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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter April 13th, 2005, Volume III Issue 4

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Dear Suzanne,

By the time you read this, we'll be in the middle of our well-deserved vacation on an 11 night Caribbean cruise. Our port of call for April 13 is St. Barths, where our tentative plan is to rent a car and drive to Lorient, where Jimmy Buffett owned his bar back in the 1980's. Our future plans are to organize educational Caribbean cruises for pet professionals who want to learn more about behavior. Any takers?

Our assistants, Barb and Colleen, and behaviorists Dr. Driscoll and Ms. Lori Holmberg will capably take care of things in our absence. Thanks in advance to them!

Dog Piece: Doggie Day Care



It seems like doggie day care facilities are springing up all over. Many of us want a

• Cat Piece: Socialize to Avoid Problems



place where we can take our dog for the day that is safe, fun, and where our dog won't be alone and will be well cared for. Good day care facilities will do all of that.

But did you know that day care can do much more than that? It can improve the quality of life for your dog and improve your relationship with your dog.

For dogs with separation anxiety or fears of loud noises such as thunderstorms, being around other people (or dogs) may lessen their symptoms. Day care by itself is unlikely to cure these problems but can make them easier to manage and reduce the dog's anxiety.

Day care can also help to meet some of your dog's basic needs. Meeting these needs improves your dog's quality of life and may prevent some behavior problems from arising. At many day care facilities dogs are going to get exercise, either running with other dogs or playing games with the staff. Dogs need frequent exercise, and providing it at day care can make your dog calmer and less destructive when he is home.

Playing with other dogs or people also provides for your dog's needs for social contact. Dogs are social animals and they need to spend quality time with others. Letting your dog have social contact at day care takes some of the pressure off of you to be your dog's social world. This may help prevent your dog from being so pesky for attention when he is home with you. It will also help to keep him socialized to others and may prevent some fears and aggression from developing.

Dogs also have a need for mental stimulation. Being away from home where there are new smells, sights and sounds can be stimulating for dogs. Playing with others or playing with puzzle toys such as those that dispense treats can also be stimulating. Providing such stimulation may help to prevent some kinds of destruction such as digging in the back yard.

Some day care facilities also offer other

For our March Cat Piece, Dan wrote about what you can do if your cats fight or aren't getting along. This month, I'd like to take a step back and talk about how we can prevent these problems.

For some time now, we've been spreading our belief that most cats are under-socialized. Dr. Sharon Crowell-Davis, a veterinary behaviorist at the University of Georgia, agrees, and puts it another way. In a recent presentation for the [Ohio Veterinary Medical Association](#) Dr. Crowell-Davis labeled most cats as socially incompetent.

Cats acquired as kittens that then live in single-cat families do not have opportunities to learn the social skills required to get along well with other cats. They need more practice and experience than what they have in the few weeks they are with mom and littermates to learn their limits in social play and how to create and maintain friendships with other cats.

After your cat has lived for several years as a single cat, never interacting with other cats, and then you decide to bring in a "companion" for her, it's unlikely she will have the social skills necessary to easily accept this newcomer. To have the best chance of success, introductions must be carefully managed with little contact between the cats at first. Cats may require weeks or months before being allowed unrestrained access to each other.

Observational studies of free-ranging cats by Dr. Crowell-Davis and her students and others reveal that young cats learn their social skills from the adults in the group. Adults have been observed mediating play sessions between youngsters that have gotten a bit out of hand.

Another factor that may prevent problems between family cats is having too many cats for too small a space. In free-ranging conditions, cats have plenty of room to disperse, and get away from other individuals. For cats, avoidance is an important strategy in preventing social conflicts. When this choice is removed,

services that can be good for your dog such as obedience or agility classes. Sometimes these are offered when you are present to learn with your dog and sometimes they are offered when you aren't around. Ask what additional services are offered at the day care facilities in your area. These classes also provide exercise, social contact and mental stimulation and can improve your dog's manners around others.

So don't think about doggie day care as just a safe place to leave your dog, it is also a place that can improve his well being.

