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## Dog Piece

### Protecting Yourself From Dogs at Large

During February, in a suburb of Denver, two pitbulls running loose accosted a woman walking her dogs along a bike path. When they heard the commotion, three young boys ran out of a nearby house to help.

The boys began hitting the dogs with hockey sticks, attempting to stop the attack. The dogs began biting at the hockey sticks and the boys' pant legs instead, and one boy remarked it was as though the dogs didn't even feel the blows.

A sheriff's deputy arrived shortly and shot the dogs. While certainly in jeopardy, the woman, her dogs, or the boys were not seriously injured. While the boys should be commended for caring enough to try to help, using physical threats against aggressive dogs is a risky business.

Dogs that are highly aroused often become more so when hit, yelled at or threatened. If you choose to try to intimidate or threaten an aggressive dog, you better be sure you can win. If you can't, and the dog escalates the conflict, he is more likely to bite you.

Not all dogs who are running loose are set on harming people and other dogs. A few years ago, Suzanne evaluated three huge Malamutes that had escaped from their yard and were running crazily through the neighborhood. The owner had been charged with owning vicious dogs.

These dogs were unruly and out of control. When they greeted me, all three jumped on me and their combined weight pushed me back against a wall. Although they were only exuberantly friendly, having three large dogs run toward me rapidly and jump on me was a bit unnerving. But the dogs were not at all aggressive, and certainly not "vicious" (whatever behavioral definition is applied to that word).

What's the best thing to do when you encounter a loose dog? First, try to assess the dog's intentions. This requires some knowledge of dog body postures and behavior. [Our Canine Body Posture videotape](#) provides this knowledge. Observing and interpreting the dog's ear and tail carriage, facial expression, and general demeanor will help you predict what the

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## Our Piece

### End of Life Decisions

Our older Dalmatian Mocha will be 13 in June. Arthritis, cataracts and senility are beginning to take their toll and we know he won't be with us much longer. Even though Suzanne was one of the co-founders of the grief education program at Colorado State University's Veterinary Teaching Hospital, and co-author of the [Human-Animal Bond and Grief](#), we've been struggling for several months now to know when it's time to say goodbye to Mocha.

Most pet owners have to face this heart wrenching decision at one time or another. We offer these suggestions, all of which we've used both personally and professionally to help us know when.

#### **1. Consider the consequences of not euthanizing your pet.**

By choosing euthanasia, you ensure your pet will receive a peaceful, painless death surrounded by those who love him. If you wait, your pet may die when you aren't home with him, or may not die comfortably.

#### **2. Trust that you will know when it's time.**

It can be frightening to be responsible for saying "it's time". Trust in yourself and in the bond you have with your pet. No one knows your pet better than you do.

#### **3. Find specific ways to say**

dog is likely to do next.

Second, your goal should be to lower the dog's arousal level. The more aroused dogs become the greater the risk they may snap or bite. Yelling, screaming, gesturing threateningly or running will excite dogs more and put you at greater risk.

Instead, make yourself appear less threatening. Stand still, and avoid making eye contact with the dog. Speak in a soothing, quiet tone of voice. If your dogs are with you, get them under control, sitting (a [Gentle Leader](#) works great) and quiet.

If you have treats with you, toss a handful in the dog's direction. Irresistible tidbits (or even a tennis ball) may not only distract the dog but lower his arousal level.

Last, if you feel you must defend yourself, carry [Direct Stop](#). This is a harmless citronella spray that for dogs, has a pungent, unpleasant odor. It has a high success rate of interrupting a variety of behaviors including barking, threatening and aggressive behavior toward people, and fights between dogs.

The neat things about citronella are it can't harm either you or the dog, and it doesn't increase a dog's arousal. While no product works all the time with every dog, we've successfully used this on loose dogs who wanted to pick a fight with our dogs while we're on a walk and to break up fights between clients' dogs.

Many dog bites could be avoided if people obeyed leash laws. Dogs cannot be allowed to run loose except in designated off-leash areas. While many people argue their dogs are friendly, it's not fair to people who are walking leashed dogs who may not be good with other dogs.

If you encounter loose dogs, report them to your local animal control agency. If you are a public service worker (cable installer, mail carrier, delivery person, etc.) check out our [Bite Prevention Program](#). We tell you how to determine if a dog you may not see is likely to be in residence on a property, how to read the body language of dogs and how to react in a safe way to dogs that you do encounter.

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## Cat Piece

### Socialization For Cats

How well does your cat ride in the car? Does your cat hide when the doorbell rings, or does she want to sit in visitors' laps within the first 10 minutes of their arrival? Does your cat enjoy being brushed and groomed, or does she have a "don't touch me" attitude about any kind of body handling?

Have you considered socializing your cat with methods similar to the way most people are told to socialize their dogs? Most cats are mildly to severely under-socialized. Cats rarely go on car-rides except to unpleasant destinations - the groomer, the kennel, the veterinarian. Indoor only cats don't have opportunities to become familiar and at ease with events outside their small world.

While we don't recommend free outdoor access, cats who are allowed outside in a supervised way, have the chance to experience and become less fearful of a variety of stimuli. Our friends at [Cat Care Society](#) believe that the cats they take in who have been on the street, adapt to new homes easier than those who have previously lived in a one-owner home.

Part of the difficulty in socializing cats is that the sensitive period for socialization occurs much earlier in cats than in dogs - between 2 and 7 weeks of age. So by the time most people acquire kittens, the window of opportunity during which cats most readily form

### goodbye.

Maybe you take your dog for one last walk on his favorite trail or treat him to a steak dinner. Your cat might enjoy a solid week of evenings spent in your lap or a tuna dinner. Write a letter to your pet telling him what he's meant to you. Create a clay paw print using a [Clay Paws kit](#).

