently but firmly, you are preparing the body to be able to reach the deeper tissues. I am reminded of myofascial release while reading about the taking out the slack method and how many emotions can be released with such a gentle intended movement. The fascia that is connecting the skin to the underlying tissues webs throughout the body and affects muscles, blood vessels, nerves and even organs. When the fascia is released it can be felt throughout the body because of its far reaching nature. Once the slack is out of the skin, gentle rocking and stretching can occur. The stretching consists of gentle methodical movement which allows the stretch to lengthen with each movement.

I decided to give the Trager approach a try on my neighbor's dog. Her name is Piper and she is a mixed breed that the owners believe is part Beagle and Labrador Retriever. When Piper was a young puppy, she was very excited to see me and ran into a fence while trying to come to me. She fractured all of her metacarpals in her front right paw. I have never heard a puppy cry as much as Piper did that night. To say the least it was a traumatic event for a puppy and I was there for the entire healing process. During one of my PetMassage sessions with Piper, I tried to help her release some of those terrible memories that have surely caused her pain and gait dysfunction for years. I was steady with my breathing and tried to rid my mind of her accident. My intentions went immediately to her shoulder and I started with taking out the slack. She and I were very much in harmony as I stretched and rocked her affected arm. I do believe she improved with work to her shoulder and paw. Piper is usually guarded with any touch to her paw. As I massaged, she let me work between each pad, through her wrist and on up to her shoulder without any resistance. Obviously a dog can't tell you how they are feeling after a session but Piper did make it quite obvious that she appreciated it. She rolled onto her side, gave me a quick kiss and refused to get off my table.

In conclusion, dogs and humans are deeply affected by touch. The Trager approach can be another tool in your toolbox for both if you see value in it. The Trager approach is a gentle, methodical technique that can deeply affect a life for the better and create balance at the same time.







Bibliography

Juhan, Deane. "Taking Out the Slack." *Trager International*, 2020, www.trager.com. Accessed 25 October 2020.