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## Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

July 11th, 2007, Volume V Issue 7

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Dear Suzanne,

Welcome to summer! Denver has experienced record setting temperatures - hitting 100 degrees and the high 90s during the last several weeks. As you'll see in our What's New section July is a crazy month for us - but good for you with TWO telecourses available! Hope to have you in class.

Best wishes,  
Suzanne and Dan

### • **Cat Piece:** **Carl's Water Fetish**

### **Dog Piece:** **Crating Correctly**



Several submissions to our [Most Burning Question](#) link prompted us to take up the topic of

crates again. One dog owner writes about her Husky that had been spending all day in his crate while she was at work. Now she is retired and the dog is chewing and swallowing stuffing from his toys when he's free in

In a recent note to us about her "Most Burning Question", Janice wrote about a strange behavior from her cat Carl. She wants to know why her cat plays in his water dish. He'll put his paws in the water, scoop it around spilling it out of the bowl and drag the bowl around the floor. It creates quite a mess for Janice.



There's much about cat behavior we don't understand. We can only guess why Carl is so fascinated with his water dish. This is most likely to be play or investigative behavior.

the house with her. Another visitor had been crating her dog to prevent him from being destructive during thunderstorms, but the dog is breaking out of the crate.

These stories illustrate two of the most common mis-uses of crates. We're not sure when crates became so popular. Our families didn't use crates with any of our childhood pets. Now they seem to be routinely recommended by breeders, shelters and veterinarians.

We believe crates are wonderful tools for training puppies, preventing young dogs from getting into mischief and for keeping dogs safe in the car. We've crate trained all our dogs for the last 30 years. Suzanne just wrote an article for [Cornell's Dog Watch](#) newsletter that will be out in the coming months about behaviors that can make it easier for dogs to be evacuated or rescued in disasters, and crate training was one.

However, spending 8 hours plus a day, 5 days a week in a crate, for 10 or more years is not our idea of a good quality of life for a dog. Some dogs, in addition to being crated while the owners are away at work, are then put back in the crate to sleep at night. This means they have maybe 5 hours a day of freedom. We have trouble sitting at the computer for more than an hour at a time without getting up to stretch our legs. Being confined to the computer chair all day would be agony!

With this kind of restricted, impoverished environment it's no wonder we often see dogs develop self-injurious behaviors, be quite reactive, excitable and difficult to train, become possessive of objects, or show abnormal behaviors such as pica (eating non- food items).

Using a crate to stop a dog from being destructive when alone is risky. If the destructive behavior is motivated by any sort of fear - separation anxiety, noise phobias, etc., the dog is going to become more panicked and quite likely

Cats, particularly young ones, are inquisitive about things. They can make almost anything a toy. We've heard of cats playing in water dishes and even wash- basins and bathtubs full of water. In fact there's a great [video on U-Tube](#) of a cat repeatedly flushing a toilet and watching the water spin around. It isn't true that cats are inherently afraid of water. Their reaction depends in large measure on their past experience with water.

Indoor only cats may have limited experience to novel surfaces, so the water may feel very interesting on Carl's paws. The way it moves in the dish when Carl paws at it or even the way the light shines off of the water may be intriguing to him. It is also possible that Carl sees his reflection in the water and thinks it's another cat looking at him. We know that not all animals recognize their reflected images as themselves. Siamese fighting fish and some birds will attack mirror images of themselves as if they were other fish invading their space. Many cats lose interest in the cat-in-the-mirror after a while when he doesn't do anything except stare back.

Janice could stop Carl from dragging the dish around by fastening it down so it can't be moved or use a very heavy crockery dish that is difficult to move. Keeping Carl from spilling the water is more difficult. She shouldn't do anything that will make it unpleasant or difficult for Carl to drink. Cats that don't drink enough water can end up with health problems. One way to minimize the spillage is to cover part of the water dish with a plastic container lid cut in half. This would cover half of the water dish. Another option might be a pet water fountain.

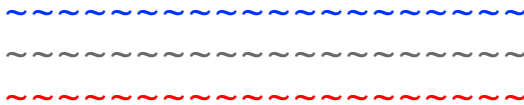
Janice could also reduce the problem by giving Carl other things to play with and investigate. She could set up mirrors or other shiny reflective objects or toys for Carl to look at or bat around. These may provide an alternative to the water dish as a play thing.

Janice can also step back and look at Carl's behavior in perspective. Carl may outgrow this habit as he matures. Compared to more serious problems such as peeing out of the litterbox, fighting with other cats or clawing the furniture, Carl's spilling water on the floor

injure itself trying to escape from the crate. We can't imagine the degree of terror these dogs must feel that they will actually break teeth to get out of the crate.

Our take home points are:

1. Recommend crates for training, NOT as a way of life. Help dog owners know how and when to transition their dogs out of routine crating.
2. Avoid recommending or using a crate to manage existing home-alone problem behaviors until it is clear these behaviors are not fear motivated.
3. Dogs must be gradually accustomed to not only being confined in a crate, but being confined when alone. For more information, see our video "[Crate Training the Right Way](#)", available at all PETSMART stores.



