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## For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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**Dear Suzanne,**

Happy Easter, Passover and just general Spring-time to you! Our bulbs are up and we are doing our best to keep the dogs from eating them. Flower and vegetable gardens and pets – it's often a constant struggle! We hope you enjoy this month's issue.

Best,  
Suzanne and Dan

- **Cat Piece:**  
**Trouble in Paradise**

### **Dog Piece:** **Bark! Bark! Bark!**



Barking problems are among the most common complaints that pet owners (and their neighbors) have of their dogs. It can be a very serious problem for pet owners (they can be fined or have their dogs taken away), for the neighbors (they may be disturbed by



Having dogs and cats who live in the same family get along well together can sometimes be a tricky business. Our big orange 12-year-old cat Buffett has had to learn to live with four dogs, as several have died at the end of their life spans and we've acquired new ones. Buffett has always been able to set limits with

the barking or have more serious conflicts with dog owners) and for the community (tax dollars have to be spent to enforce and prosecute barking dog ordinances).

So why do dogs bark and how can barking be stopped when it becomes a nuisance? First of all we need to recognize that dogs do more than bark. They howl, yelp, whine, growl and scream. What we call a "barking" problem may be some other vocalization or a combination of them. For the sake of simplicity, we'll just call it barking. Dogs bark much more frequently than their wolf ancestors. During domestication people may have preferred and perhaps selected dogs to be highly vocal. At some point in our history, it was probably a good thing for a dog to alert us to unfamiliar people or animals who could be enemies or predators.

These alerting barks are familiar to everyone who has had a visitor come to their door. Dogs also bark as part of play, to get attention from others, as a part of threatening behavior, when they are in pain, frightened or when they have separation anxiety.

How we try to resolve barking problems depends, in part, on what is causing the barking. For pain-elicited vocalizations, stopping or treating the source of pain is the obvious solution. For fear related barking, including separation anxiety, treating the fear with counter conditioning and desensitization programs usually works best. Barking and growling motivated by aggression require modifying the aggressive behavior, often with the help of a behavior professional.

One way to manage alerting barking, attention-seeking and play-motivated barking is by removing the stimulus that triggers the barking, such as keeping an alerting dog away from the fence where he sees others. Teaching the dog another response to the trigger, such as sitting quietly at the door rather

our dogs, all of whom have respected his ability to do so. Recently however, we've noticed a change in the interactions among Buffett, our Dalmatian Ashley, and our young Irish setter Coral.

Although we've never seen the very beginning of this sequence, on several occasions we've observed Ashley showing her teeth at Buffett while Coral barks from nearby. Buffett is poised and ready to swat or lunge, but when we come to intervene, runs quickly away, clearly frightened. We haven't yet figured out who is provoking who or why. Buffett has become much more cautious around the dogs, particularly Ashley, although he and Coral still peacefully sleep on the bed with us. Both however can be a little grumpy if the other accidentally intrudes into the other's personal space while sleeping.

With the recent nice weather, we've left the back door open when we must be gone all day so the dogs can have potty breaks (Buffett can't get over the fence so he stays in the yard). But last Saturday when we arrived home we noticed Buffett's food on the counter had remained uneaten. Food is quite important to Buffett, so the fact that he did not feel comfortable coming into the kitchen to eat, while alone with the two dogs, is an important finding. It's time for us to start taking action.

Our plan is to begin staging encounters so Buffett and Ashley can spend time close to one another while calm and relaxed. Not only do we want to closely observe their body postures so we can gain more information about what the trouble is, we also want each to have pleasant experiences with one another. Both are clearly avoiding each other more, so we want to try and overcome whatever unpleasantness has developed between them.

Although we still aren't quite sure what's going on with our critters, we've made the decision to confine Buffett in our bedroom with the necessities when we leave the dogs loose in the house together. For short absences, we'll often crate Ashley due to her unpredictable destructive episodes, and we aren't worried about Buffett and Coral

than jumping up and barking at visitors can be effective. Punishment, both positive and negative, can be effective if used with positive reinforcement for other behaviors.