### 4. Remember you can always change your mind.

Making an appointment for a specific time and day to euthanize your pet can feel overwhelming. Knowing that you can cancel and reschedule another time, may give you the courage to actually make the appointment.

### 5. Try to think of what's best for your pet, not just what's best for you.

As pets become elderly, they are able to do less and less and their quality of life decreases. Ask yourself if your pet can still enjoy things, or is his health so compromised that life has become an unpleasant, daily struggle.

### 6. Take it one day at a time.

Notice if your pet has more good days than bad days. Don't count on having your pet for another week or another month. Think of today and tomorrow.

### 7. Seek support from those who understand and ignore those who don't.

Many cities now have pet loss support programs. Denver has one that is coordinated through the Denver Area Veterinary Medical Society. Being able to talk about your feelings with others helps you know that you aren't alone.

### 8. Know what's normal.

It's normal to feel guilty, anxious and frightened. No matter how timely your decision, you may wish you'd waited or done it sooner. Trust that you've chosen the time that's right for both you and your pet.

It's not quite time yet for Mocha, but we know it soon will be. And it will be hard to say goodbye to our old friend.

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## What's New at ABA

### New Email consultations - Special Introductory Offer

social attachments and learn to adapt to change, is beginning to close.

This doesn't mean things are hopeless however. When Suzanne was in college, her boyfriend's roommate was a cat lover and always had several cats he acquired as young adults from the local humane society. Steve loved to camp and fish and early on would acclimate his cats to car rides, leashes and harnesses, camping and fishing gear, and the outdoors. After a while, Steve would harness the cats and tie them near him while he fished, and they'd camp with him as well, sleeping in the car at night while he slept in the tent. The cats loved it and would begin meowing and pacing excitedly when Steve put his gear in the car.

A friend and colleague, [Dr. Marsha Heinke](#), a veterinarian, CPA and practice management consultant, took cat socialization to heart and now takes her two cats to work with her everyday. They relax in the office, making sure everyone's desk is kept neat, and occasionally let Marsha know when it's time to end a telephone call by walking across the dial pad. Here's a picture of Greyson, one of Marsha's cats, with one of her assistants, at the office.



Dr. Kersti Seksel, an Australian veterinarian, has been one of the pioneers in developing kitten socialization classes. She conducts classes in her veterinary practice, where kittens have opportunities to play and socialize with each other, become accustomed to the veterinary clinic, and learn to enjoy being handled by unfamiliar people.

As a cat owner, what are some important socialization experiences you can give your cat? You can acclimate her to car rides and the cat carrier, so that neither predicts a trip to an unwanted destination. Sit in the car with her while you pet, play or feed her, and perhaps drive around the block. You can handle your cat often, pairing touching various parts of her body with a bit of tuna or other tidbit.

Start with what your cat will tolerate. If she doesn't like being touched or handled, don't force her to sit in your lap as the first step. Perhaps a 10 second rub on her cheeks while she licks a bit of tuna juice from your other hand is a better place to start. Socializing an older cat will require significantly more time and effort than socializing a kitten.

Well socialized cats have a better quality of life, show fewer fearful behaviors and can be

On March 22, 2004, we'll launch our email consulting service. We decided to create this new service because of the large number of emails we receive from people asking for help with their pets' behaviors. Email consulting will allow us to help people and pets from all over the world, as long as they can read and write English.

Interested pet owners will first complete a brief assessment form to determine if their pet's problem is suitable for email consultations. Dogs with aggressive behavior problems that have bitten hard enough to cause injury are generally not suitable for email consultations.

Once approved for an email consult, you'll go to our secure shopping cart to purchase the service. After we receive your payment, we'll email you a detailed behavior questionnaire to complete. You may be asked follow-up questions as well. After we have all the information we need, we'll create a behavior modification plan for your pet. We'll email you detailed instructions so you'll have a step-by-step plan to follow.

After you've started working with your pet, we'll expect you to email us regularly with progress reports and questions. Email consultations include three months of email follow-up, similar to our telephone consultations.

We plan on adding additional features to our email consultations in the near future. For example, in addition to written instructions, clients will be able to access streaming audio instructions on counter conditioning and other techniques that are included in many behavior modification plans. Hearing "how to" instructions in addition to reading them provides another learning option.

To introduce this new service, we are offering a special price on email consultations. Until April 1, 2004, rather than the regular price of \$150, you can purchase an email consultation for only \$125. That's almost a 20% discount!

You'll be able to purchase an email consultation from our website beginning March 22. But if you are interested in this special offer, email us

integrated into more of your activities.

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at  
[ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com](mailto:ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com)  
and we'll send you an early-bird  
evaluation form so you can be pre-  
approved by the 22nd.

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## About Our Services

### Telecourse Schedule

We still have openings on our  
[Fundamentals Of Animal Learning](#)  
Telecourse that begins Thursday,  
March 11th. We apologize for the error  
on our website that lists this course  
beginning on Wednesday, March 11th.

[What Your Cat Wants You to Know](#) is  
March 16th and 17th.

Our free [Chaos at the Door](#) class is  
Wednesday, March 31. Due to demand  
we've increased class size to 20, and  
there are only several openings left.

Another session of Pia Silvani's very  
popular [Becoming a Great Dog](#)  
[Training Instructor](#) telecourse begins  
on March 30th.

Our free [Creating a Cat Friendly](#)  
[Litterbox](#) is now available via streaming  
audio directly from our website.

April marks the start of another  
[Fundamentals of Canine Behavior](#) on  
the 5th, and [Just Behave: How to Get](#)  
[Your Dog to do What You Want](#) on the  
8th.

We hope to "see" you in one of our  
classes soon!

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