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Dog Piece

Socialization: It Isn't Just for Puppies

If you are a dog owner, you are probably aware of the importance of socializing your puppy. Dogs have a sensitive period for socialization between the ages of 3 and 12 weeks. This means that pleasant exposures to people, other dogs and other animals during this time will have long-lasting influences on the sociability of your dog. Well socialized dogs tend to be friendlier and less fearful of the kinds of individuals they were socialized to.

Veterinarians, dog trainers and other dog professionals urge new puppy owners to take their dogs to puppy classes and to provide other socializing experiences. Although this is excellent advice, a puppy class by 4 months of age or a basic training class at 6 months shouldn't be the end of a dog's social training.

Don't underestimate how important it is to continue to socialize your dog well into adulthood. We've seen quite a few dogs that seem to have been well socialized early in life, were friendly and accepting of people and other dogs and then began to react with threats or aggression during social encounters. These dogs had no traumatic or frightening experiences but became fearful and/or aggressive later, usually beginning around 8 months to 2 years of age.

For example, Wendy recently called us about a problem developing with her St. Bernard, Eddie. Wendy took Eddie to puppy class and made sure he had frequent contact with other people and dogs during puppyhood and later. He always seemed to like people and was very friendly.

Soon after Eddie turned a year and a half old, Wendy and her

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Our Piece

Bite Prevention and Safe Animal Handling Training

Consider the following:

--A veterinary receptionist was bitten in the face by a client's dog. The receptionist had received no training on dog handling nor on handling aggressive dogs.

--An assistant dog trainer was bitten on the neck by a client's dog as she was helping the owner teach the dog to sit. The dog had a history of growling at the owners when reached for, although the assistant was not told this.

--A shelter in North Dakota requires its volunteer dog walkers to take a class on how to train and handle the dogs.

--A shelter in Vancouver was ordered by the Workers Compensation Board to immediately develop a vicious dog handling course after one of its officers was severely bitten transporting an injured Rottweiler.

If your job involves handling or interacting with animals, what kind of training did you receive to safely be able to do so? If you are an animal related business or facility what kind of training do you provide your staff? Informal on-the-job training cannot ensure employees receive consistent, complete or accurate information.

Injuries from bites are no small concern for animal related businesses. In 2002,

husband moved from the city to the country, and Eddie saw very few people or animals in his new home. Now Eddie is almost two and he has been growling and lunging at people who come to the house or he sees from the car. This is new behavior for the previously friendly Eddie.

What's going on here? We can't know for sure why Eddie has become more aggressive, but we see quite a few dogs whose behavior changes after a change in the frequency of their social contacts. After the family's move, Eddie had almost no experiences with unfamiliar people. It is possible that this lack of continued social experience has contributed to Eddie's aggressiveness.

Another recent case involved a very friendly 3 year old mixed breed dog whose behavior gradually changed after the birth of two children and a move to a new home. Lucky received fewer and fewer walks as mom and dad became more involved in child rearing. She spent more time watching and barking at people and dogs who would frequently appear in an open space right across the street from her new home.

In her book "[The Other End of the Leash](#)" applied animal behaviorist Dr. Patricia McConnell talks about "juvenile-onset shyness", a period in adolescence when dogs become more cautious and perhaps aggressive towards people and animals who are unfamiliar to them. If this aggression is due to a lack of experiences in adolescence or early adulthood, one way to prevent it would be to continue socialization well into adulthood.

These activities might include taking your dog out frequently to meet other people. Regular play dates with other dogs and/or trips to the doggie park can help continue socialization. Dogs also need to meet and have pleasant experiences with people who come to the home. In Lucky's case, one technique we recommended was to have every visitor toss treats on the floor for her immediately upon entering.

So remember, that your work isn't done once you've done all the right socialization activities during puppy hood. Dogs need continued socialization throughout their lives. If you'd like to learn more about your dog's behavior and how to have a behaviorally healthy dog, take our [Just Behave](#) telecourse. This month's session comes with a free bonus - see **About Our Services** in this newsletter.

