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Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

July 9, 2008, Volume VI Issue 7

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Dear Suzanne,

We hope you had a great 4th of July celebration. Read about our fun time in South Dakota and about our line up of telecourses for the second half of the summer in the What's New Section. Our articles this month are about canine and feline aggression and how problem behavior isn't always what it seems.

Suzanne and Dan

• **Cat Piece:** **Fighting Felines**

Dog Piece: **Helping Tucker Be Friendly**



Sam and Lisa have a black Labrador retriever named Tucker. Tucker went to puppy class and on many outings and was very friendly to people and other dogs. But when Tucker was about

nine months old, he began to bark wildly at people he saw on walks and growl when people came to the house. Tucker's owners

A client of ours from a few years back initially called for help when her male cat began attacking one of her females. Louise's three



cats had lived together peaceably for years until recently. Lucy, one of two female cats was sitting quietly in the kitchen when Louie, the male came up the nearby basement steps. At the top of the steps was the screened kitchen door leading to the backyard. On this particular morning a free roaming cat was hanging by his claws on the screen, looking in.

became very concerned about his behavior because one of the reasons they'd chosen a lab was for their good natured temperaments. After all they had done to socialize Tucker during puppyhood they couldn't understand this apparently sudden change in his demeanor.

Over the years we've talked to many people like Sam and Lisa and seen many dogs like Tucker. Despite their owners having done a lot of things right, between about 9 months and 2 years of age is a common time frame for dogs to develop aggression problems.

The development of normal behavior during "adolescence", between sexual maturity and behavioral maturity, has not been well studied. Drs. John Paul Scott's and John Fuller's seminal research beginning in the 1950s of behavior development in the dog didn't extend much into these ages.

There are a number of possible reasons why some dogs' social behavior takes a turn for the worse in adolescence. While most dog owners have heard about the importance of socializing puppies, the importance of continued socialization through adolescence is a message that hasn't been pushed nearly as hard.

For many dogs, after puppy class and maybe a basic obedience class, contact with people and other dogs becomes more limited. Young dogs may want to greet people they meet on walks but are often discouraged from doing so, or they may become increasingly fearful of unfamiliar people and aren't given enough opportunities to overcome their fear.

As dogs mature, not only does their territorial nature surface, but they become conditioned to the

As Louis mounted the steps and saw the cat his territorial "instincts" kicked in and he rushed the screen, yowling and hissing. Of course the outdoor cat ran off, but Louie looked to his left and there was Lucy just a few feet away. Still quite aroused, Louie rushed over and attacked Lucy. Louise heard Lucy's screams and Louie's yowls and rushed in to separate the cats.

A few hours later Louise fully expected the cats would be back to normal when she allowed them together but that was not the case. Louie immediately went for Lucy who in turn ran, terrified, from him. The cats repeated this pattern when Louise tried several times to re-introduce them over the next several days, at which point she called us.

Had Louise not seen what had happened with the outdoor cat, it would have been quite a mystery to her as to why her two cats, that had lived peaceably together for years, suddenly couldn't stand the sight of one another.

Louie was showing redirected aggression to Lucy. This occurs when an animal directs aggressive behavior toward another individual that didn't initially elicit the response. Redirected aggression is one of the most common reasons why cats in the same family fight. In our experience it also has the best chance of successful resolution; higher than territorial and personal space problems.

One of the most important tactics whenever family cats begin to fight is to separate the cats so the fights can't continue. If fighting becomes the cats' usual way of interacting the behavior will become increasingly difficult to change as they lose their previously friendly ways.

Because cats do not have ritualized appeasement, reconciliation or play behaviors, once they begin not getting along, it's difficult for them to repair their relationships. Re-introductions can take quite some time - Louise's cats required 3 months before they could live together peaceably again.

To learn what we did to help them, and how you

sound of the doorbell predicting visitors will soon appear. More frustration ensues if owners grab their collars and haul them into another room so as not to annoy guests. This "chaos at the door" could contribute to subsequent threatening and aggressive behavior. Why this happens in some dogs and not others, depends on other factors we don't fully understand.

In addition, it's certainly true that dogs experience conditioning experiences. During their alerting displays, "intruders", in the form of delivery people and mail carriers leave the property. We assume this reinforces barking and other alarm behaviors. It's not clear how, or if these alerting displays contribute to the development of aggression problems, because almost all dogs engage in the former but significantly fewer in the latter.

