

You are receiving this email from Animal Behavior Associates because you subscribed on our website or asked us to add you to our list. To ensure that you continue to receive emails from us, add [ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com](mailto:ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com) to your address book today. If you haven't done so already, click to [confirm](#) your interest in receiving email campaigns from us. To no longer receive our emails, click to [unsubscribe](#).



## For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

June 16th, 2006, Volume IV Issue 6

### In This Issue

**Dog Piece:**  
**Summer Noise Phobias**

**Cat Piece:**  
**Learning to Speak Cat**

**Our Piece:**  
**Pets as Judges of Character**

**What's New:**  
**More Travels**

### Dear Suzanne,

Hi Everyone,  
We apologize for being a few days late with this issue. We both got behind because of our lecture schedules, some personnel changes, and a health crisis with Suzanne's 94 year old father. He is doing better, and we both are back in town from our travels. Thanks for your patience, and we'll do our best to see it doesn't happen again.

Best,  
Suzanne and Dan

### **Dog Piece:** **Summer Noise Phobias**



It's that time of year when thunderstorms and fireworks become more common and frighten many dogs. Owners of fearful animals are often told

they shouldn't coddle or comfort their fearful pets because this will reward and intensify the fearful behavior. This isn't true. While

### • **Cat Piece:** **Learning to Speak Cat**

#### **Part 2**

Last month we talked about how to read and interpret the body language and vocalizations of cats in order to better predict their moods and intentions. For example, we said that if your cat, while sitting on your lap being petted, lays her ears back, flicks her tail quickly, and/or growls, hisses or meows,



reinforcement can increase the frequency of certain behaviors, with highly emotional behaviors such as fear, another kind of learning - called classical conditioning - predominates. Classical conditioning occurs when a previously neutral stimulus, after numerous pairings with a fearful event, can also elicit fear. Dogs fearful of thunder may become fearful of darkened skies, wind, or dropping barometric pressure because these things are reliably associated with the loud noises of a thunderstorm.

Classical conditioning can be used to decrease a dog's fear. If the sound of thunder predicts a relaxing massage or a chance to sit in a lap, the sound of the storm can come to elicit a calm, relaxed state rather than a fearful one. This classical conditioning overshadows any reward learning that could occur in the situation. Pairing the sound of the storm with gentle petting and soft words leads the dog to become relaxed and calm. These behavior are counter to or incompatible with fearful behavior. Over time, the fearful behavior can be eliminated or greatly reduced.

A similar situation occurs when children have nightmares. The child is awakened and is in a panic, crying and trembling. We don't tell parents not to comfort their child because it will reward the panic behavior. Instead we tell them to comfort the child to help him calm down and become less fearful. The same is true for fearful dogs.

If your dog is fearful of loud noises:

~ Do your best to limit your dog's exposure to the sounds. Help your dog find a "safe" place to hide during the storm or while the noise is present. This may be in a basement, a closet or the bathtub or where ever your dog seems to be less fearful. Letting your dog go to safe places won't decrease your dog's fear of noises, but may make the problem more manageable for you and him.

~ Try to mask the noises with other sounds from the stereo, radio or TV. Sometimes tuning a radio between channels to produce that radio "hiss" or static is better because it tends to mask more sound frequencies and continues without interruption.

is being defensively threatening. She is trying to tell you to stop petting her because it is no longer enjoyable. We don't know why some cats can tolerate being petted for longer than others, but when they have had enough, they may threaten or bite us.

As we try to interpret our cats' communication signals, they are doing the same thing to us! But, cats will tend to interpret our behavior as if we were cats and not necessarily in the manner we intended. When we move suddenly to pet a cat, staring at her as we do so, we intend to be friendly, but cats can view these gestures as threatening. So it's not surprising that cats can respond by running away, threatening, or biting us. No wonder so many people are scratched or bitten by cats every year.

This doesn't mean that cats can't learn to better "read" us, especially if they are well socialized to people. The more familiar specific people become to a cat, the more likely the cat is to correctly interpret their intentions. Our behaviors that might initially have seemed threatening to a cat, no longer appear so, after numerous pleasant, rather than unpleasant, outcomes. The more unfamiliar you are to a cat, the more likely the cat is to "mis-read" you. That's why it's important to slow down when greeting a new cat, and allow the animal a bit of time to check you out.

If you want to show a cat that you are friendly and mean no harm, try the following. Don't go to the cat, let her come to you. Cats are often frightened by unfamiliar people approaching them. Crouch down or sit down. Try not to loom over her. Move your hand near your side, curl your fingers into a soft fist and stick out your index finger. Don't move your hand towards the cat, let her come to you.