Cat Piece

Gilbert: The Lucky Kitten

Dr. Hetts recently had the opportunity to help out a kitten in need. Gilbert, a 7 month old, intact male black and white kitten came to [Cat Care Society](#) in January. CCS in Lakewood Colorado, provides temporary homes for up to 50 homeless, abandoned and abused cats until appropriate, permanent homes can be found.

the [American Animal Hospital Association's](#) workers compensation program paid over \$374, 335 for 666 claims in the "contact/exposure" category, which was mostly due to dog and cat bites and scratches.

In addition to the financial impact, lost work time, personal human trauma from bites, and potential liability consequences for animal facilities, what about the consequences for the animal?

When pets have scary experiences at the kennel, groomers, training class, veterinary clinic or doggie day care, they begin to anticipate the worst, become defensive more easily, and more difficult to handle during subsequent visits. Dogs and cats can also generalize these bad experiences to similar situations.

We recently consulted with the owner of a young terrier puppy who was traumatized during his first nail trim and later tried to bite the owner when she tried to brush him and clean mud from his paws.

Ask yourself the following:

--What do animals experience (see, hear, smell and feel) when they first enter your facility or class?

--Have you evaluated the arrangement of your physical environment from the animal's perspective?

--Can you name four common body postures most people assume when greeting unfamiliar dogs and cats that the animals perceive as offensive threats?

--Do you know what questions about behavior must be on any intake form for an animal coming to your facility or class?

--Do you have at least two types of protocols for information sharing among staff members about the behavior of the animals currently in your care or in your facility or class?

Along with [Dr. John Wright](#), a certified applied animal behaviorist in Macon Georgia, we present six hours of lecture on animal behavior at the [National Animal Control Association's](#) Level I Training Academies which are conducted across the country. Among

According to Kathy Hill, Executive Director of CCS, Gilbert's owner relinquished him after her children had handled Gilbert roughly, thrown rocks at him and the family left him outside in freezing weather for three days. Gilbert had almost four days of "calm down" time at the Society and still couldn't be handled. He would strike out when staff walked by his cage and tried to bite whenever staff extended their hands toward him.

Even after a move to a larger room, Gilbert was still unpredictably aggressive. At that point, Kathy called me and said she thought the only way Gilbert was going to make it was if he had the benefit of a professional behavior modification program.

Suzanne agreed to help, and went to CCS to meet Gilbert. CCS has large community rooms where cats are housed once they've completed their intake period. Here's Suzanne's report:

When I first saw Gilbert, he was lying on a cat bed on top of a tall, indoor cat enclosure. When I extended my hand toward him, he sniffed, allowed me to touch his head briefly, and then began to growl.

A few seconds later I offered Gilbert my hand again and this time he hissed, swatted me and snapped at my hand without making contact. Gilbert's body postures indicated he was offensively motivated - he didn't move away from my hand, his ears were upright, and he was staring straight at me. Kathy said that was typical, and Gilbert would escalate to scratching and biting if petted longer or picked up.

Gilbert needed to learn to trust that people touching him would not harm him. To accomplish this, every interaction with a person had to have a pleasant consequence for Gilbert. First, people and their hands were paired with something enjoyable for Gilbert. We used tasty canned food.

Second, people were to avoid crossing Gilbert's boundaries regarding how much contact with people he wanted. Too often people make the mistake of forcing pets to accept contact they clearly do not want and do not enjoy.

I recommended every act of reaching toward Gilbert be paired with a little canned cat food. Gilbert was not given free access to canned food during the behavior modification period. Only brief touching was allowed, so as not to trigger Gilbert's threatening or aggressive behavior. Staff were not to touch Gilbert unless they offered him food. Gilbert also received a lot of toy-directed play time.

Training sessions were brief - several minutes - but frequent - six or more times per day. If Gilbert became threatening, staff were instructed to pick up the cat food, or the toy, leave the room and try again a few minutes later.

Kathy reported that within 24 hours, Gilbert was a different kitten. He was calmer, much less aggressive and more predictable.

other topics, these lectures teach animal control officers how to observe and interpret dog and cat communication and what to do to avoid being bitten.

Drs. Estep and Hetts have given presentations to veterinarians, technicians, groomers and kennel owners at national conferences on how to use behavioral knowledge to safely and humanely interact with animals and create behaviorally friendly environments. Dr. Hetts will be speaking on this topic at the [Midwest Veterinary Conference](#) in Columbus Ohio on February 27.

