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Dog Piece

Fearful Dogs

Lately we've had quite a few calls from people with fearful dogs. Two of Suzanne's recent cases involved a hound mix, and a Shar-Pei. During the in-home consultation, these dogs were so fearful they couldn't be touched. Any movement toward them caused them to run away, tails tucked, ears back. The hound barked incessantly at visitors, although he'd never bitten. The Shar-Pei had bitten at times when he couldn't escape.

Both dogs were acquired at less than 12 weeks of age. The hound was adopted from a rescue group that had euthanized the rest of his litter due to "anti-social" behavior (the hound's new owners weren't told what this meant). The Shar-Pei was acquired from an amateur breeder. The dam growled, barked and showed her teeth at people coming to visit the puppies. The prospective puppy buyers thought this was normal behavior for a female protecting her puppies.

Once in their new homes, both dogs received plenty of attention from the family but weren't taken out and about much. This limited their socialization experiences to what they were familiar with. Without repeated experiences with unfamiliar things, puppies never learn to cope with anything new and different. Under-socialized puppies can't adjust to changes well, and are fearful and/or aggressive with new people or unfamiliar events.

When I saw them the Shar-Pei's owners were concerned about the biting, and the hound's family just wanted to help him be more tolerant of and quieter around visitors. Unfortunately, both families are going to have an uphill battle, and are likely to be limited in how much change they're going to be able to make in their dogs' behaviors.

The behavior of the hound's littermates and the Shar-Pei's

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Our Piece

"What can I do to stop my female cat from following me and meowing loudly whenever I walk into the nursery to put my 18 month old baby down for his nap? My baby is already asleep and the cat's meows wake him up."

What an interesting behavior! Cats don't meow and cry a lot to communicate with each other, but they do use these vocalizations to communicate with people. This cat is most likely anxious about what her "mom" is doing or is unhappy about being excluded from the social interaction between mom and baby, and is meowing for attention.

You may be thinking a simple solution is to shut the door and not allow the cat in the nursery, or just squirt her with a water bottle when she meows. The first idea won't stop the meowing - she'd probably meow outside the door, which could be just as disruptive. The water might work IF mom could use it quickly and immediately, but could also create additional fear or anxiety reactions.

I'd like to know whether the cat meows at other times when mom and baby go into the nursery. If she does, then the meowing is unrelated to nap time. If she doesn't, this indicates there is something unique about the naptime ritual that is triggering the meowing and we need to find out what it is.

I'd also like to know what mom does

dam were big red warning signs. A puppy's relatives can provide information about genetic behavioral tendencies. While behavior patterns aren't directly inherited and individual variation certainly occurs among related individuals, a puppy whose relatives have problems is at greater risk of having the same tendencies. These genetic tendencies will set limits on how much these puppies' behaviors can be changed.

Such at risk puppies need extensive socialization to give them the best chance of overcoming any fearful or aggressive tendencies. During puppy hood, both the hound and the Shar-Pei's social group was primarily their families. Most puppies - and these puppies in particular - need more social experiences than that. By the age of 12 weeks, puppies need positive experiences with many different people, animals, places and things. Between 12 and 16 weeks, puppies become increasingly fearful of anything unfamiliar, and it is this developmental process that closes the window for socialization.

Social deficits during the sensitive period for socialization can never be completely compensated for. To maximize your chances of having a friendly outgoing companion, choose a puppy whose relatives show these same behaviors, who isn't fearful herself, and then socialize, socialize, socialize. For more information about raising well behaved puppies buy our [Puppy Behavior Wellness Manual](#).

Cat Piece

The Attack Cat

Have you ever seen a true "attack cat"? We saw one recently that was quite scary. This cat had attacked her owner while the person was quietly sitting in bed reading. Although the woman could pet the cat if she approached from behind, the cat would bite and scratch if her owner reached toward her to pet her.

To test this reaction, Suzanne reached toward the cat with a fake plastic hand, ala Sue Sternberg's "Assess-a-Hand" which many of you are familiar with. This cat grabbed the hand with her front legs and paws and began biting the hand repeatedly. As the cat worked her way up the sleeve, biting as she went, Suzanne became concerned the cat was going to continue right up her arm. Thankfully she didn't. A few minutes later, the cat again attacked the hand, after Suzanne had quietly placed it on the couch. After that, the cat laid down on top of the hand and proceeded to take a nap!

This is somewhat unusual behavior for a cat! We don't have a good label for this aggressive display. The most common types of aggression that cats show to people are play motivated, defensive or fear, and occasionally redirected aggression. Cats - unlike dogs - are rarely territorially aggressive to people. This cat's behavior clearly did not fit into any of these categories.

While some might want to label this "dominance aggression" because the aggression was triggered in part by reaching

when the cat meows. It's not always true that pets will misbehave to receive any kind of attention, even if it's a scolding. This would only be the case if this cat hasn't been rewarded with attention for good behaviors (such as being quiet) and if she's somewhat attention deprived because more time is understandably being devoted to the baby and less to her.

Without this information, we could take a general approach, and try to make the cat feel better about nap time. As mom takes baby into the nursery, she could drag the cat's favorite toy along or toss it in front of her. A special treat the cat loves could be tossed instead. This decreases her anxiety, and also helps her be included, thus decreasing her need to meow.

