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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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• **Dog Piece: Sleeping can be a displacement behavior**



Dear Suzanne,

We are back from our wonderful Caribbean vacation. What culture shock to come back to a full workload after 2 weeks of no responsibilities, blue skies, turquoise water and sandy beaches. We enjoy being in the Caribbean so much that we are even more committed to offering future educational seminars in these beautiful islands. The new telecourse schedule is out, and we hope to meet even more of you in one of our courses.

Best,
Dan and Suzanne



On a recent flight back home, the family in

the bulkhead row in front of me included a deaf child and his hearing dog. Of course everyone was oohing and aahing over the dog, a real life example of what Dr. Lynnette Hart and others have found - that assistance dogs are social icebreakers for people with disabilities.

My interest of course was on the dog's behavior. As the plane took off, the dog lay down in the bulkhead space and appeared to go to sleep. The parents remarked that the dog knew that he was supposed to do this. While that may have been true, there is another possibility.

In an article in Readings in Companion Animal Behavior, Dr. Victoria Voith has observed that sleeping can be a displacement behavior, and a dog's way of coping with a stressful situation or environment.

Displacement, or conflict behaviors, occur when a dog is unsure about how to respond in a given situation. Common displacement behaviors in dogs are grooming, lip-licking and yawning. We discussed displacement behaviors in our June, 2004 issue.

When fearful or anxious dogs show displaced sleeping behavior, Dr. Voith says they seem to resist falling asleep. They appear to struggle to keep their eyes open, and when their heads start to drop, awake with a jerk. Dr. Voith has also observed the same behavior in horses.

Like Dr. Voith, we've often observed dogs doing this during behavior consulting appointments. A German short-haired pointer that I was seeing for separation anxiety did this. For awhile, she wandered around the office, anxiously panting, then sat down next to her owners and began to 'nod off'. Rather than going fully to sleep, she alternated between the nodding off/jerking awake behavior, and anxiously panting.

Dogs that lie down, relax and go fully asleep are likely not showing displacement behavior. The hearing dog on my flight home did exactly this, so she may have been

• **Cat Piece: Preventing Cat Elimination Problems**

This week we were visiting a friend who mentioned that his cat was peeing on his carpet as he phrased it, "to show his (the cat's)



displeasure when we leave him alone to go on a trip." As we've mentioned in past newsletters, pets don't do destructive things out of spite, to get revenge or to express displeasure. If these aren't valid reasons for the behavior, what are the causes of cat elimination problems and what can be done to prevent them?

Cat elimination problems generally fall into three categories: medically caused, litterbox problems and urine marking. Medical causes include urinary tract infections and gastro-intestinal problems. Litterbox problems involve the cat developing an aversion to the litterbox or some aspect of it, or developing a preference for some other area to eliminate. Urine marking is a communication behavior and often occurs when there are conflicts among cats. Discriminating among the causes isn't always easy. If your cat has an elimination problem, the first stop should be at your veterinarian to diagnose and treat any medical problem. If the problem isn't medical, your veterinarian can refer you to an animal behaviorist that can help with litterbox and marking problems.

Prevention of medically caused problems can be addressed with regular wellness checks by your veterinarian. The veterinary staff can detect problems as they are developing and can advise you how to prevent the most common medical problems leading to inappropriate elimination.

comfortable with the flight. And as you see from her picture, Coral is utterly relaxed while asleep.

The pointer was obviously anxious about whether her owners were going to leave her. She seemed to be soothed by being touched and petted by her owners, probably because as long as they were in physical contact there was no threat of separation.

Because most animals typically seek out safe places to sleep, one normal function of the behavior may be to remove an animal from hazardous situations. This may be one influence in how sleep became a displacement behavior.

May Specials: ***Help Celebrate Be Kind to Pet Week***

• Take Part in a Live Telecourse, and Receive a Free Booklet!

We have two classes designed with the pet owner in mind.

[Just Behave! How to get your dog to do what you want.](#) From housetraining to destructive behavior, from chaos at the door to out of control behavior on walks, you'll come away with new understanding of your dog and dog-friendly techniques that will work better than any you've tried before.

Receive: What Dogs Need And How They Think 70 Tips To Help You Create A Sociable, Easy To Handle Canine Companion, FREE with this course! **Tuesday May 24th and 31st**

[What Your Cat Wants You To Know.](#) At last!! This is the course your cat would tell you to take if she could. Designed especially for cat and kitten parents, we'll help you understand what can be that most mysterious of creatures - your cat. Receive: Cats Come Clean 50 Tips About Cats and Litterboxes. Understand your cat's bathroom habits, and the best ways to prevent problems, FREE with this course!

