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Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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Dear Suzanne,

Halloween is over and the Holidays are fast approaching! It was good to visit with some of you at the APDT Conference in Portland last month but we're happy to be home for a while after a very busy month of travel. We're working full time on our new websites and expanded offerings, so look for the launch in the coming weeks. This month we talk about a common problem - redirected aggression, and a couple of controversial ideas - rewarding fears and problems related to phase of the moon. Don't miss your opportunity to tell us what topics you want to hear about and what resources you need in our What's New section. And take advantage of our THANK YOU offer. Enjoy!

Dog Piece: **Can Fear be Rewarded?**



Of all the myths and misconceptions that have surrounded dog behavior and training for a very long time, perhaps the most persistent is the one that claims it is possible to reinforce an animal's fear by paying attention to him or trying to reassure him. This was certainly a belief some of Suzanne's first mentors indoctrinated her with close to thirty years ago.

• **Cat Piece:** **Redirected Aggression In Cats**

Jaimie was just dozing off to sleep when she heard what sounded like her cat, Alexander, having a major fight with another cat. As she stumbled out of bed to find the source of the racket, she couldn't figure out how Alexander could be fighting. He was an indoor, only cat! She found Alexander at an open window



For almost that long, behavioral researchers have known that it is difficult to influence emotional states and involuntary behaviors using rewards and punishments. Ever tried to influence your heart rate or other physiological parameter using biofeedback? Not easy to learn, even given the cognitive abilities of people that animals don't share.

So, if your dog is afraid of say thunder, and you hold your pet and calmly stroke her to help her relax and calm down do you think her fearful behavior is likely to increase? That's what reinforcement does - increase the frequency of behaviors it follows. So if reassurance rewards fearful behavior, then it also follows that your pet is becoming more afraid as a result. It's the emotion of fear that is expressed with observable behaviors. If your pet's feelings of being afraid don't intensify, then neither will her fearful behaviors.

There seems to be a persistent belief that it is possible to reward fearful behaviors without rewarding the emotion of fear. This may be true in people. We all know individuals with a "martyr" mentality who will act fearful and helpless just to get attention and have others take care of them.

This doesn't seem to be true for animals. They don't pretend. If they don't feel afraid, they don't act afraid. When their emotional state changes, so do their behaviors.

Behavioral researchers back in the 1940s, conditioned rats to jump to the other side of their enclosure in order to avoid the shock that followed a buzzer. In the next phase of training, the researchers changed the sequence so that cheese followed the buzzer and the shock was discontinued.

Over multiple experiences with cheese follows buzzer, even as the rats attempted to jump to the other side, do you think the rats became more

hissing, growling and throwing himself at the screen. On the other side was a cat Jaimie hadn't seen before. Clearly, Alexander was upset over this stranger and the stranger was returning the sentiment.

As Jaimie reached down to pick up Alexander and close the window, Alexander attacked her, biting her on the hand and sending her to the emergency room for the rest of the night. Jaimie called us the next day in tears. How could her beloved cat do such a thing? He'd never shown the slightest hint of threatening behavior in the past. Was he sick? Was he crazy?

After a thorough check up, Jaimie's veterinarian told her Alexander wasn't sick. And as we explained to her, he wasn't crazy, either. Instead, Alexander was showing a common form of aggression for cats - redirected aggression. When some cats become aggressively motivated but can't get to their desired targets, they "redirect" it to others that happen to be nearby. Alexander became threatening to the cat outside the window, but couldn't get to him because of the screen, so he attacked Jaimie instead.

We don't know why some cats, and dogs (yes, some dogs do it too), show redirected aggression and others don't. To resolve the problem, we usually try to address the original cause of the aggression. If that can be stopped, then the redirected aggression won't occur.

In Alexander's case we recommended that Jaimie close the windows and blinds so that Alexander couldn't see outdoor cats. Jaimie also needs to find humane ways to keep other cats away from the house. This isn't always easy to do. Sometimes physical or chemical repellants can be used such as the Ssscat, which sprays a puff of air when a cat or any other animal gets near it. Another is the Cat Stop, that delivers a loud but ultrasonic tone when animals get near it.

These devices may help to manage the problem by keeping the cats away, but don't change Alexander's motivation to attack unfamiliar cats on his territory. This may be quite difficult to do.

fearful and increased their jumping behavior? That's what would happen if you believe the jumping behavior (and therefore the fear) was reinforced by the cheese.

