

## Correspondence

To the Editor,

**Extinction versus exhaustion: or “Oh Sleep, Why Dost Thou Leave Me?”**  
*Behavioural Psychotherapy*, 1985, 13, 162–165.

In response to the keen uninterest which followed the publication of our report on sleep disturbance in a small dog we have prepared a brief resumé of follow-up data on this case. G's night-time behaviour continues exemplary eighteen months after the termination of the training programme and the foster mother has frequently been observed to be awake at the wheel of her car. The subsidiary programme, to develop car entry after a walk, has also been successfully concluded. This programme initially entailed physical prompts and a continuous schedule of reinforcement. Later these were replaced with a verbal prompt (“Biscuit”) and a thinned reinforcement schedule. We hypothesize that the word “biscuit” is now interpreted by G as “Get into the car this instant”. Again, a programme to teach leash-acceptance has changed the target behaviour from the initial flying snatch of a biscuit at full gallop to appropriate immobility while the leash is snapped on.

It may be of some interest, especially to those concerned in the nature/nurture debate, that G's sister K, also placed in foster care elsewhere, has never shown the problem behaviours described, nor any other. As K's foster mother says with some complacency “She is very lively but we've never had to bribe her with eatables”. At this point it is possible only to speculate on the apparent differences in the ongoing environment, following both parentage and early maternal nurturance in common for the two subjects, and to hazard the supposition that different responses to behaviours in the early foster placement period were responsible for the different behaviour patterns that developed in each subject. Nevertheless it is noticeable that the beneficial changes in G were brought about without any diminution in her idiosyncratic resourcefulness (e.g., when half a pound of chocolate ice-cream was left recently on a high table she managed to get and gulp it before being discovered). Notwithstanding the efficacy of the intervention in re-orienting some of G's behaviours, there is no question of her having developed into a compliant robot.

Perhaps we might mention here that one of us (JC) has also been involved recently with another subject, and with the design and monitoring of a

programme to teach appropriate use of a cat-flap. At the outset this entailed graded training, the flap being placed at increasingly acute angles. It became apparent however that the subject, D, was at best mildly mentally handicapped (this is a subject of dispute with the foster mother in question who maintains that D is severely mentally handicapped) and this phase of the programme lasted ten weeks. The foster mother then reported that D could successfully negotiate the flap, but only with the aid of a gestural prompt. On further questioning it became apparent that this gestural prompt, a pointing finger, in fact involved marginal movement of the flap. The foster mother was then instructed to fade this prompt, placing the pointing finger adjacent to but not touching the flap, and then gradually to fade the prompt further still to a weak wave of the wrist, and ultimately no gesture of any kind. Within a further week the prompt was entirely faded and D now springs back and forth through the cat-flap of her own volition. It is not necessary to point out the benefit that the acquisition of this essential skill has conferred on this disadvantaged subject.

Readers may like to know that we propose establishing, in the near future, a new Special Interest Group within the British Association of Behavioural Psychotherapy to be entitled the "Group for the Assessment and Treatment of Small Domestic Pets." Subscriptions (£30 per annum) may be sent to the first author, and subscribers may receive a Newsletter at erratic intervals.

**Janet Carr**  
**Joan Bicknell**

*Department of Psychology,  
Department of Psychiatry,  
St George's Hospital  
Medical School,  
University of London.*