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## For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

August 9, 2006, Volume IV Issue 8

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### **Dog Piece:** **Recognizing Dangerous Dogs**

Recently, we've been asked to evaluate the dangerousness of particular dogs. There are few things more important to the safety of people and the humane care of dogs



### Dear Suzanne,

The summer is flying by, and has included some sad news for us as you'll see when you read further. Our articles this month are quite useful to pet parents and professionals alike.

Best,  
Suzanne and Dan

### • **Cat Piece:** **Away From Home**

Cat owners know that most cats do not adjust quickly to new environments. If you still have summer travel plans and intend on boarding your cat, you know this can be quite stressful for your pet. We've created a list of ideas to help you decrease your cat's stress. Some of these ideas can also be useful to shelters that are striving to provide better behavioral care for cats and even for veterinarians and groomers who want to improve the ease with which cats can be handled.



1. One of the best ways to help cats cope with unfamiliar environments is to provide them a

than knowing how likely a dog is to bite and how severely he may bite. But how do we evaluate whether a dog is dangerous? Clearly, the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Beyond that, there is little agreement about how best to evaluate dogs.

Evaluations vary from the simple to the complex to the ridiculous. Dangerousness based on appearance is ridiculous – if it looks like a pit bull, it's dangerous. Other evaluations are based on simple behavioral rules – if a dog growls or shows other threatening behavior, regardless of the circumstances - it is dangerous. Complex behavioral "tests" that include various scenarios also have been constructed. Most animal behaviorists who evaluate dogs don't use simple rules or complex tests but rather obtain information on many interacting factors that should be considered in forming an opinion about the relative dangerousness of a dog's behavior. Following are some of these.

How severe is the aggression? We consider a continuum from mild threats at a distance to the production of severe injuries during attacks.

How predictable is the aggression? All other things being equal, a dog that is very predictable is less dangerous than one that is unpredictable.

How long have the threats or aggression been going on? Behavior of long-standing duration is usually more difficult to change than newly acquired patterns.

How much warning does the dog give prior to the attack? Warning signs give people time to avoid a bite, as long as they know what signs to look for and how to defuse the situation.

How generalized is the aggression or threat? If the behavior occurs in response to a few very stimuli, the dog may be less dangerous than if he is

place to hide. A cardboard box with an opening cut in one side, a paper bag, or even a small carrier can be placed in the cat's cage. It's common for cats who are frightened in confined environments to use their litterbox as a hiding place because it's the only thing available. Boxes and bags are disposable and kennels can simply put new ones in to replace soiled ones, so be sure you bring one or more for each day your cat will be boarded.

2. Bring several small towels from home, or a small cat bed, that have your cat's scent on them. This will help your cat feel surrounded by something familiar. Many kennels don't want you to bring bedding because it may be lost or damaged, so choose items you don't mind losing.

3. Spray Feliway(tm) in your cat's carrier and leave the bottle with the kennel so they can spray your cat's cage. Feliway(tm) is a synthetic cat facial pheromone that is reported to help reduce anxiety because it is similar to the scent cats would leave by facial rubbing.

4. Consider choosing a kennel that provides individual handling and playtime for an extra fee. If your cat is well socialized and enjoys being with people, this social contact can be invaluable in enriching your cat's life while she's away from you.

5. Choose a kennel that either has a boarding area or room separate from the dog kennels or is a cat only facility. Most cats will be stressed by being housed in the same room with barking dogs they can easily see as threatening.

6. Bring along the litter your cat is accustomed to. While your cat may continue to use the litterbox with a different type of litter in it while being boarded because she has no choice, familiar litter will be one less change your cat will need to adjust to.

High-end cat boarding facilities are becoming more common. The picture accompanying this article, from Acoma Animal Hospital in Denver is an example - each cat, or family of cats, has their own private bedroom.

Another option of course is to hire a cat sitter

threatening or aggressive in a wide variety of situations.

How big is the dog and how small and/or helpless are the potential targets of the aggression? A very large dog and a small child or debilitated adult create potentially more dangerous situations. Other dog factors to consider include the age and health of the dog.

How well does the dog respond to attempts to inhibit or interrupt the threats or aggression? Dogs that are difficult to inhibit or interrupt are more dangerous.

Are owners willing and able to manage the dog or its environment to minimize potentially dangerous encounters? Dogs that live in busy, chaotic families or with owners who don't take the problem seriously present a greater danger.

These are just a sampling of factors that could be considered. It's important to realize that making predictions can be complicated, and good predictions aren't based on simplified information or interpretations. This shouldn't be surprising, given that aggression is a complex behavior influenced by a wide variety of sometimes poorly understood factors.