We are in the process of creating a telecourse based on this material that will discuss staff interactions with animals, operational protocols, and elements of the physical environment which can help to keep staff safe and pets calm and relaxed. If you'd like to be the first to know about the launch of this course and how you can register, send an email to Ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com, with your name, email address, mailing address and telephone number. Mention the safe behavioral handling telecourse in the subject line or message.

What's New at ABA

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Our webmaster has been ill, so the dates mentioned in this newsletter for our next sessions of telecourses will not be on our website until Friday, February 13. However, you can still register for any course now. Because we don't have multiple sessions of each course running concurrently, there won't be any confusion. Thanks for your patience and understanding.

Newsletter Receives New Look

You'll notice our newsletter has a slightly new look. Based on your feedback- and the time available to us each month to write - we decided to remove two sections. This will make the newsletter a little shorter and easier to read. Hope you like the change!

Dr. Hetts in the News

Look for Dr. Hetts' Special Report on whether puppy testing can predict

After two weeks of additional behavior modification, Gilbert was neutered and placed up for adoption. Here's the latest update from Kathy on Gilbert's progress:

"After his neuter he was integrated into the Kitten room. He plays and gets along well with the kittens (he does get a little rough at times). We let him out in the main shelter area. He had a ball running up and down the hallway. He has not shown any aggressive behavior to anyone! He does grumble a bit if you pick him up and he doesn't want to be held, but that is about the extent of it. He is really a pretty cool cat - thank you so much for all your help! It was a real boost for all our staff. Most of them were afraid of him and now they're all playing and holding him. He gets lots of kisses!"

The take-home messages from Gilbert's case are: 1) a pet's behavioral starting point must be respected. It doesn't help to see how far you can go or to push the pet to accept things he's not ready for, 2) consistency and frequent practice are keys and 3) behavior modification plans require precision and correct implementation to be effective.

Kathy and her staff are to be congratulated for their commitment to Gilbert and to implementing his behavior modification plan correctly. If you'd like to learn more about cat behavior and how to create friendly cats, take our [What Your Cat Wants You To Know](#) two-week telecourse. The next sessions begins March 16, 2004. [Click here](#) to go to our website for a course description and to register.

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personality. The article "**Putting Puppies to the Test**" appears in the March issue of [Dog World](#).

Suzanne appeared on Denver's ABC affiliate, KMGH TV Channel 7 to discuss how to protect yourself if confronted by a potentially dangerous dog. The segment aired on Monday, February 9.

She also appeared on several CBS affiliate stations this week in the story about medications for behavior problems, which we told you about last month.

About Our Services

SPECIAL TELECOURSE OFFER

You still have 24 hours to sign up for our next session of [Just Behave: How to Get Your Dog to Do What You Want](#)" 2 week telecourse. We are offering a special registration bonus for this session. In addition to 10 pages of class notes we are including free copies of our two tips booklets [76 Ways to Get Your Dog To do What You Want](#) and [What Dogs Need and How They Think](#). [Click here](#) to register before class begins on Thursday, February 12 and take advantage of this bonus offer. The bonus won't appear in the shopping cart, but we'll take care of it when we receive your registration.

TELECOURSE UPDATES

We apologize for the glitch on our website that prevented some of you from registering for our free **Managing Chaos at the Door** teleclass. Our wonderful webmaster was finally able to correct the problem. Thanks to all of you who alerted us to this difficulty. We'll repeat this course on Thursday, March 31 at 6pm Mountain time. [Click here](#) to register, or visit our website.

Registration is open for the next sessions of telecourses! [Fundamentals of Animal Learning](#) begins March 11, [Fundamentals of Canine Behavior](#) begins April 5, and [Becoming A Great Dog Trainer](#) begins March 30. Reserve your space early. Just click on the titles or go to Services for Professionals, and then Telecourses on our website.

The streaming audio version of our free **Creating a Cat Friendly Litterbox** will be available on our website starting

February 17.

EMAIL CONSULTATIONS COMING SOON

Beginning in late March, we are adding a new service - Email consultations. These will likely be priced comparable to our telephone consultations. [Dr. Jan Driscoll](#) will be the primary behaviorist involved and she is currently designing how the process will work. Look for more information in our March newsletter.

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