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Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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Dog Piece: **Is a Tired Dog a Good Dog?**

The dog piece this month is contributed by our new assistant Christine Shedron, CPDT. Learn more about Christine in our "What's New at ABA" section.



We're not sure who to give credit to for the "tired dog is a good dog" axiom, but many of us agree with it. A

Dear Suzanne,

We hope you'll all welcome Christine Shedron, CPDT our new assistant. Thanks to Christine for the "Dog Piece" article this month.
Best wishes,
Suzanne and Dan

• **Cat Piece:** **Cat Pee Everywhere!**

Cat elimination problems can be complicated. Consider the case of our clients Joan and Jack. Joan and Jack have four cats: Edgar, a 6 year old male, 3 females - Fluffy and Blue Eyes, both 4 years old and Jo who is 3 years old.



Six months or so ago, one or more of the cats started spraying on the kitchen counter. It spread to Jack's office and the master bedroom. Joan has seen both Edgar and Jo urine mark by backing up against objects and spraying urine.

Joan took all the cats to the veterinarian where medical causes were ruled out. Before they consulted with us, Joan and Jack were convinced the cats were trying to get back at them because Edgar was Joan's favorite and Fluffy was Jack's favorite cat. They believed various combinations of the cats were jealous of each other and of them.

corollary might be "a tired dog is a happy dog". Do we care if our dogs are happy? If we don't we are missing a crucial piece of overall health in our wonderful companions.

Dogs are being relinquished at an alarming rate to shelters all over the country because "the dog was too hyper" when in actuality the dog was normal and the owner just wasn't meeting the dog's needs. Dogs that spend 5 days a week crated and receive few opportunities for exercise and social time when their owners' are home aren't leading the best quality life. This is true regardless of the size of the dog. Small dogs need mental and physical stimulation too.

There are many activities available to committed dog owners who want to improve their dogs' quality of life. Here are some examples:

1. Doggie daycare - Doggie daycare is a wonderful way for your dog to socialize while you are at work. Even a couple days a week would do wonders for your dog mentally and physically, as long as the facility is well managed by knowledgeable individuals who carefully monitor the well-being of the dogs and don't allow fights and bullying. While there are several good day cares in the Denver area, we recommend [The Den](#), not only because we have our office there, but also because of the knowledgeable owners Andy and Joy Hansen.

2. Dog agility - You are likely familiar with these obstacle courses with jumps, tunnels, weave poles, etc. Puppies should not do adult agility until 1 year of age but puppy agility without jumps is available. Agility is great for socialization, it is mentally and physically challenging, and it tends to create a strong bond between you and your dog.

3. Canine Musical Freestyle – This is one of my favorites because I have a dance background. Freestyle is a combination of obedience, trick moves and jumping, choreographed in an upbeat positive manner to music. Dogs of any age or size can do freestyle and you do not need any dance experience

"Getting back" at people and jealousy aren't causes for marking. We don't always understand why cats mark, but it seems to be a form of communication that occurs when cats are having antagonistic interactions with other cats, or when they have stressful interactions with people. The marking can occur in response to anything cats see, hear or smell.

In Joan and Jack's case, Edgar and Jo have had fights over access to a preferred cat bed. Jo also chases and attacks Fluffy. Jo is terrified of Jack, for unknown reasons. Joan grows catnip in her backyard, and a gang of neighborhood cats hang out there and threaten Joan's cats through the windows. Some of the conflict among the family's cats may have been re-directed aggression triggered by this gang. Given all this, it would be surprising if the cats weren't spraying!

This case is unusual in that there are so many different potential causes for the urine marking. We didn't know how much each of these factors was contributing to the problem, so we took a broad approach to resolve it. Jack and Joan's veterinarian prescribed anti-anxiety medications for Edgar and Jo.

We had Joan and Jack block the neighbor cats' access to their yard and pull up the catnip. We also instructed them to improve the relationships between Edgar and Jo and Jo and Fluffy. Jack will be working on helping Jo be less fearful towards him.