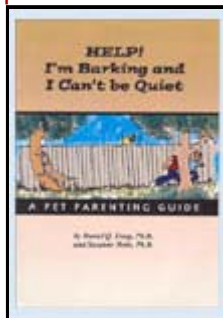
Anti-bark collars and other anti-bark devices can be quite successful at stopping problem barking, but they shouldn't be the first or only means of addressing the problem. Anti-bark collars are inappropriate for some kinds of barking problems, such as those caused by separation anxiety, fears and pain, and can make these problems worse.

With the right kind of help and a strong desire to stop the problem, most owners can successfully resolve barking problems in a safe and humane way.

If you or someone you know needs help with a barking dog problem, visit our new website [BarkingHelp.com](http://BarkingHelp.com). We've also revised and updated our "[Help! I'm Barking and I Can't Be Quiet](#)" book. It's the best self-help resource for barking problems on the market today.



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First Edition of: [Help! I'm Barking and I Can't Be Quiet](#)

Discover:

- Ten most common causes of barking
- What's making your dog bark

together.

Our take-home message to you is if you have observed tension or conflict among your dogs and cats, don't leave them alone together. This is also true for big dog, little dog combinations. We've worked with people who have come home to severely injured and tragically even dead pets. We don't want that for Buffett, so until we can resolve what's going on, we'd rather be safe than sorry. We'll keep you updated on our progress.

• **Our Piece: Getting a Dog or Cat for Your Child**



Many parents have asked us – “We want to get a pet for our kids. Should we get a dog or cat, and if we get a dog, which breed is best?” Before we even begin to answer these questions, we ask several others. Sometimes parents have unrealistic expectations about what’s involved in acquiring a pet for the children. They think caring for a pet will help their children learn responsibility. Parents who are first time pet owners may not understand the time and energy required to care for a pet. Parents should ask themselves the following questions before adding a pet to the family.

First, how old are your children? Older children will more easily be able to learn how to behave in a safe and humane way around a dog or cat and how to help care for the pet. Younger children are not yet developmentally ready to easily remember things and control their emotions.

Second, who is going to have primary responsibility for the pet’s care? It is unrealistic to expect any child to assume full responsibility for a pet's care. Children may be most interested in and capable of pet care between about 9 to 13 years of age. Younger children are less capable, and teenagers may be less interested. For more information see the excellent book “Raising Puppies and Kids

- Solutions that work!

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Together," by Pia Silvani and Lynn Eckhardt

Third, what age dog or cat are you considering? Puppies and kittens need much more care than older pets and come with their own special challenges. Young pets need help learning good behaviors, and require much more supervision. Puppies or kittens and young children are not usually a good mix. Parents now have two youngsters to care for rather than one. This additional work can be overwhelming for parents. Neither young children or young pets know how to behave around each other. Both can scare and hurt the other, even unintentionally, and create bad experiences, making it difficult to create a beneficial relationship.

Families thinking about acquiring a pet should consider the decision carefully and talk frankly with all family members about responsibilities for the pet's care. Those who honestly answer these questions may prevent a sad and unpleasant experience for themselves and the pet.

- **What's New:**  
**Welcome Kelly!**



Our big new event is the addition of an "intern" or "trainee" to our business, Dr. Kelly Long. Kelly relocated from Maryland, where she worked for the federal government, and interned for a time with our friend and colleague, certified behaviorist Ms. Nancy Williams in her business [Dogs With Issues](#). In addition to her work in law enforcement, Kelly is a former veterinary technician and also has a graduate degree in clinical psychology. She is the proud, if sometimes frustrated mom to two German Shepherds, Chaos and Brennan. In addition to accompanying us on appointments, Kelly, along with our other

behaviorist Ms. Lori Holmberg, will be helping us with our marketing efforts and new services we have planned including a Puppy Intensive class and Learning to Be an Effective Pet Parent class. More about those next month.

Since our last issue, we've lectured to the veterinary technicians at Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital here in our metro area, attended a 3 day self-publishing conference and conducted another Introducing Your Dog to Your New Baby class at Littleton Adventist Hospital. Suzanne started the next level of her steel pan drum lessons and traveled to Knoxville Tennessee on business. Dan lectured to the veterinary technician students at Front Range Community College in Fort Collins. We've also been interviewed by several journalists on topics ranging from cat litterboxes to dog aggression.

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