## July Special

**Save 50%**

### **Gently Used Puppy Books**

We have a limited number of our "Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy" book that have been slightly damaged (bent corners on the cover, wrinkled or dirty page edges). These are books that may have been handled too much in book or pet stores or in cartons that broke open during shipping. We're selling them at a 50% discount - only \$7.95 - from their regular \$15.95 price. It's a great deal as they are still quite useable and in decent shape. Nice opportunity for limited budgets, donation purposes, or your own lending library. Scroll to the bottom of the webpage on our site to find the special pricing.

**Available only while supplies last!**

These are offered "as is" -no returns permitted.



is relatively minor. Janice should appreciate his creativity!

- **Our Piece:**  
**Taking the Emotions Out of Behavior**



We often receive emails from people seeking help for their pets' behavior problems. As we read descriptions of pets' problem behaviors, it's quite interesting to hear the variability in the emotional states of the pet owners. Some, despite dealing with quite severe fear and aggression problems, are most concerned with their pets' well-being and express desires to do whatever they can to help their pets be less upset.

From others, their anger at their pets is quite apparent. One woman even wrote "dog pound here I come". What's so disturbing is that often it's so easy to see how distressed these pets are, and that the problem behaviors people are describing are the animals' way of trying to cope with very difficult situations over which they have no control.

Previously friendly dogs being attacked by other dogs and becoming quite aggressive to all dogs. Female dogs, both with litters of puppies, housed in proximity and wanting to attack each other, the owner threatening to muzzle them and allow them to "fight it out". Dogs, improperly trained to outdoor boundary systems, now afraid to go outside for fear of being shocked. Dogs being "alpha-rolled" by their owners and becoming aggressive. Cats having lived as the only pet, being relocated to families with multiple cats and dogs and becoming aggressive, fearful and soiling in the house. Previously friendly pairs of cats attacking each other after one returned from the veterinary clinic or grooming salon. Cats, with what sound like untreated medical problems, soiling the house and constantly meowing.

One of the qualities we appreciate so much in our pets is that there are no hidden agendas. While we don't always understand the motivation for each and every behavior we see, as we've said before, we do know that

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pets do what works for them. They are seeking to make "good things" happen (from their point of view), avoid unpleasantness, cope with stress, and/or get their needs met.

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## Quick Links...

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

Our first reaction when we observe problem behaviors should not be "how can I get him to stop this", but rather to ask "why". Why is my pet doing this? What's behind the behavior change? We know it's not due to spite, rebelliousness, trying to show us who's boss, or any other mean-spirited motivation we see from humans!

Behavior changes in fact, are one of the primary ways we know our pets are ill. So the first step is a medical examination by your veterinarian. Even if a disease or illness isn't the primary cause of a problem behavior, any condition that causes your pet to be uncomfortable can lower a behavior's threshold. A cat for example, may have long been a bit "edgy" and prone to biting, but if the aggression suddenly increases in frequency or intensity, perhaps it's due to diseased teeth and gums or allergies.

Rather than becoming immediately frustrated, annoyed or angry when our pets' behaviors are less than perfect and thinking of how to discipline them, we should use our "superior intelligence" and try to analyze the situation from the pet's point of view. That's not always easy, and you may often need the help of a professional behaviorist.

- **What's New:**  
**Busy Summer Schedule**

LAST CHANCE to join Pia Silvani's [Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor](#) 5 week telecourse. Class



started last night (July 10th) but you can catch up by listening to the replay. Registrations close Friday July 13th.

STILL TIME to register for Suzanne and Dan's [Shining the Light of Science on Canine Behavior](#) telecourse, starting next Wednesday July 18th. This class won't be offered again this year.

We now offer a webcast option for all our telecourses if you prefer to listen through your computer rather than be telephone. [Listen to our FAQ session to learn more.](#) Earn CEUs for both courses from CCPDT and CACVT.

Registrations are coming in for our September [Canine Aggression Seminar](#) here in Denver. Seating is limited, and fall will be here before you know it, so register NOW so you don't miss out. We expect this seminar to sell out.

On Thursday July 12th we deliver another "Introducing Your Dog To Your New Baby" class at a Denver hospital. Watch for our new DVD on this topic coming soon!!

Suzanne will travel to Washington DC on Saturday, July 14th to attend AVSAB and AVMA meetings and meet with Nancy Williams, her co-presenter at our September seminar.

Dan and Suzanne travel to Nebraska to deliver a one day behavior seminar on July 27th to veterinary technicians at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture. From there it's on to South Dakota where Suzanne's cousin lives, to spend time water skiing on the Missouri River.

Dan just returned from a nightmarish trip to Louisville KY to speak at a NACA 100 Academy. His flight from Chicago to Louisville was cancelled and he was forced to fly to Pittsburgh to get to Louisville. Made for a 13 hour travel day - not pretty. And congrats to Dan for completing the 1/3 Marathon Gothic to Crested Butte run on July 4th. Suzanne ran last year, but nagging minor injuries sidelined her this year.

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