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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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Dog Piece: **Preventing Separation Anxiety**

Sally is a friend of ours who recently adopted a 12 week-old mixed breed puppy from a local shelter. She called us to ask what she could do to prevent her pup from developing separation anxiety. Separation anxiety is a common



Dear Suzanne,

We hope you enjoy this issue of our ezine. Read about preventing separation anxiety, factors influencing friendliness in cats, the joy of a new pet, and see our new telecourse schedule. Make the most of the last month of real summer!

Best, Suzanne and Dan

- Cat Piece:**
**Friendly Father,
Friendly Kittens?**

Have you ever wondered why some cats are so friendly while others seem to be poster-cats for that aloof, untouchable attitude cats are famous for? Not much research has been done into cat personalities, but one important study looked at the effects of paternity and early handling.



Almost 20 years ago Dr. Dennis Turner, a behaviorist in Switzerland, found a paternal effect on cats' friendliness to people. Friendly fathers tended to produce friendly kittens. Because the sires in Turner's study never saw their kittens, he concluded this had to

behavior problem that can be quite serious in some dogs. It is an anxious state that is brought on when the dog is separated from a person or other animal to whom the dog is attached. Dogs with the problem may try to escape, bark and howl, house soil and/or become destructive. Treatment is often successful but can take significant time and effort. As with other behavior problems, prevention is much better than treatment.

The causes of separation anxiety are poorly understood, so it makes it difficult to give advice on how to prevent the problem. We know that it is an attachment problem – that is, it has to do with developing and breaking bonds with others. We also know that it is more common in dogs who have come from shelters, have had previous owners, or have moved frequently. The immediate trigger for the anxiety is usually when a person leaves the dog for some period of time.

These facts suggest that if a dog can be comfortable being left alone, the problem wouldn't arise. So the recommendations that are usually made to new dog owners are to immediately begin to leave their dogs for varying time periods. Leave your dog alone in a room as you go to another part of the house. Leave your dog in the yard for a few minutes while you are inside. Leave your dog in the house as you go to put the trash on the curb. Leave your dog in the house or yard while you run an errand to the store. The separations should be of variable and unpredictable lengths – sometimes just a few seconds, sometimes minutes or eventually hours. Keep initial absences quite short and lengthen them very gradually. Vary their duration, as you don't want your dog to be able to predict how long he is going to be left.

Dogs can often predict how long they are going to be left by your departure cues, your clothes and what you take with you. If you dress for work and

be a genetic effect rather than how the males behaved with the kittens.

In most cases, we don't know how genes operate to influence behavior. Behaviors themselves are not inherited. Cats and other animals don't have a gene for friendliness or other complex behaviors. Many genetic effects are indirect, which turned out to be the case with "friendly" cats.

A later study by Dr. Sandra McCune looked into how both paternity and early handling between 5 to 12 weeks of age affected "friendliness".

Interestingly, whether or not the kittens were handled did not influence their likelihood to approach a novel, inanimate object. But kittens from the friendlier fathers approached novel objects more quickly than those from unfriendly fathers.

This led the researchers to revise their original findings, and conclude that the trait paternity was influencing was not "friendliness" but what they labeled "boldness". Paternity actually influenced the kittens' response to things they hadn't seen before, whether these were people or objects.

The effects of early handling were specific to the kittens' behavior toward people, and seemed to add to the "boldness" effect. Handled kittens from friendly fathers approached people the quickest, and unhandled kittens from unfriendly fathers were the most standoffish. Unhandled kittens from friendly fathers and handled kittens from unfriendly fathers were intermediate in their behavior toward people.

This is a good example of how behaviors are readily influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. We still have people ask us what behaviors or portions of behavior are "inherited" and which are "learned". This is a meaningless question. An individual's genetic makeup may help to set limits on behavior, as it seems to with cat friendly behaviors. Early handling produced different results, depending on the kittens' genetic makeup. Kittens from unfriendly fathers never approached people as readily as those from friendly fathers, even when they had the same kind of handling.

The factors that influence behaviors are numerous and they often interact with each other in complex ways. It is misleading to try to partition behavior into "inherited" and "learned" components. To learn more about all aspects of cat behavior from a scientific point

always pick up a briefcase and keys before leaving, your dog interprets these signs that your absence is going to be a long one. Try not to be predictable in these pre-departure cues. Re-arrange your routine prior to leaving, dress for work on weekends on occasion and be away only a short time, or leave the house for most of the day dressed casually and without engaging in your work-day departure routine.

Try to leave your dog in different places – the yard, the house, your car, a friend’s house, a dog day care, or board him for just a day at a kennel so he becomes comfortable in being separated from you in all these different locations.

When you leave your dog, give him something fun to do. Give him a chew bone, food-stuffed toy, or a rope tug-toy or ball to play with. If you can associate pleasant things with your separations, it may make it more difficult for your dog to become anxious. And keep arrivals and departures low key - don't make a fuss either when you leave your dog or when you return.

