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Dog Piece

Comments On the October 3 ABC 20/20 Segment

Did any of you see the 20/20 segment on ABC that aired on Friday, October 3? We missed it, but [click here](#) to view the transcript.

The story was about John Stossel and his male Tibetan terrier puppy, Oscar. While John was able to work through housetraining and other puppy issues, the big problem was Oscar's biting. He bit John on the ear while playing, bit a veterinarian in the face, tore a visitor's pants, and bit John's son. Obviously, Oscar and John have a problem.

John consulted a trainer and was told that Oscar was feeling threatened, thinking that he needed to protect himself. The solution, said the trainer, was to teach Oscar that John is in charge, is the "dominant dog", and Oscar should learn to rely on John to protect him. How to accomplish this? Use pops on the leash and collar to correct Oscar.

Because John's leash skills were apparently not good enough, Oscar went in to a board and train program. After two weeks, he came back and was still "his wild old self". While Oscar will now respond to basic commands, John states that "he still sometimes jumps at people, and if the leash didn't stop him, I think he'd bite."

Not surprising. This sequence of events - and their outcome - is why I thought this story important enough to share with you. It's an example of fuzzy thinking about dog behavior. Let's look at a few of the fallacies.

If Oscar is afraid and feeling threatened, (making the biting fear motivated) punishment won't help him be less afraid and won't decrease his likelihood to bite.

If Oscar is supposed to trust John to keep him safe, how will pops on the collar teach him to trust? And how will he learn to trust John if someone else is training him?

How will John being dominant over Oscar help Oscar to like visitors

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Our Piece

How Teaching Your Pet To Wear a Halloween Costume Could Save Her Life

Halloween is approaching. Are you planning a costume for your dog or cat? Years ago we dressed our first Dalmatian, Katie, up in a black cape and booties. I don't remember if she was supposed to be the wicked witch of the west or Bat Woman, but she had fun parading around - mostly because there was food involved!

Many pets are anywhere from intimidated to annoyed with body attire. They'll either be convinced they can't move a muscle with all this stuff wrapped around their bodies, or, they'll immediately insist on shaking, pawing or chewing off those adorable costumes.

Aside from the normal safety concerns regarding costumes, you can make Halloween dress-up time less stressful for your pets by introducing them to their costumes now. Introduce your pet to just one piece of her costume at a time, starting with the one you think your pet is going to dislike the least.

Gently place this piece on your pet as you ply her with irresistible treats, give her a toy

better?

Oscar still wants to bite people. The leash, and Oscar's response to commands, has allowed John to better manage his behavior, but it hasn't really changed it.

The first step in modifying this serious behavior is to understand why Oscar is biting. The story doesn't provide enough detail for us to know for sure why Oscar is biting.

But it sounds as though John's ear may have been the victim of Oscar becoming overly aroused during play. The intensity with which he used his mouth is troubling, however.

Puppy play biting is a different problem than territorial aggression, which I suspect is the motivation for Oscar's behavior toward visitors. Procedures that are helpful for puppy play biting - such as not engaging in wrestling games, abruptly ending a play session and a time out - will be totally irrelevant for territorial behavior. This requires changing Oscar's ideas about visitors.

Rather than reacting to them as territorial intruders, Oscar needs to learn how to be friendly. This might require discouraging and minimizing Oscar's chances to display "on patrol" behavior, counter conditioning techniques to help him anticipate "good things" from everyone who walks through the door, and good control when visitors arrive, perhaps by using a [Gentle Leader](#).

If Oscar is friendly with people when off his territory, giving him more opportunities to meet and greet, so he has chances to practice friendly behaviors, may also be helpful - especially if Oscar can later meet these same folks in his own home.

I'm keeping my fingers crossed for Oscar and John. This story points out the importance of correctly understand the 'why' of dog behavior. If behavior is misunderstood, the techniques used to change it will at best be irrelevant and at worse harmful, and resolution of the problem will be delayed.

Our [Canine Behavior Telecourse](#) discusses concepts such as dominance, territoriality, fear, drives and motivation from a scientific viewpoint. We want to help you gain a clearer understanding of dog behavior so you can prevent problems and make your relationship the best it can be.

Canines in Costume

A reader forwarded us pictures of dogs in Halloween costumes. They've likely been floating around the internet, so you may have seen them. They are another example of how we treat our pets as family. [Click here](#) to view all five pictures.

In addition to being fun to look at, you can learn quite a bit about canine body postures by studying each picture carefully. Look at Boxer Face. See how the Boxer's head and neck are down and his head is turned away from what's in front of him? These are submissive and avoidance postures.

Look at Pumpkin Pinscher. See how her ears are laid back and she's panting? Laid back ears are a sign of fear or submission, and panting is a sign of stress.

she rarely gets, gently massage her, and/or talk in soothing tones of voice. Leave the piece of costume on for only a few seconds, then take it off. Give your pet a break for a few seconds, and repeat the process two or three more times.

When your pet is tolerating the costume piece, leave it on for a bit longer. Try taking your dog for a short walk, or dangling the cat dancer for your cat, to keep your pet's attention focused on something enjoyable.