Preventing urine marking is not easy because the causes are not well understood. A large percentage of marking problems seem to be due to conflicts among cats. Socializing cats and encouraging them to be tolerant of each other from a young age may marking problems from developing. Other marking problems seem to be related to stressors in the environment, including contact with unfamiliar people. Adequate socialization to people and acclimatization to places and things in the cat's environment may prevent some marking problems by reducing stress. You can learn more about how to avoid conflicts among cats in our narrated slide presentation or audio presentation of "[Helping cats co-exist: Creating feline friendships.](#)"

Preventing litterbox problems is more straight forward. Meeting your cat's behavioral needs for elimination can prevent problems from developing. Provide a quiet, but accessible place for the litterboxes, enough litterboxes for all the cats in your home and clean them frequently. Provide the right texture of litter (usually a very small grained, sandy substance) and a litterbox that is the right size. By paying attention to your cat's elimination behavior and even giving her choices for her litterbox and its characteristics, you can meet her needs and avoid elimination problems. You can learn more about cat elimination behavior and litterboxes in our booklet "[Cats come clean: 50 tips about cats and litterboxes.](#)"

You can learn more about meeting your cat's behavioral needs and a general strategy for preventing all kinds of cat behavior problems in our two hour telecourse "[What your cat wants you to know](#)".

• Our Piece: Be Kind To Animals Week

May 1 to 7 was [Be Kind To Animals](#)



Mondays, June 6 and 13

Dangers of Feeding Your Pet a Raw Diet Tuesday, May 17, 2005, 7:00pm-8:30pm. Loew Building Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, 200 Westboro Road, North Grafton, MA 01536 [click here for more info..](#)

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[Week.](#) Created in 1915 by the American Humane Association to celebrate the bond between people and pets, it's become a way to encourage people to make a positive difference for animals.

We thought it fitting to give you a few ideas about how we might give back to our pets even a portion of the good things they do for us and make a positive difference in their lives.

Spend More Quality Time With Your Pet

Because we work out of our home, and one of us is there much of the time, this doesn't mean that we really spend a lot of time actively doing things with our pets. Yes, Buffett, Coral and Ashley are usually hanging out in whatever room we are in, but we are usually on the phone or on the computer, while the critters sleep somewhere nearby. We aren't actually doing things WITH the three of them as often as we think we should. We think most pets would enjoy more active social time with family than they usually get. Social time could include a walk, playing with toys, or just petting and stroking our furry friends.

Give Your Pets a More Stimulating Environment

Most of our clients remark how smart they believe their pets are. If that's the case, then we probably need to do more to stimulate their minds. While channel-surfing recently, I caught a few minutes of Super Nanny. The segment showed several bored children who were trying to amuse themselves and ended up doing all kinds of obnoxious things. The same thing can happen with our pets.

Teach your dog how to play a new game

such as hide or seek. Buy a new bird feeder so your indoor cat can have something to watch. Some cats also seem to enjoy watching videos made especially for them. Use clicker training to shape any number of new behaviors in your cat or dog. Karen Pryor's introductory clicker kits are perfect for this (make a live link). Buy your dog one of the new interactive "Busy Buddy"

toys. To make it easy for you, we have a special sale this month on clicker kits and toys.

Give Your Pets More Feedback About Their Behaviors We tend to be quick to "correct" our pets when they do things we don't like, but not as free with rewards as we should be. If you were to count up the times you said "NO" or did something else to discourage behaviors and compared that with the number of times you reward your pet each day you'd probably find quite a difference. Make it a point to reward good behavior more often.

To be effective, feedback whether pleasant or unpleasant, needs to be given in a timely fashion. Aim for no longer than 3 seconds after the occurrence of a behavior. If you try to reward your dog or cat for lying quietly next to you, but you don't do so until they've been lying there for 3 or 4 minutes, you're rewarding the duration of the behavior, not the act of lying down in the first place. And we've talked many times about why punishment after the fact doesn't work.

These ideas are just a start. Think about what YOUR pets really likes to do, how you can improve their quality of life, not just for a week, but for as long as you share your life with them.

- **What's New: Busy Speaking Schedule**

Suzanne, Dan and Lori have been busy lecturing to a variety of audiences this month. Suzanne just returned from lecturing in Gatlinburg, Tennessee to the



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Mid-South Electric Metering Association about safety around dogs and avoiding dog bites. This is the fifth year that we have been invited to address this group of electrical meter readers. Suzanne's [presentation from 2004](#) is available as a narrated slide presentation on our website. This information is valuable to anyone who goes onto properties where there may be dogs. We have also helped to produce a more formal safety training program for home service providers titled "[Dog bite prevention training program](#)", also available on our website.

Lori and Dan lectured on what's new in reinforcement and punishment training to an audience at the Peticular Care Doggy Daycare and Training Center in Fort Collins, Colorado. Lori's dogs Norton and Emma were the stars of the presentation. You can learn more about animal learning in our telecourse "[Fundamentals of Animal Learning](#)."

Dan travels to Guelph, Canada this month to lecture on "Constraints on Learning: Pugs as Scent Detection Dogs" at a Symposium on "Understanding and Training Your Dog in 2005" sponsored by Professional Animal Behavior Associates (not related to ABA, Inc.). You can learn more about this symposium at the PABA website www.gentleleadercanada.com. Lecture notes from the symposium may be available upon its conclusion.

We also lecture in May and June on "Introducing your dog to your new baby". On May 16 we're at St. Anthony's Hospital, North in Denver and on June 14th we're at Littleton Adventist Hospital. To register or for more information call the Health Advisor at (303) 777-6877. We also have a [narrated slide presentation](#) of these lectures available at our website.