

You are receiving this email from Animal Behavior Associates because you subscribed on our website or asked us to add you to our list. To ensure that you continue to receive emails from us, add ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com to your address book today. If you haven't done so already, click to [confirm](#) your interest in receiving email campaigns from us. To no longer receive our emails, click to [unsubscribe](#).



For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter December 8, 2004, Volume II Issue 12

In This Issue

[Our Piece: What to get your pets for Christmas \(or Hanukah, Kwanzaa or Ramadan\)](#)

[Cat Piece: Do Cats Have Dominance Relationships?](#)

[Dog Piece: Pica, dogs eating "non-edibles"](#)

[What's New at ABA](#)

[Our Piece: What to get your pets for Christmas \(or Hanukah, Kwanzaa or Ramadan\)](#)



Dear Suzanne,

We had a really nice Thanksgiving and hope you did too. Now it's time to gear up for the holidays. With parties to go to and presents to buy and wrap, let's not forget our furry friends. Watch out for those holiday pet hazards, and spend some quality time with them this month!

- **[Cat Piece: Do Cats Have Dominance Relationships?](#)**

One of the questions we are frequently asked is whether or not cats develop dominance relationships that are



similar to those seen in dogs. The short answer is yes and no. The social relationships among cats are a little different from that of dogs. As you probably know, social dominance is a mechanism that allows animals in a group to divide up limited resources, such as food, rest spots and mates, without having to fight over them. The dominant individual gets first access to those things he or she wants and others defer to him or her. In wolves, the ancestors of dogs, social dominance seems to play a role although the dominance relationships aren't as rigid as we once thought. In dogs, social dominance may play a

Many of us will be thinking about presents to give to our companion animals for the holidays. What makes a good gift for a dog or a cat? Certainly anything that improves the quality of your animal's life would be wonderful gift for her and for you. Consider taking her to your veterinarian for that annual health exam that you have been putting off. She might not think it is very much fun, but the reward for her and you is a longer and healthier life.

Most cats and some dogs seem to like the stimulation provided by outside views. You can build your cat an outside cage where she can be outside on nice days but secure from getting lost or injured in the neighborhood.

You can put in a doggie door to let your dog have frequent access to your backyard. An alternative is to build or buy an elevated perch where your cat can sit or lie and look out a window and/or watch the activities of the household. Cats seem to like to rest on elevated places. You may want to provide a place where your dog can look outside as well. Watch your dog's reaction to this. Some dogs bark excessively when given views of people or other dogs passing on the street. Placing a bird feeder outside a window can be attractive to your cat. A squirrel feeder may be attractive to your dog.

There are also videos of birds and small animals especially made to entertain cats and some dogs may find them interesting as well. For some ideas about how to enrich the environment of your cat see our new narrated slide presentation "[What cats want: creating a cat friendly environment](#)"

Puzzle toys are often attractive to cats. Boxes or tracks with balls that can be moved around are fun for lots of cats.

Fabric toys or rubber toys are often interesting to dogs. Puzzle balls or rubber toys with food treats inside can also be attractive to your dog or cat. Feathers on strings or even strings on the end of sticks can be very

role in some groups but isn't present in all of them.

Our domestic house cats have probably evolved from a more solitary species, the African wild cat, which doesn't live in complex social groups like wolves. However, through domestication, cats have probably become more tolerant of each other and quite often can live amicably together. Conflicts do occur among cats living together and sometimes dominance seems to be involved. Some recent studies of cat groups have found evidence of dominance-subordinance relationships like that seen in other species including dogs and wolves. A study published last month from researchers at the University of Georgia showed that in a stable population of 27 cats living together, there was a positive relationship between agonistic interactions at a food dish and those at other places in the house. This demonstrates that aggressive dominance and access to resources can be related in some groups of cats. What isn't clear yet is how important these relationships are in the average cat household. We've seen many households where dominance relationships among the cats weren't obvious.

Cats are different from dogs in that they don't seem to have the elaborate submissive behaviors seen in dogs and that they don't seem to have the same mechanisms for reconciling with each other after a conflict. The way most cats show submission is just to avoid or walk away from another cat. Dogs have several ways of showing submission such as the submissive grin, licking the face of the other and rolling over on the back and exposing the belly. Dogs seem to use these behaviors to patch up conflicts with others. Cats don't seem to do this. This may be one reason why when cats begin fighting, the conflict rarely resolves on its own. So while there are some similarities between dogs and cats in the occurrence of social dominance, there are differences because cats aren't as sophisticated in the way they handle conflicts. If you want to learn more about conflicts and how to resolve them see our narrated slide presentations "[Helping cats co-exist](#)" and "[Understanding canine conflict](#)"

- **Dog Piece: Pica, dogs eating "non-edibles"**

entertaining for cats, but don't let your cat have access to string and feathers unless you are there to supervise. Toys or scratching posts with catnip are fun for most cats. You can grow catnip for your cat or even grow "kitty greens" for your cat to eat. Think about adding an additional scratching post for your cat to give her another place to scratch. Consider getting or making a comfortable bed for your pet. For some ideas of [interactive toys](#) for your pet, look at the toys on our website.