Alternatively, going to the nursery could become a conditioned signal for another enjoyable event. Mom could put a little canned food out for the cat in another room before heading for the nursery. This gives the cat another positive activity and keeps her busy till mom's done.

Our recommendations might change with more insight into what is going on. But the general idea is rather than asking how we can get the cat to stop meowing, ask instead, how can we encourage and reward quiet behavior.

If your pet has a behavior problem you'd like help with, [Click here](#) to send us a request to contact you to schedule an appointment.

What's New at ABA

First Sessions of Telecourses Completed

We just completed our first group of telecourses on [Canine Behavior](#) and [Animal Learning](#).

Participants in our [Behavior Course](#) acquired new perspectives on social dominance in dogs, compared displacement and submissive behaviors with "calming signals" and learned the difference between drives and motivation, to name just a few discussion topics.

[Learning class](#) participants were given

toward the cat, we probably shouldn't jump to this conclusion. Social hierarchies in cats are not comparable to those of dogs. Canid social structures tend to be very ordered, with clear social roles among all members of the group. This is not usually true for cats.

While some cats in a group may have priority access to favorite resting spots for example, cats rarely fight with each other over possession of objects - a common component of social status in dogs. And rather than fight over space, cats tend to share it - one cat may claim the window perch in the morning, while another gets it in the afternoon.

The owner was understandably afraid of the cat. And the cat made Suzanne a bit nervous, as it sat next to her on the couch flicking its tail back and forth. A behavior modification plan must be done carefully, as the owner's safety is most important.

Labeling the cat's behavior as "dominance" or something else, is really irrelevant as far as what should be done to modify the behavior. It's often more productive to just work with the behavior you see rather than attaching a label to it.

In this case, the goal is to convince the cat that someone reaching toward her is not a reason to feel threatened and therefore be aggressive. If we can pair reaching toward her with something she loves (a technique called classical counter conditioning), and do so in small increments (a process called desensitization) we can hopefully teach her to at least tolerate, and maybe even enjoy, a hand coming toward her.

We instructed the owner to begin making tiny movements toward the cat - perhaps moving her hand a quarter of an inch forward - while with the other hand (and minimal motion) gently tossing a tidbit aimed at a point between the cat's feet. Most cat owners have to experiment a bit to find a treat their cats will like. The owner must be very cautious not to overdo these movements. Using the fake hand instead is a possibility, but the cat seemed to be more reactive to it than the real thing.

After many repetitions the cat should be anticipating a treat arriving at her feet when a hand makes a small motion toward her. At that point, the owner should increase her hand's forward motion to perhaps a half inch and repeat the pairing of hand-food.

This is a tedious, time consuming process because many repetitions of many small increments are required. However, it's obvious that physical confrontation with this cat to "discipline" her or "dominate" her is out of the question. It's not only dangerous but counter productive. This cat is more likely to get better if her owner can manage her in the short-term by avoiding situations that might trigger the cat's aggression, or is able to quickly interrupt the behavior if necessary.

If you'd like to learn more about the basic nature of cats and how to create a cat friendly environment that meets your cat's behavioral needs while preventing behavior problems sign up for our Telecourse [What Your Cat Wants You To Know](#). Your

tons of practice categorizing operant conditioning outcomes - can you explain how a dog is negatively reinforced for eating the candy wrapper when he sees you coming to take it away?

Here's what a few of our first group of participants had to say about the classes:

"An informative and extremely convenient way of listening to the experts. The coursework covered is detailed, relevant and up to the minute, and Suzanne and Dan bring a real enthusiasm to the telecourse." Pam K.

"Both courses were very informative and thought provoking. The lectures were well structured yet flexible to accommodate questions and discussion." Lori H.

"Dan and Suzanne kept the information flowing, encouraged dialogue and questions and gave real life examples that clearly illustrated and/or demonstrated the subject matter." Janice S.

Sound interesting? Registration is now open for our next classes. Sign up now and avoid the last minute rush! Click on the course titles above to sign up.

Want to get your feet wet before committing to a four-week class? Check out our two [free Telecourses](#). More information in the "[About Our Services](#)" section of this newsletter.

About Our Services

Free Teleclass Offer

Have you been wanting to try our telecourses but haven't been sure whether you'd like the format? Well now's your chance to find out.

We are offering **two FREE teleclasses** this month. Choose from [Managing Chaos at the Door](#) , or [Creating A Cat Friendly Litterbox](#). Both classes are 1 hour in length.

In the "**Chaos**" class you'll learn how to control your canines when the doorbell rings, and how to curb your dog's territorial reactions while promoting friendly behavior.

cat will be glad you did!

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The "**Litterbox**" class explains in detail the features of litterboxes that are important to cats which you must get right if your cat is going to use the box reliably.

Registration for both classes is free but you must sign up in advance. The only cost to you is that of a long distance phone call.

Send us an email with your name, email address and telephone number (in case of email problems) to ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com. Within 48 hours you'll receive a reply with the telephone number to call, access code, and instructions regarding teleclass etiquette. You'll receive a second reminder the day before class. Each teleclass is limited to 50 people, so sign up NOW before they fill up.

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