A chicken, a rabbit, a duck, or any creature has emotions, and these emotions cannot be ignored. Dealing with an animal's emotions can be difficult as it is hard enough to deal with a person's emotions. Let us think about this. We can talk to another person and he can talk with us. He can tell us what he is feeling, what his emotions are, and we can help him to overcome his fear, appease his anger, or share his love. But we have no way of communicating with a chicken, a duck, or a rabbit. We can only observe their actions and then make an intelligent guess. Even after we are pretty sure what emotion the animal is experiencing, we have no way of discussing it with him. If the chicken is afraid, we cannot tell her there is nothing to fear. If the bull has been angered by our actions, we cannot explain them to him. If the dog is made jealous by our attention to another pet, we cannot tell the dog that we still love him. Therefore, the only way we have to deal with an animal's emotions is through our physical actions. If the chicken is fearful, we try to remove what she is afraid of. If the bull is angry, we probably just leave him along until he cools off. If the dog is jealous we pat him to show him that we love him.

FEAR IN ANIMALS

In working with most animals, fear will be the most common emotion displayed. The animal may be afraid of humans, the props, or the noises of the training room. If an animal is to be a successful performer he must conquer these fears. This process of overcoming fear is known as emotional adaptation, and can be greatly aided by the people who work with the animal. It is, in fact, most important for the trainer to know how to tame and care for a scary animal because severe fright or rough handling can ruin an otherwise good and sometimes very costly, animal. It is hard to prescribe rules to cover all animals, just as it is hard to prescribe a medicine for all people; therefore, the trainer's judgment is all important.
There are, however, some guidelines which are helpful, and in fact necessary for the taming and handling of any animal.

1) A person should never punish the animal unless control cannot be obtained in any other way. For example, mild punishment would be needed to teach a dog not to chase cars or not to bark, but no punishment should be used to teach the dog to sit. The dog should not be hit or yelled at if he makes a mistake in his trick.

2) A person should be careful not to make sudden movements or sharp noises around an animal, especially a scary one. The animal should be handled gently; he should not be squeezed, hit, pushed, or thrown around. Such things are, in fact, punishment to the animal.

3) The trainer should introduce all new stimuli and situations very gradually. If a new sound is used, the trainer should sound it softly at first. If a flashing or rapidly moving object is to be used, such as a banner or bright sign, it should be a little ways away at first so that the animal can see it at a distance to start with and then gradually brought closer. Sometimes it is a good idea for the trainer to give the animal a free reward when a new situation is introduced. For this reason, it will help if the animal is a bit hungrier than usual because then the calming effect of food will be greater. Any time a new sound or object is introduced, the trainer may have to drop back in his ratio requirements. This is particularly true of automatic acts where loud noises or lights of the prop cannot be lessened in degree. For example, perhaps a chicken has been dancing for a ratio of 15 seconds on an open house prop. If she is put into the automatic prop with lights and music, the number of seconds which she is required to dance may need to be reduced to 4 or 5.

4) As a final note, we might mention that most animals will respond to and, in fact, flourish under a little love and friendliness from their trainers. It may seem corny to the trainer to pat a rabbit or cuddle a chicken, but it can be surprising what effect such actions can have in the reduction of an animal's fear.