Just the opposite occurred. The rats' fear decreased, the jumping stopped and they began to eat the cheese. This is an example of classical conditioning changing behavior by changing emotional state rather than operant conditioning rewarding fear.

Are you confused or want more information? Our [CD "Using Counter Conditioning and Desensitization Techniques Effectively"](#) will ease your confusion. See our special offer below!

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**2 Special Offers This Month, Just In Time For Holiday Gift Giving!**

For a limited time, for our ezine readers ONLY we are including a free copy of "Environments Country Thunderstorm" audio tape with the 2 CD recording of our popular teleclass ["Using Counter Conditioning And Desensitization Techniques Effectively To Modify Behavior"](#). This one hour high-fidelity audio tape of thunderstorm sounds can be useful with desensitization and counter conditioning techniques to decrease a pet's fear of thunderstorms. This bonus is a \$12 value. Hurry as supplies of the Environments tape are limited and when they're gone, they're gone.

Please put "Ezine-Reader" in the special instructions box. The bonus won't show in the shopping cart, but will be included.

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 Purchase the 5 disc [DVD of our September seminar "Understanding and Modifying Canine Aggressive Behavior"](#) and for a limited time we'll include our ["Collection of Canine Aggression Articles" CD](#). To receive this bonus you **MUST** enter

The important things to remember about this situation is that it's never safe to try to pick up or handle an angry cat. Cat bites can be serious, and need immediate treatment. And remember that the presence of outdoor cats can significantly affect the behavior of your indoor cat!

• **Our Piece:
Howling at the Moon**

We ran across an interesting article in the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association's newsletter we receive as affiliate members. Dr. Raegan Wells, a veterinarian at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Colorado State University, recently conducted a study on the frequency of pets'



visits to the emergency room. After reviewing the records of almost 12,000 such visits over a 10-year period, she found a 23% increase for cats and a 28% increase for dogs in emergency visits during the full moon. Her results were published in the July 15th, 2007 issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

It's been a long-standing belief among both veterinary as well as human medical and mental health professionals that emergency room visits are more frequent during a full moon. There now seems to be data to support those beliefs.

While the research established a correlation between frequency of emergency room visits and the phase of the moon, it was not designed to discover the underlying cause. That's an important point to remember when it comes to scientific research - establishing a correlation does not answer why the correlation exists.

One possibility of course is that the effect is the result of human behavior. If people behave differently as a result of the lunar cycle, and for example are more likely to believe their pets' need emergency care, this could account for the increase. However, Dr. Wells' data

"ezine- reader" in the special instructions box in our shopping cart. Limited to the first 10 people who order!

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don't support this interpretation. The reasons for the emergency did not vary with the moon's phase, and were often quite objective - such as trauma - rather than subjective - such as believing the pet just wasn't feeling well.

We don't know of any behaviorists who have tracked their case loads or types of behavior cases relative to the lunar cycle but it might be an interesting undertaking. The odds of finding significant correlations might be much less because behavior problems don't often require immediate interventions the way medical emergencies do. So the timing of when a pet owner contacts a trainer or behaviorist may not represent the exact onset of the behavior problem.

For those of you who work in the medical or veterinary health care fields, you might want to prepare yourself for the next full moon that occurs on November 24.

## • **What's New:** **We Need YOUR Help!**

Well, we survived our 17 days of travel in October and are happily home working hard to develop our new websites, products, and services that focus on providing scientific education and information about pet behavior to pet professionals and pet parents.



To best serve you, we need your help. Please visit our [Most Burning Question](#) page and give us your ideas for new educational classes, tell us what pet behavior concerns and problems you'd like to see us develop CDs and DVDS about, and any other ideas you have about what we might provide YOU as pet parents or pet professionals to help you deliver better behavior care.

In return, we'll give you the chance to listen to a 40 minute presentation Dr. Estep gave to the Grand Valley Kennel Club about *"Interaction of Genetics and Other Factors on Behavior"*. To be eligible for this bonus you MUST, MUST identify yourself as an "Ezine-Reader" when

:: [ezine@animalbehaviorassociates.com](mailto:ezine@animalbehaviorassociates.com)

::

<http://www.AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com>

you submit your comment.

You won't receive your link immediately after submitting your question but you will receive an email with the link, within 1 business day, so be sure you've entered your email correctly. Thanks in advance for your help!

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