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## August Special Interviews with the Experts

**Aspects of Canine Social Conflict  
Behavior**

**Regular Price: CD \$59 downloadable MP3  
\$52**

**This Month: CD \$37 downloadable MP3**

**\$32**

**Discount will be taken in the shopping**

to care for your cat in your home while you are away.

### • **Our Piece: Emotions in Animals**

Recently, we were helping Jane, and her dogs, Reggie and Dufus. When Reggie would try to get attention from Jane or her husband, Dufus would threaten Reggie, and try to push him away. If Reggie resisted, this usually resulted in a fight. Jane believes that Dufus is jealous of Reggie and the attention he was receiving. Pet owners frequently describe their pets as being "jealous", in other situations, such as when they are voicing concerns about their pets' reaction to a new spouse or baby.



Do dogs and cats experience jealousy and does it really motivate their behavior? Do animals experience other emotions such as fear, joy and love? These are questions animal behaviorists have hotly debated for over 100 years. Much research has been devoted to understanding emotions in animals and people, going back to Charles Darwin's seminal work, published in 1872, "The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals".

This month another important book, "For the Love of A Dog" by Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist Dr. Patricia McConnell helps us all catch up on this complex body of research. Dr. McConnell's new book reviews, in a most accessible way, what we know and don't know about emotions in animals.

As Dr. McConnell points out, there is good scientific evidence that some animals experience emotions similar to our own. Just what they experience is still a matter of debate. Most scientists now believe that emotions are comprised of a complex of physiological, behavioral and subjective components. The physiological and behavioral aspects are measurable, but the subjective feelings – what the animal actually experiences – are not, at least at the present

**cart cart**

Even though this popular interview series is completed, you can still listen to the interviews as many times as you want by purchasing the CDs or downloadable MP3 files. Drs. Wright, Lockwood and Ms. Silvani are three of the most popular and respected international speakers on canine aggression and social behavior.

[Dr. Wright - Roles Rules and Relationships: Reinterpreting the Meaning of Dominance](#)

[Ms. Silvani - Rehabilitating the Canine Contender](#)

[Dr. Lockwood - Laws, Liability and Dog Bites](#)

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time.

The arguments about how similar animal emotions are to our own have hinged on the similarities between human and animal physiological and behavioral experiences. For emotions such as pain and fear, there is good evidence that the physiological and behavioral aspects are quite similar. For emotions such as jealousy, the evidence is less clear.

Human definitions of jealousy include "fearfulness or waryness of being replaced by a rival," "vigilance in guarding something" or "a resentful desire for another's possessions or advantages." These definitions include both emotional (e.g. resentfulness) and behavioral (e.g. guarding) components. Jealousy apparently occurs in situations involving competition between individuals. Reggie and Dufus were clearly competing for Jane and her husband's attention but whether this includes emotional components similar to the experience of jealousy in humans can't be known.

Assuming that competitive behavior, which is widespread and well documented among animals, is equivalent to jealousy is an anthropomorphic interpretation that may confuse our understanding of animal behavior. Interpreting Reggie and Dufus' behaviors as competitive will make the process of modifying them more straightforward.

• **What's New:**  
**Trials and Tribulations**

This month was busy for Dan, as he served as the expert witness for the defense in the San Francisco case where a 12 year old boy was killed by his family's dogs. The case was a difficult one, both emotionally as well as professionally. Dan spent many hours reviewing the scientific literature on aggression and dog bites as well as pages and pages of depositions and other documents. The trial resulted in a hung jury with jurors voting 10-2 in favor of acquitting the child's mother of felony child endangerment and 7-5 for conviction of a misdemeanor for the charge. [Read more about the verdict](#)

Suzanne presented 6 hours of lecture at Level I National Animal Control training academies in

Grand Rapids Michigan and Moreno Valley California.

Dr. Patricia McConnell's new book "For the Love of a Dog" is a wonderful discussion of the emotional lives we share with our dogs. Watch this space for information about Dr. McConnell's book signing tour stop in the Denver/Boulder area this fall.

We had hoped to have new webinars ready by fall, but sadly this and other projects were put on hold after the death of Suzanne's father on July 22nd. Charlie was 94 and had been in failing health, so although his death was not unexpected it was quite sudden. Suzanne had visited with him only hours before. We are thankful his passing was quick and peaceful. Charlie was a generous and caring man, and a devoted husband and father, with a sense of humor he never lost. We will miss and love him always. Our friend Dr. Mary Lee Nitschke passed along a verse Suzanne read at graveside, that we'd like to share with you. Its' comforting message applies to all our loved ones - human and animal alike. [Read it here.](#)

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