Because aggressive behavior toward non-family members is such a huge problem for dogs, we are conducting a two session telecourse on strategies for preventing, managing and resolving these problems. Learn more about this July course at [our website](#) and in the section below in this ezine. We hope to have you in class!

~~~~~ *Summer Learning*

Summers flying by and our telecourses are filling up fast! So register soon for the second half of our summer session. Click on the name of the course for more details and to register.

REGISTRATION STILL OPEN!
[Feline Aggression to Other Cats](#) July 8th and 10th. A replay of the first class will be available to all who register. Then either join us 'live' for

can effectively intervene with fighting felines, join our two session telecourse NOW in progress.

Although the first session was yesterday, you can listen to the replay and join the second session LIVE, which focuses on behavior modification for fighting problems. Register IMMEDIATELY at [Feline Aggression to Other Cats](#) to get access to the class notes, 1st session replay, and information on how to participate in Thursday's second session.

- **Our Piece:**
Medical verses Behavioral

Brenda, a previous client of Dan's called because her cat had again begun to urinate outside of the litterbox. This re-occurrence of the same problem Dan had helped them resolve a number of months previously coincided with the birth of their first child. The couple automatically assumed the cat's inappropriate elimination had something to do with the baby's presence.



Dan insisted however that Brenda take Fred the cat to her veterinarian to be evaluated for possible medical causes for the soiling. Sure enough, Fred was diagnosed with a urinary tract infection, so the baby's birth was only coincidental to the housesoiling problem.

This is one of many examples of medical conditions that masquerade as behavior problems. We've always made it a policy that animals should be examined by a veterinarian before being referred to us for behavior consulting. Most of our clients have always come from veterinary referral but we've been particularly adamant about veterinary input if the problem involved inappropriate elimination, aggression, self-injurious behaviors, or stereotypies (also known as compulsive disorders).

We've heard of numerous instances of non-veterinary behavior consultants suggesting to pet owners that their dog's thyroid "needed to be tested" or their cat "needed to be on Prozac" or that they should change their pet's diet because of an aggression or other

the second class, or listen to both replays at your convenience!

NEW! Canine Aggression to Strangers *Learn the how to's of dealing with aggression to strangers in dogs. We'll discuss identifying causes, evaluating risk, and behavior modification options for "unfriendly" dogs. Sundays July 20th and 27th.*

Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor *Pia Silvani is a great instructor, with great information, to help great students, become great training instructors! This five week course begins Wednesday July 16th.*

NEW! Medical Problems that Masquerade as Behavior Problems *Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D., CAAB interviews Margie Knoll, DVM and Nancy Williams, M.A., RVT, ACAAB. An extremely timely topic to help behaviorists, behavior consultants, trainers, and veterinarians appreciate professional boundaries and work together to provide behavior care. August 17th and 24th.*

Don't have the time? Listen at your convenience! All courses are recorded and replays available to those who register.

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behavior problem.

Non-veterinarians do not have the expertise to make those kinds of recommendations. One of the most important contributions a non-veterinary behavior consultant should be able to make to providing behavioral care is the recognition of what's not normal behavior.

To give another example - a puppy was referred to Suzanne by a veterinarian for difficulty in housetraining. The owners had done many things right, but their house training procedures still needed a bit of tweaking. After following Suzanne's recommendations to more closely supervise and observe the puppy, we discovered the little guy was urinating about every hour or less. That's too often for most 16 week old puppies. Suzanne spoke with the veterinarian who decided further medical workup was indicated and a urinary tract infection was subsequently diagnosed.

The important point here was that input from a behaviorist allowed the owners to properly observe the puppy which in turn revealed "not normal" behavior that was a sign of a medical problem. Suzanne reported the "not normal" behavior - an appropriate way of working with the veterinarian - rather than suggesting to the veterinarian the puppy had a UTI - a clear over stepping of professional limits. Many other medical conditions could have contributed to excessively frequent urination from the puppy that a veterinarian would need to evaluate and diagnose.

Veterinarians and behavior experts working together can provide better behavior care than either can alone. In doing so, it's important for each to respect the other's professional expertise.

Because we feel this is such an important topic, we'll be conducting a two session telecourse in August with Dr. Margie Knoll and Ms. Nancy Williams on [Medical Problems That Masquerade as Behavior Problems](#). Dr. Knoll, a veterinarian, and Ms. Williams, an associate certified applied animal behaviorist, will present case examples and describe their collaborative model that has resulted in both medical AND behavior problems being

diagnosed and analyzed more effectively and efficiently because of their cooperative efforts.

Click on the link above for more details and registration information.

- **What's New:**
Fun on the Fourth



As you can see from the accompanying picture we just returned from a wonderful 4 days in South Dakota at Suzanne's cousin's cabin on the Missouri River. We enjoyed water sports,

great food and renewing family connections. What could be better!

We've come back energized to deliver THREE new telecourses in July and August. Learn about them on our [website](#) or view the reminders in other sections of this ezine.

We've also upgraded [HelpingFido.com](#) and an upgrade for [HelpingKitty.com](#) is not far behind.

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If you'll be at AVMA in New Orleans next week, please say hello. Suzanne will be at AVSAB on Friday July 19th and attending most of the behavior tracks at AVMA over the following weekend. She'll bring back nuggets of wisdom to share in future ezines.