A few weeks into the process, things are much better with just a few isolated incidents of spraying. Joan and Jack recognize this problem will take considerable time and effort to resolve. The way they feel about their cats and the problem has changed. When they realized that the cats weren't spraying out of spite or jealousy, they didn't feel so let down by their cat's behavior and were more willing to work with the relationship issues. Helping people understand why their pets do what they do is just as important to resolving a problem as is taking steps to fix it.

If you need to rid your home of urine or other pet odors, we recommend [Anti-Icky-Poo](#), one of our most popular products. You won't find it at a better price!

- **Our Piece:**
What is Learned Helplessness?



to participate.

4. There are countless other activities that utilize your dog's breed tendencies such as herding for herding breeds, field work for hunting breeds and cart pulling for Newfoundlands and other working dogs. Always check with your veterinarian to make sure your dog is physically sound before participating in any activity.

In addition to these organized activities, walking and hiking with your dog are always wonderful choices. Set up doggie play dates with neighbors and friends. Play fetch, Frisbee, or tug of war regularly. Choose family activities your dog can participate in.

Interactive toys that require some thinking and time for the dog to master are wonderful for days when your dog is home alone or for inclement, inside days. Our [Bouncy Bones](#), [Tug-a- Jugs](#) and [Kong products](#) fit the bill.

In summary, meet your dog's needs and you will have a tired and happy dog.

***April Special ***

Evaluating shelter dogs for potential adoption continues to be an important yet controversial undertaking. No commercially available procedures have been validated on shelter dogs to be predictive of dogs' future behavior in their adoptive homes.

Several years ago, we created our ["Canine Behavior For the Shelter Staff" program](#), produced by ACT, Inc. (Animal Care Technologies). The program has just been made available in DVD format and until April 25 we are offering it to you at a one time only 10% discount. It consists of 2 DVDs and a workbook. In the first DVD, "Evaluating Behavioral Health" we demonstrate our version of a shelter evaluation. The second DVD is our well received Canine Body Postures that teaches people how to observe and interpret canine communication signals.

[Canine Behavior](#)

In various dog training discussion groups, it seems to have become fashionable to talk about "learned helplessness". From what we've seen of these discussions, it's clear there is a lack of familiarity with the original scientific literature about the phenomenon.

Back in the 1960s, in an admittedly disturbing series of experiments, Martin Seligman, L. Wynne and other researchers subjected dogs to inescapable shock while they were strapped in a Pavlovian harness. There was nothing the dogs could do to successfully escape, or avoid the shock. The shock terminated independent of their behaviors.

These dogs, and another group of naïve dogs - not subjected to inescapable shock - were then put individually in a device called a shuttle box. The enclosure has two sides with a barrier in between. A light is dimmed in the box, and several seconds later shock is administered through an electrified grid in the floor of the side of the box where the dog is standing. The dog can escape the shock by jumping over the barrier to the other side of the box. By learning that the dimming of the light predicts shock will occur, dogs also learn to avoid the shock altogether by jumping as soon as the light dimmed. "Naïve" dogs easily learned this behavior. The experimental dogs - those that had experienced the inescapable shock - did not. These dogs initially scuttled around, howling, but after a few trials just stood still and "took" the shock.

From this overview, it's clear that learned helplessness is about previous experiences interfering with future learning. We've seen the term erroneously applied to a decrease in responding as a result of positive punishment or when a dog is physically prevented from making a response.

An example of the former was a dog we watched on a video being subjected to repeated leash and collar "corrections" that ultimately stopped his lunging at a garden hose and instead sat panting. While this positive punishment was used inappropriately, it doesn't meet the criteria for learned helplessness. The dog could stop the punishment by not lunging. In addition, there is no evidence the dog's decrease in responding in this context led to an inability to learn in other contexts.

Friends and colleagues of ours, Ms. Nancy Williams and Dr. Peter Borchelt (both certified applied animal behaviorists) developed an

game for your dog.”

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Watch For Our New Blog!

We will be launching a blog within the next month. We'll send you details in a special message. The blog is another way we can provide world-wide quality education about pet behavior.