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Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

March 12, 2008, Volume VI Issue 3

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Dog Piece: How Dangerous Is Fido?



One of the most important things we do when we work with people with aggressive dogs is to help them assess the risk of keeping their dog in the home. Until people have a good idea of how dangerous their dog is, they can't

Dear Suzanne,

Spring is in the air and it's given us renewed energy to move forward on our mission to make scientific education about behavior readily available to pet professionals and pet owners alike. We hope spring has sprung in your neck of the woods too and energized you to accomplish wonderful things!

Best wishes,
Suzanne and Dan

• Cat Piece: Why Cats Are Not Dogs

We recently had a conversation with a friend who told us he hated cats and he was a dog person. When we asked him why he disliked cats he said he didn't understand them. They didn't "do" anything and they have no personality.



From the perspective of a dog person, cats may seem really different and inscrutable. Many of these behavioral differences have to do with differences in lifestyles and ancestry. Dogs are

make rational decisions whether to keep the dog in their home. The process of risk assessment involves examining the dog's past behavior, the environment, and the people and other animals that will be around the dog. This information is then used to make predictions about what could happen.

Our current ability to make accurate predictions is not very good. We can't say "If Rover is in the home and X, Y and Z happens, there is a 60% chance he will bite." The reason our accuracy is limited is because the causes of dog bites are very complex and our knowledge of all the factors that influence dog aggression is still poor. In spite of this rudimentary knowledge, there are some things we do know and information we can give owners to help them make decisions.

When doing assessments, we look at three factors: Dog characteristics and behavior, environmental factors and people/animal factors (those that are the potential victims of a bite). We know that all these factors interact and influence bite likelihood.

Risk assessment isn't just about evaluating the dog. The same dog in two different environments with different people or animals present may present two very different bite risks. For example, a dog living behind a high stone wall that attacks unfamiliar dogs is less of a risk than the same dog living at the end of a chain in an unfenced yard where any animal can wander in.

People and animal factors include the presence or absence of particularly vulnerable people or animals. Those whom are very young, very old or disabled, present more of a risk. The potential for provocative behavior such as neighborhood children harassing the dog, the presence or absence of fearful or threatening people or animals, and the ability of the owners to keep potential victims safely away from the dog are also important.

social living and social hunting predators. Cats are solitary living and solitary hunting predators.

These inherited tendencies result in behavioral differences between cats and dogs. It's not that cats don't "do" anything, it's that cats do things differently than dogs. When the ancestors of dogs hunted, they did it by actively moving around, getting the sight, sound or scent of their prey and chasing them down. When the ancestors of cats hunted, they did it by picking a spot, lying in wait and pouncing on their prey. So our domestic cats are perfectly happy to sit in a window and watch birds at a feeder while our dogs run outside barking and chase the birds away.

These differences in activity and lifestyle influence the social behavior of dogs and cats and account in part for differences in personality. What some people call a lack of personality in cats is really just a different way of relating to people and other animals.

Cats can become as strongly bonded to their people as can dogs, but just display their attachments in different ways. Your dog may want to lick your face, paw at you and climb in your lap. Your cat may simply want to sit next to you on the sofa. Social rewards may be more important to more dogs than cats. Many dogs will do things for people when the reward is praise or petting. Most cats are not so strongly rewarded by social contact.

Many people who dislike cats would probably like them better if they were around them more and took the time to understand them. This same message applies to other things we don't like, whether they be people or animals, or objects such as cars. The world would be a better place if people took the time and effort to learn more about others.

- **Our Piece:**
Do the Ends Justify the Means?

At a recent meeting, we listened to an individual describe his experience with a local trainer for his two spaniel puppies. As we understand it, the man had called a trainer because the puppies were biting him

Finally, the owner's risk tolerance is another factor that comes into play. For some people, it is unacceptable for their dog to ever growl at their child, no matter what the child may have been doing to the dog. For others, a growl may be acceptable in some circumstances, particularly if the child provoked the dog. It is not for us to say what risk an owner should live with. That must be their decision. We simply try to give them the best information available to help them make their decision.

Threats and aggression by dogs must always be taken seriously and owners who have threatening or aggressive dogs should be counseled to have their dogs evaluated. This month we are offering a [teleseminar on risk assessment](#) for pet professionals and interested pet owners. See the section below this article to learn more.

We have a great offer for you this month. We are re-organizing our office space and discontinuing some products as we make room for our expanded line of educational products. We have a limited number of [Premier's Gentle Spray Citronella Anti-Bark Collar](#) - while supplies last - at only \$59.95 plus ground shipping. Make sure you get yours, because when they're gone, they're gone!

We also want to remind you of the wide selection of tele-webcasts we have for you this spring. Coming up TOMORROW - Thursday, March 13th, is ["How You Can Start an 'Introducing Your Dog to Your New Baby,' Class in Your City"](#). We'll make a special offer to attendees ONLY for materials we've created to help you get started. So don't miss out - we only have a few spaces left, and registration closes at noon mountain time on Thursday.