Repeat these steps with each piece of costume before dressing her up in the complete outfit. If your young children are going to help, carefully supervise them to keep their handling of your pet gentle. If your kids become frustrated because the pet is struggling and trying to escape, just let it go and try again another time, perhaps when your pet is a bit tired or sleepy.

If your dog or cat has issues about body handling, you might want to rethink your idea of a Halloween costume. Instead, begin to condition your pet to be more relaxed when his feet are touched, or your cat to be more tolerant of tummy rubs. Use the same baby steps and enticements we just described. Set a goal for a Christmas costume instead.

Pets who are relaxed about body handling are easier to take care of. Nail trims aren't nightmares, and combing your cat isn't a threat to life and limb. Ease in handling also allows your pet to receive better medical care. Your pet won't have the benefit of the best care possible when she is ill or injured, if she tries to hurt people who are trying to help her. So - by teaching your pet to wear a costume - you may be saving her life by teaching her to accept having her body handled.

The Canine Pep Squad is also not too happy. Look at the laid back ears of the middle dog, and more panting from the dog on the right. The dog on the left, although her ears are pulled back slightly, appears less disturbed.

Disco Dog looks much more confident with her upright position, head held high and direct gaze. Maybe it's all that extra hair that gave her such self-assurance!

We can't tell much about the body postures of the Halloween Ghosts, so we don't know what they think of their costumes. This illustrates an important point. If an unfamiliar dog you are greeting shows no reaction to your presence - no attempts to be friendly, no avoidance, no fear, no threats, or no aggression - proceed cautiously. He's not telling you how he feels, and that makes him potentially dangerous, because you can't predict what he's likely to do next. The Ghosts however look like they might be Labradors, and if so, they are probably counting the seconds until they can get into their Halloween candy!

To learn more about canine body postures, [click here](#) for our Canine Body Posture videotape.

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What's New at ABA

Recent Activities

Did you know that October is Adopt a Shelter Dog Month? The [ASPCA](#) in New York encourages you to visit your local animal shelter to find the perfect four-legged match. Suzanne was honored when the ASPCA asked her to contribute content from ABA's tips booklets for their promotional brochure that was mailed to thousands of shelters nationwide. [Click here](#) to view Suzanne's article in PDF format. If you like what you see and want more, click on the titles to order our booklets - [76 Ways to Get Your Dog To do What You Want](#) and [What Dogs Need and How They Think](#).

Look for a quote from Dr. Hetts in [Dr. Marty Becker's](#) "The Bond Column", about Halloween and pets, appearing in hundreds of Knight Ridder newspapers. Dr. Becker is the veterinary correspondent for Good Morning America, and the author of Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul and The Healing Power of Pets. Suzanne was also on Dr. Becker's radio show twice last May.

We just presented a class on Introducing Your Pet To Your New Baby, at two hospitals in the Denver area. Expectant parents wanted to know everything from how to help their dog get along with people who would be visiting the baby to how to help their pets not be mad at them for giving them less attention after the baby comes. We'll soon be creating a streaming audio course on this topic you can access through the web, plus a CD and a tips booklet. Look for more information in the next few months!

About Our Services

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Cat Piece

Keeping Your Cat Indoors

With Halloween approaching, it's a good time to keep your cat indoors if you aren't already doing so. It's dangerous for cats to roam outside unsupervised, not to mention the problems they can create for neighbors.

When you decide to turn your indoor-outdoor cat into a strictly indoor cat, it's better to do so "cold-turkey" rather than gradually. If your cat meows to go outside, and you randomly let him out sometimes and not others, he will continue to pester to go out, because that behavior works for him some of the time. Intermittent reinforcement such as this is the very best way to create a cat who doesn't give up pestering.

You can allow your cat supervised or restricted outside time. A patented barrier system called [Cat Fence - In](#) can be installed along the top of any fence to keep a cat in the yard. A [Kittywalk](#) is a series of portable chew-proof wire-mesh arched tunnels that can be set up anywhere. Or you can teach your cat to walk on a leash and harness.

To prevent your cat from pestering you for access to his Kittywalk or to be taken for a walk, use a conditioned signal. When the signal is present, teach him that outside time will not be allowed. Ignore his pestering, or even give him a time out in a bathroom for a few minutes. But, when the signal is gone, his requests to go out will be honored.

Let's Link

The subscription list for our newsletter continues to grow, and is now over 800 members! We'd appreciate you emailing our newsletter to a friend who likes learning more about pet behavior.

Do you have a website? Are you interested in trading links? Linking is one of the best ways to obtain a better position with the search engines. If you'd like to exchange links, [email us](#) your URL and let's review each other's sites to see if a mutual link is a good fit.

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What to use for a signal? Any object dangling from the door that will grab your cat's attention. Something as simple as a colored paper plate hanging from a string. Make sure the plate hangs down to cat-eye level so your cat won't miss it. The plate may have an added advantage of being something your cat can bat at, and distract him from wanting to go outside.

In the meantime, make your cat's indoor environment more fulfilling for him. Bring in a small section of tree branch for him to scratch. See if you can interest your cat in a cat video. Your cat may enjoy one of several battery-operated toys that change direction whenever they encounter an obstacle. Make sure you make sufficient time to play with him or just hang out together.

Our cats are too dear to put them at risk with unsupervised roaming, especially at Halloween.

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