Finally, watch for signs that your dog is distressed during your separations from him. If you see signs of distress such as whining, panting, depression or a reluctance to be separated from you, get professional help. It is far easier to deal with the problem when it first arises than after it has been going on for a while. If you need help with a separation anxiety problem contact your veterinarian for a referral to a behavior consultant or you can call or email us at our office, (303) 932-9095 and Info@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com.

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**FALL  
TELECOURSE  
STARTING  
SOON!**



of view, we suggest *The Domestic Cat: The Biology of its Behaviour*, edited by Drs. Turner and Bateson. Not an easy read, but a very educational one.

- **Our Piece:**  
**The Joys of a New Pet**

Our friend Sally, who we mentioned above in the Dog Piece, has a new 12 week old puppy from a local shelter. She commented the other day about how much work it was to deal with a young puppy and wondered if there was any way to make it easier. We can empathize. We went through the same experience last year at this time with our puppy Coral. New pets will be a trial in the beginning as we try to meet their needs, get them acclimated to their new homes and train them to live with us. Puppies can be especially trying because of the need for house training and dealing with puppy destructiveness.



There’s nothing magic that will take away the work, except hiring a pet nanny to take over the chores for you, but we do have a few helpful suggestions. Basic research on how attachments develop between people and animals gives us some guidance. The stronger our bond to our pet, the more work we will do and the more we will put up with. We know that the more time we spend with our pets, the more attached we become to them, and they to us. We also know that when interactions with others are rewarding, the stronger the bonds with them, so make it a point to have fun with your pet. Play games, go for walks and just enjoy quiet time cuddling. If you have a puppy or kitten, this might only happen when they are napping!

On the other hand, try to minimize unpleasant times with your pet. Follow a regular schedule for house training or provide a cat-friendly litterbox so you can minimize “accidents.” “Pet-proof” your house and keep valuables up and away from your new pet so you can minimize damage. The fewer accidents you have to clean up and the fewer personal items your pet damages (some damage is inevitable!) the happier you will be with your pet.

Try to make pet care as easy as possible for yourself. Recruit family members, neighbors and friends to help you when things are especially hectic or frustrating.

Don't forget, all 3 of these classes have been approved by CCPDT and CACVT for four hours of Continuing Education credits.

### Fundamentals of Canine Behavior:

\*\*Starts Aug. 30th

### Fundamentals of Animal Learning:

\*\*Starts Aug. 31st

### Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor:

\*\*Starts Sept. 1st

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HOT AUGUST SPECIAL

Sign two friends up for one of our fundamentals telecourses and receive yours at **50% off**. Offer good until August 29th.

Call us to schedule and receive your discount!
303-932-9095

Canine Behavior Symposium, Saturday, October 15 – Sunday, October 16, 2005. Speakers: Gerrard Flannigan, DVM, MSc., Dipl. ACVB; Alice Moon-Fanelli, MA, PhD, CAAB; Nicole Cottam, Tufts Behavior Service Coordinator; Contact: Continuing Education Dept. 508-887-4723; susan.brogan@tufts.edu, web site: www.tufts.edu/vet/continuedu

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Think about taking your dog to a day care once in a while. You need occasional time off from your care-taking duties so you can take care of yourself.

Sign up for pet training classes to learn how to relate to your pet more effectively and how to train him to have good manners. Puppy and kitten classes and new parent classes are especially valuable for you and your pet.

Finally, keep in mind that new pet stresses don't last forever. Your dog will be house-trained, your kitten will stop scratching the drapes and both will develop good manners in time. The time and effort you put in now will more than pay off later in a well adjusted and well trained pet. Although Coral's puppyhood was a lot of work for us, we wouldn't trade one single day. And we'll have fond memories years from now when she is a gray faced senior.

• What's New: New Telecourse Dates

Now that fall is almost upon us, we have resumed our Fundamentals Telecourse series. [Fundamentals of Animal Learning](#) will begin August 30, and [Fundamentals of Canine Behavior](#) on August 31. We'll skip a week midway through the courses, because we will be lecturing at [Groom Expo](#), and we suspect many of you will be at the [APDT conference](#) as well. In response to your requests, the telecourses will have a slightly later start time - 6:30pm Mountain time.

Pia Silvani's telecourse, "[Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor](#)" is back by popular demand! She will start on Thursday Sept. 1st, at 6pm mountain time, and will skip the same week since she will be at the APDT conference.

Register from our website, and if you have any questions, or problems, drop us an email. info@animalbehaviorassociates.com



Recent Media Interviews. We've been interviewed for print, television and radio media regarding the pit bull bans that various cities in the Denver metro area are considering. We are not in favor of breed specific legislation because it does nothing to target the irresponsible owners and breeders of so-called potentially dangerous breeds who are at the root of the problem.

Writing The Summer Away. Both Dan and Suzanne are busy with a variety of writing projects – we'll update you as they near completion. Suzanne has been to workshops on pod casting, branding and blogging and has a slew of new ideas she'd like to implement but no time to do so until the writing projects are finished. Stay tuned!

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