If she wants to be friendly, she will sniff your finger, in much the same way cats sniff noses when they first meet. After one or two sniffs, if the cat wants more

~ Do not punish any fearful behavior, even if your dog is destructive or relieves himself inside. Punishment only makes fearful behavior worse.

~ Don't force your pet to experience the fear producing noises. He won't "get over it" or learn that the noises won't hurt him. This will most likely make the problem worse.

~ Consult with your veterinarian and/or a behavior consultant. Medications are available that your veterinarian can prescribe to help with severe fearful behavior on a short-term basis. A behavior consultant can help you with behavior modification to reduce the fearful behavior long-term.

~~~~~

## June Special

All Sound Sensabilites CDs on Sale!  
These CDs are very helpful in working with fearful pets to acclimate them to sounds so that they don't become fearful.

**Regularly \$25.95**  
**This month only \$20.95** (includes us ground shipping)

- [Thunderstorms](#)
- [Fireworks](#)
- [Car Trip](#)
- [Dogs](#)
- [Children](#)
- [Flight](#)
- [Guns](#)
- [Cars and Trucks](#)
- [Kitchen and Vacuum Noises](#)

discount will be applied in shopping cart.  
Special only available to ezine subscribers.

~~~~~

attention from you, she will rub up against your hand (a friendly gesture that leaves scent marks on you). If she does, try gently touching her on the face and head. If she seems to like that, you can try to go farther (sounds like a teenage boy on a first date, doesn't it) and scratch and pet her behind the ears and on her neck. While doing so, watch the cat closely for signs of fearful or threatening behaviors and stop petting immediately if you see them. By showing appropriate cat etiquette you can avoid a nasty encounter and even make a friend!

### • **Our Piece:** **Pets as Judges of Character**



Mary, a client of ours, recently told us that her dog, Lucy, who is aggressive to strangers, is a "good judge of character".

It seems that Lucy threatens people who act suspiciously or whom Mary feels uneasy about. Is Lucy a good judge of human character? Can dogs, or cats, tell good people from bad people? If so, how do they do it?

We could argue about what defines good and bad people and what we mean by character. We'll side-step those philosophical questions and say that no matter how you define it, there is no evidence that pets can discriminate people of good or bad character. Goodness and "badness" are defined by human values that pets don't understand anymore than they know right from wrong. If pets really were good judges of character, why would they live with really bad people? Even criminals have been known to have loyal dogs and cats.

It is likely that what Lucy's varying reactions to different people are the result of a discrimination based on the stranger's behavior and/or Mary's behavior. Some pets become threatening to people who act in unusual or

## Quick Links...

- [Our Website](#)
- [Products](#)
- [Services](#)
- [More About Us](#)
- [Archives](#)

unpredictable ways or when people do things that the pet interprets as threatening.

For example, a visitor who comes to the door and seems nervous, speaks in loud and gruff, tones and moves in quick and erratic ways would appear unusual to most people and most pets. Both pets and owners would likely be threatened by these behaviors, resulting in one or both being threatening or afraid in return. Sometimes dogs seem to take their cues from their owners. If the owner is somewhat tense and fearful when meeting someone, the dog also becomes anxious which can lead to defensiveness.

What about cats that won't have anything to do with certain people? Are they judging the person's character? Probably not. Like dogs, cats decide how to react based on the person's behavior. Many cats are put off by people who attempt to pet, pick up or approach them too quickly. It's been said that cats will be most friendly to people who don't like cats, just to annoy them. A more plausible interpretation is that people who don't like cats ignore them, making the cats more comfortable and more likely to approach these folks.

Both dogs and cats often respond to very subtle changes in human behavior. Pets can be quite aware of even slight changes in muscle tenseness or facial expressions that their owners' may make when feeling anxious or uncomfortable in the visitor's presence. So even if the owner doesn't know why the person makes them uncomfortable, the pet may be responding to very subtle cues. It appears that what pets respond to is not something inherent in the person's character but rather to directly observable, although sometimes quite small, behavior changes.

- **What's New:**  
**More Travels**

Dan just returned from



Lecturing at a NACA Training Academy in Hartford, CT.

Suzanne enjoyed helping customers while signing copies of her and Dan's award winning **Raising A Behaviorally Healthy Puppy** book. Thanks to the Park Meadows PETSMART for including us in their Puppy Fair.



Suzanne has returned from Ohio where she provided a workshop on cat behavior to a major pet industry corporation. She also had her steel pan drum recital last week. Won't be long before she is dressing and talking like a down-islander!

:: [ezine@animalbehaviorassociates.com](mailto:ezine@animalbehaviorassociates.com)  
:: <http://www.AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com>

:: 303-932-9095