Toys for cats and dogs don't have to be expensive. Many cats enjoy playing in empty boxes or paper bags. Some dogs like to play with empty plastic pop bottles, especially if they contain tasty tidbits that they can knock out. Whatever you buy or make for your pet, think about her safety. No sharp edges, nothing that can be swallowed (unless it is food) and nothing that can fall over. Be especially careful of strings, Christmas tree tinsel and ribbons that your pet may try to swallow. They can cause serious health problems.

Probably the best gift that we can give our pets is the gift of ourselves. Spending quality time with our pets, walking them, playing with them, petting them or just sitting with them will be rewarding for them and for us. Especially during the busy holiday season, spending a little extra time with our pets can reduce our stress and enrich all our lives.

Quick Links...

- [Our Website](#)
- [Products](#)
- [Services](#)
- [More About Us](#)

At 6 months of age, our Irish setter puppy Coral is still at that stage of exploring her world with her mouth. Not only is she still tempted to chew on corners of the futon and our shoes, but she also likes to merrily race down the hallway with a pair of underpants or socks she's snatched from the clean or dirty clothes bin. She's also interesting in occasionally picking up bits of usually harmless debris she sometimes finds on walks.



Traditional thinking about these behaviors would advise us to trade a toy for clothes, teach a 'leave it' or 'drop' behavior, and never ever let her eat what she finds while walking. While we generally subscribe to these ideas, our friend and colleague Nancy Williams, (dogswithissues.com) a certified associate applied animal behaviorist, has a theory about how inappropriate reactions to these normal dog behaviors can create a problem called pica.

Pica is the ingestion of non-food items. The most serious versions of this behavior are dogs who have become fanatic about eating rocks and socks, resulting in intestinal blockages and surgery. The reasons for pica are not well understood. The behavior has been attributed to anything from an inadequate diet to brain lesions.

Ms. Williams has a different idea, which we think better explains at least some of these pica problems. Based on her experience, Nancy believes pica is often a learned behavior, and is the result of how owners respond when their dogs pick up "off-limit" items. When an owner rushes toward a dog, yelling, grabbing for the item, some dogs react by escalating their attempts to keep control of the object. The dog may push the object further back in its mouth, and after not too many repetitions of this scenario take the ultimate step in keeping the object - swallowing.

We've all watched dogs develop sudden

interest in something, simply because another dog is paying attention to it. Coral for example isn't interested in a toy or a chewie until Ashley picks it up. As a result of this social facilitation, the object momentarily becomes the most valuable thing on earth!

Nancy sees pica problems most commonly in young, active dogs that were acquired as puppies, and whose owners were quite intent on consistently and forcibly removing objects from their dogs' mouths. So according to her theory, development of the problem is the result of an interaction between owner behavior and some set of predispositions in the dog. Not all dogs whose owners grab things out of their mouths develop pica problems.

To prevent these problems, Nancy recommends not making a "big deal" when a dog grabs something he shouldn't have and redirecting the dog's attention onto something else. While some dogs, like Coral, react well to trading, other dogs escalate their behavior because they learn that grabbing something off limits causes the owner to bring them something better.

From Nancy's view, a better option, rather than rushing over to grab the object, is to go knock on the door, open the cabinet where the treats are, pick up the dog's leash, or do anything that refocuses the dog's attention onto something else. Avoid looking at the dog, or talking to him. Just make something else in his immediate environment more interesting than the object.

We'll tell you more about pica in future and you'll have a chance to participate in a survey which will help us gain more information about this behavior. We'll have something for you to thank you for your time.

- **What's New at ABA**

Telecourse Special For Professionals only.
50% off our [Just Behave! How to get your dog to do what](#)



:: ezine@animalbehaviorassociates.com
::
<http://www.AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com>

:: 303-932-9095

[you want](#) and [What Your Cat Wants You To Know](#) telecourses.

You must be a Veterinary Clinic, Shelter, or part of a professional dog training association, such as APDT, to take part in this special offer.

This offer is good for the January classes only. Hurry to sign up as the classes are limited to 15 students.

Businesses that take part in this special will be eligible for our professional discounts coming after the first of the year. They will include special telecourse pricing for pre-booked class registration.

These classes help pet owners understand their animal's behavior and gives them useful strategies to prevent most behavior problems. This is your chance to preview these classes so you can feel confident when recommending them to your clients.

Click on the course titles for times and dates. When registering use the coupon code- "professional" and also give us the name of your business. Thanks and hope to hear you on the other end of the phone in January!

Suzanne Hetts and Dan Estep