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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

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Suzanne has become very attached to Coral, our new 15 week old Irish setter

Dear Suzanne,

We can't believe summer is gone. We sacrificed many of our typical summer activities to create a selection of new products for the upcoming APDT conference and our Australia workshop. Hope you enjoy them!

- [Cat Piece: Buffett and Coral: NOT a Match Made in Heaven](#)**

While Ashley and Coral have learned to get along much sooner than we expected, our cat Buffett and Coral have taken longer than



anticipated to understand each other. At first, Buffett was clearly afraid of Coral's bouncy, enthusiastic puppy antics. He'd hiss whenever she got too close, and tried to avoid her when possible. Coral was intensely curious about Buffett, and seemed to be confused by his behavior. If given the chance, she loved to sniff him - particularly that "area-under-his-tail" - to try to learn more about him.

Coral has tried many times to get Buffett to play with her. She'll do a big play-bow (well, big for Coral's small size), paw at him, and bark in her high-pitched puppy way. Buffett of course does not view these behaviors as play

puppy, in a very short time. Suzanne has sometimes - against her better judgment as a behaviorist - let Coral get away with more than she should.

She loves to watch Coral while she sleeps, and just loves that special setter smell of her fur (it's her opinion that each breed has their own special scent).

While Dan is also attached to Coral and thinks she's a cutie, there is a real difference between us. He isn't as "gaga" over her as Suzanne. Why do such differences develop between people in their attachments to pets? Studies from animal behavior as well as social psychology give us clues about the factors that influence our attachments.

First is the amount of time spent with one another. The more time together, the stronger the attachment is likely to be. Both of us are lucky to be able to spend lots of time with our pets. So it's not surprising that both of us have relatively strong mutual bonds with not only Coral, but Ashley and Buffett too. For people who are away from home a lot and can't spend as much time with their pets, the bonds may not be as strong. The same thing might happen if a pet spends most of its time outside rather than inside the house with the family.

Pleasant physical contact, through feeding, play and petting also strengthens bonds. We're lucky to be able to spend a lot of time playing with Coral, feeding her, taking her to puppy classes and just holding her. Suzanne tends to do more cuddling with Coral than Dan, which probably has a positive, feedback effect on her attachment. Suzanne cuddles Coral and becomes more attached to her, the more attached she is, the more she cuddles her, etc. We may not become as attached to pets that either don't enjoy or don't tolerate as much physical contact.

Punishment seems to disrupt most

solicitations, but unwanted threats. He'll puff up, hiss and swat at her. When he thought she was being particularly obnoxious he'd literally box her ears, although he never hurt her.

For awhile, Coral was frightened by Buffett's behavior, but only momentarily. She'd back off, but later would try once again to play. We of course were trying to stage calm and friendly reactions between the two.

Now things are a bit different. Buffett is no longer afraid of Coral - he's figured out she's not out to hurt him. Coral still hasn't given up on her play solicitations, but she isn't quite a pushy as she used to be. Buffett will often walk by Coral and ignore her in what appears (anthropomorphically) to be a very disdainful manner. And he still has to occasionally give her a big SWAT just to be sure she doesn't get too uppity. Coral reacts as though this is a game, by running away a few steps and then turning and barking at him.

What's been fascinating to watch is how Buffett and Coral came to understand each other's behaviors. While Buffett's threats were pretty clear to Coral, her play solicitations were not at all clear to him. And Coral in turn was confused by Buffett's unwillingness to play.

Because cats and dogs have such different communication systems and signals, it's not surprising that they require much more time to get along, especially when neither has much experience with the other species. Although Buffett has lived with our dogs since he was 4 months old, none of them have wanted to play with him like Coral does. Buffett was very attached to Mocha, our elderly Dalmatian we recently lost, but his idea of a great relationship was to snuggle up to Mocha when resting or sleeping. And of course Coral had no experience with cats until she met Buffett

When introducing cats to dogs, it's important to take into account their differences in communication. Give both plenty of time to learn about the other, and control their encounters to minimize fearful or threatening reactions. We have specific suggestions on introducing puppies to cats in our new [Raising A Behaviorally Healthy Puppy](#) book, which is

bonds, as you might expect. Hitting our pets or scaring them can weaken their bonds with us. We're not likely to have strong bonds with animals that bite us, scare us or destroy our stuff, which are unpleasant consequences for us.

Our prior experiences with other pets are also important influences.