Photo courtesy of www.TheDenDoggieDayCare.com

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Our Interview with the Experts series concluded, and people said " It was Great, like nothing I've ever done before. Very informative and useful!"

If you couldn't make the live classes, the CDs and downloadable mp3 files are now ready. Add the interviews with [Dr. John Wright](#), [Ms. Pia Silvani](#), and [Dr. Randy Lockwood](#) to your behavior library today!

Puppy Package



fighting becomes more likely.

One option to facilitate avoidance in an indoor environment is to install an indoor cat door that requires a magnetic key or infrared signal the cat wears on a special collar to open. Installed in a bedroom, laundry room, basement, or mud-room door, this door would allow one cat to escape to a room where another cat couldn't enter. These doors can be purchased at PETSMART.com [Staywell Infra-Red Pet Doors](#)

For more tips on how to arrange your house to best meet your cats' needs, we recommend our presentation or audio CD's - [Helping Cats Co-Exist: Creating Feeling Friendships](#) or [What Cats Want: Creating A Cat Friendly Environment](#). If you need specialized help to resolve your cats' fighting problem, [email us](#) to schedule a private consultation.

• Our Piece: A Personal Example of the Power of the Human-Animal Bond

On April 4, our car was broken into in the parking lot of our health club, and my purse, and all its contents including cell phone, wallet, credit



cards, checkbook, etc. was stolen. To put it mildly, this was a traumatic event, especially for me more than Dan, because it was my personal effects that were taken. The sense of violation and being taken advantage of was quite intense, and both of us, although me more so, were quite emotionally upset.

As I returned home from spending 2 hours waiting to get a new driver's license, who should meet me at the door, with her happy face, wagging tail, and sloppy kisses but

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Coral. Coral, of course, had no inkling how upset I was, she was just showing her puppy pleasure at having mom back home. I sat down on the floor, let Coral crawl all over me, and played with her for a few minutes. Only us pet owners could understand what a lift to my spirits she provided.

Much has been written about the human-animal bond and why pets are good for us, but I think that's particularly true at times of emotional distress. While Dan has been much more positive and in control in dealing with this robbery than I have, even he can't yet reach the point of cheerfulness.

Coral however has remained her happy, sunny self. Because our pets don't have to experience our emotional trauma first hand, their behavior remains relatively constant. That constancy, something even our closest friends and relatives usually can't provide, is one reason why pets are such an important source of emotional support.

Pets also don't hold grudges. A few weeks back, Coral stole yet another piece of my clothing from the laundry hamper and proceeded to chew a hole in it. This was a new piece of clothing that I just loved, so out of anger I raised my voice at Coral for a few choice sentences. She retreated into the other room, and I sat down on the floor with my sewing kit to try and repair the damage. Within just a few minutes I saw this little red-head peek around the partially closed door. I looked up at Coral, her ears went back, and her tail started wagging. I looked away, she took a few steps toward me, and her ears came back up.

While I know better than to conclude Coral was "sorry", she was definitely showing what behaviorists call reconciliation behaviors - attempting to repair our social bond. Of course I couldn't stay mad at her, and said "OK, we're friends again", and she came over and licked my face.

It's much more difficult for us humans to make these attempts to repair relationships when things go wrong. We allow our pride, hurt feelings, and need to be right to get in

the way. Our pets don't do any of this.

So my hat is off to Coral for being a "bigger person" than I could possibly be and for "being there" for us, as only she could.

- **What's New: Coral In St. Patrick's Parade**

If you receive our ezine in html format then you see the picture of our Coral in



the St. Patrick's day parade. She was even on TV! If you receive the text version, you must click on the link, because Coral, in her green vest, is too cute to be believed! This coming, of course, from two (well especially one!) puppy parents who are more than a little attached to their kiddo.

Suzanne and Coral joined the Irish Setter Club of Colorado in the annual St. Patrick's Day parade. It was a hard choice deciding whether to go with the setter group or the ParrotHead Club float, but Coral won out. It was great fun.

Our [Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy](#) book is back from the printer, with a newly designed cover and improved binding. We think this book it a great item for breeders, shelters, and veterinary clinics to send home with every new puppy parent. Contact us for quantity wholesale discounts for your facility.

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