A fantastic companion to this course is ["Helping Kids and Dogs Get Along"](#) which we'll be team teaching with Ms.

and his wife when they tried to put them in their crates. The man described previously being told to hold the puppies up to his face (one at a time obviously), stare at them until they looked away (to show he was "dominant" over them) and then try putting them in their crates. The puppies started biting during this interaction, and the new trainer told him it was because they were "bored" with this stuff and were biting so he would put them down. Well, the puppies definitely wanted to get away from this, but because they were afraid, NOT bored!

The trainer then proceeded to use a broom to "sweep" the puppies into their crates. One puppy apparently gave up and entered the crate to avoid the broom, while the other started biting it. The trainer then strung the puppy up (lifted it off the floor and over his shoulder using a choke chain and leash) and shoved him in the crate. We of course were horrified and remarked that to us this was animal abuse. But the puppy owner responded by saying he never had anymore trouble with that puppy going into his crate. For him, the method had "worked", therefore it was OK.

The first problem with this situation is that the viewpoint of too many pet owners seems to be the end justifies the means. For some folks, it doesn't seem to matter that unnecessary mental and physical trauma is inflicted as long as the "training" results in the desired outcome - at least in the short term. This is one reason why aversive methods promoted on television are so popular.

The second problem with this is the conclusion that the technique "worked". Very often what people interpret as having "worked" is the product of nothing more than increased fear resulting in suppression of numerous behaviors. We've often seen fear and aggression problems that can be traced back to unnecessary and inappropriate use of aversive techniques. But because these problems don't always surface immediately, owners may not make the connection. It's kind of like food poisoning - you may not feel sick until a day later and have a difficult time knowing if it was something you ate that made you sick.

Pets can also learn that doing anything is the safest bet. Interestingly, the owner remarked he was still having problems with the second puppy. When the family tries to "make her do something", she goes limp and won't move. And he just couldn't figure out what to do with her.

Pia Silvani on March 20th. Most parents still are under the assumption their children have to be "dominant" over their dog for the relationship to work. Learn why this is a misconception, how to overcome it and others, and get "buy in" for a different perspective. We'll give you clear guidelines to offer parents and Pia will share her tips from her award winning book "Raising Puppies and Kids Together".

Don't forget "Risk Assessment of Aggressive Animals" coming up on March 25. This class is filling up fast and is the first of an upcoming series on aggression we'll be rolling out later in the spring. Be sure to get in on this class so you get the full benefit of the subsequent classes which will build on this one.

Pia Silvani begins her ever popular 5 week "Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor" course on April 1 (and we ain't foolin'!) Pia doesn't fool around either in this course and really explains - with tons of examples from her years of experience overseeing her staff of trainers at St. Hubert's - the people and organizational skills you need to be a Great Instructor!

Finally on April 9th and 16th is "Using Counter Conditioning and Desensitization Techniques Effectively". We've had many requests for this course since offering it last year. This one won't come around again until late fall or winter so take it now!

All courses are approved for CEUs by CCPDT and CACVT (live versions ONLY).

Whew - if you can't find something in THAT line up that will expand your knowledge, drop us an email and tell us what else you'd like to see - but only after you've taken all those courses!!! Seriously - we welcome your suggestions at any time.

Ahh, some days it feels like a losing battle! But the anticipation of launching our BehaviorEducationNetwork.com membership site, and our affiliate program, both aimed at helping pet professionals, keep us going. We promise folks, these ARE coming, we just had no idea of the challenges involved!

**• What's New:
Notes from IFAAB and the 'Wearing O' The Green'**

We just returned from another great get together at the 12th Annual Interdisciplinary Forum in Applied Animal Behavior held again this year in New Orleans. This small, invitation only meeting allows us to visit with and get to know colleagues and "talk shop" for three days over great food and sometimes too many beverages of the alcoholic variety. But a little indulgence from time to time doesn't hurt!



Just a few highlights - We learned about new statistical techniques used in research, were reminded of the importance of the skill of observation (and the need for more opportunities for professionals and pet owners alike to be formally trained in it), had a quite lively discussion on the use of "aversives" in training and behavior modification, and still went home friends. One thing IFAAB teaches us is how to disagree and discuss different points of view without ever turning these learning opportunities into personal attacks, something we see far too commonly in other contexts.

We HOPE the programming on our membership site BehaviorEducationNetwork.com is close to being finished so we can begin uploading all the amazing content we have planned for you. As soon as we are sure we can proceed, we'll give you details. Just a small preview - membership comes with 3 copies of our "[Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy](#)" book on even months and "[Help!](#)

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[I'm Barking and I Can't Be Quiet](#)" on odd months (while supplies last, you just pay shipping, OR you can opt out of this benefit if you wish) AND a members ONLY teleclass every month for no additional fee! We'll keep you posted!

We are looking forward to celebrating St. Patrick's Day by joining the Irish Setter Club of Colorado in the annual Saint Patrick's Day parade with our Irish setter, Coral this coming Saturday. On Sunday, we're running in a 5k fun run, and then are excited to attend "Brass Bagpipes and Co" - a performance of the Denver Brass in conjunction with the Colorado Celtic Pipe and Drums and the Wick School of Irish Dance Performers. We wish all of you a fun and safe Happy St. Paddy's day.