Suzanne's stronger attachment to Coral is probably partially due to her long experience with other dogs (Suzanne has lived with dogs longer than Dan). Suzanne also had another Irish setter, Blaze, a number of years ago, who she had a very special and unique bond with. Those strong feelings for Blaze have probably facilitated her attachment to Coral.

Understanding attachment is important, because research has shown that people are more likely to give up an animal to a shelter when their attachments to them are weak. Helping people develop and strengthen their attachments to their pets can help pets stay in their homes, can increase the joy and benefits for us of sharing our lives with animals and allow both people and pets to lead happier, longer lives.

To better understand your pet's behavior and improve your relationship, consider either our [What Your Cat Wants You to Know](#) or [Just Behave](#) telecourses or our helpful [booklets](#).

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an updated and expanded version of our Puppy Behavior Wellness manual.

[Learn more about helping pets get along in our telecourses for pet parents](#)

• Dog Piece: Confusion About Training and Learning Terminology

We were reading a popular mail order pet supply catalog and came across some confusing descriptions of training products. We suspect such confusion is widespread and worth discussing.



In a description of an electronic training collar, the catalog stated that these devices weren't meant to PUNISH a dog, but to correct undesirable behavior. It's clear that in this case the word "correct" means to suppress or stop a behavior from happening. It also states the collars can be used to help reinforce acceptable behaviors.

Could this collar "correct" a behavior without punishment? The answer is no. In psychology and animal behavior punishment has a very specific definition. It is the delivery of some noxious stimulus or the removal of a pleasant stimulus that causes a behavior to decrease or stop. The delivery of the unpleasant stimulus (shock) is what is being described in the catalog as a "correction". By definition this is (positive) punishment.

In every day language punishment has many bad connotations such as it being harmful or frightening. It's understandable that the advertisers in the catalog want their product to sound safe and friendly and not have those connotations. So they say their product delivers a "correction" rather than a shock or other unpleasant stimulus. No matter what it is, if it stops the behavior, it's punishment. It doesn't help people understand how products work by confusing these terms.

Punishing stimuli don't have to hurt an animal or scare him to be effective. In fact, research

has shown that if punishing stimuli are too strong and cause pain or fear, the pain or fear may interfere with learning. So it's better for punishers not to hurt or scare an animal.

Can electronic collars that deliver a punishing stimulus be used to reinforce acceptable behaviors? Well, not directly. The shock or loud sound or spray of citronella oil will suppress any behaviors that immediately precede them. But they can also cause some behaviors to increase.

Any alternative behavior that allows the animal to escape or avoid the noxious stimulus will be reinforced. This is known as negative reinforcement - where a behavior increases in frequency when a noxious stimulus is removed. So you could teach your dog to run back to you or to sit at the corner rather than chasing cars, IF those behaviors allowed the dog to avoid the shock delivered by the collar.

It is much more effective to use positive reinforcement to teach an appropriate behavior than to depend upon negative reinforcement of an escape or avoidance behavior that may not be desirable.

What punishment is and isn't and how to use it effectively and humanely are some of the major topics in our telecourse, [The Fundamentals of Animal Learning](#), a four hour telecourse (seminar by telephone). The next course begins Monday, September 20. Check our [we bsite](#) or click on the link above for more information and to register.

- **What's New at ABA**

We have been utterly overwhelmed the last month in our attempts to finish up 9 new products. In addition to [Help! I'm Barking and I Can't Be Quiet](#) and [Raising A Behaviorally Healthy Puppy](#), the first two in a series of Pet Parenting Guides, we've been working on 7 new CD presentations.

Some of these are audio CD's, playable in any CD player, while others are Presentation CD's, viewable in any PC with Windows 95 or later operating system. The Presentation CD's are narrated, illustrated Power Point lectures - just like having us give you a personal presentation anytime you want on your own computer! (You

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don't need a Power Point program to view these CD's). We'll have a sample up on our website by next month.

Our new titles are: Presentation CD's: **1. What Cats Want: Creating a Cat Friendly Environment** **2. Helping Cats Co-Exist: Creating Feline Friendships** **3. Introducing Your Dog To Your New Baby** **4. Understanding Canine Conflicts** **5. [What You Don't Know About Dogs Can Hurt You](#)** (available now on our website)

Audio CD's **1. Managing Chaos at the Door** (expanded from our teleclass) **2. Fundamentals of Canine Behavior** (lectures from our telecourse) **3. Fundamentals of Animal Learning** (lectures from our telecourse)

These materials will be ready for sale on our website and at our booth at the [APDT conference](#) beginning September 30th. If you are in Denver for the conference, be sure and stop by and say hello.