Welcome to the sixth edition of Behavior News, the newsletter designed to keep veterinary staff and other animal handlers up to date on current behavior recommendations for companion animals. In this issue we continue our series on low-stress handling and have a few discussions regarding the human-canine relationship.

We are also pleased to announce that the search for an Animal Welfare Specialist in the Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine has officially begun. Filling this position will allow for an expansion in both the teaching and research aspects of behavior and welfare in the College. For additional resources on animal behavior at The Ohio State University, please visit: vet.osu.edu/Behavior and vet.osu.edu/CommunityPractice.

Coming soon…

Keep your eyes peeled for the December 1, 2012 issue of Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA) for an article that discusses some of the benefits of offering behavioral medicine services (BMS) in a specialty referral hospital. This study found most BMS clients had not previously been to a specialty referral practice with their pet. Furthermore, based on their experiences with the BMS, they would be likely to return to the same specialty hospital for other specialty services. In essence, behavioral medicine recruits a clientele that may not have considered taking their pet to a specialty practice and may build trust and loyalty for return visits, even in other specialty areas. More details in a JAVMA coming to you soon!

Behavior Textbook Review


Although it is not specifically a “behavior” text, the 7th edition of Plumb’s Veterinary Drug handbook offers an abundance of information on many of the psychotropic drugs currently utilized by veterinary behaviorists. You will find detailed information on the more commonly used SSRIs, such as Reconcile (fluoxetine), Clomicalm (clomipramine), Paxil (paroxetine), and Zoloft (sertraline), and benzodiazepines, such as diazepam, alprazolam, and lorazepam. Never heard of trazodone? Clonidine? Plumb’s gives an excellent description of the indications, use, and dose recommendations for these more commonly used behavioral medications. This new edition is a major upgrade from the 6th edition in regard to psychotropic drugs.
Teenagers: Dealing with the adolescent dog

A dog’s adolescence usually begins around six months of age and will continue until he is one-and-a-half to three years of age, depending on his breed. This period of time is notably the most frustrating for pet owners. Lessons the dog has learned as a puppy begin to take lower priority as his adult-dog interests develop. He will become less dependent on his owner for guidance as he begins to explore other dogs, scents and environments. Energy levels, especially for large, active breed dogs, are at their peak during this time, making exercise requirements much higher than they were during puppyhood. Some breeds, such as Terriers, Labrador Retrievers, and herding dogs, require more exercise than others. However, the rule of thumb for any breed is that the more energy a dog spends on exercise activities, the less energy he will have to expend on unruly behaviors, such as destructive chewing or mouthing. Providing enrichment toys, such as food-stuffed Kongs, Busy Buddies, or Bully Sticks, will also help redirect the dog’s energy to an appropriate outlet.

Be aware that as dogs mature and grow larger, behaviors that may have been cute and tolerable as a puppy, such as jumping up, sitting on laps, licking faces, etc., are no longer acceptable – especially for small children or guests that visit the home. Do not expect a dog to realize on his own that these behaviors are unacceptable. Start when he is a puppy by rewarding him for sitting and do not allow people to give him attention when he jumps on them. Yelling at or pushing him for jumping up on people can be interpreted as a reward for the dog, often reinforcing the behavior. Harsh punishment is rarely effective for attention-seeking behaviors and is likely to create a negative association with the owner, family members, or guests. This negative association may lead to anxiety about interactions with people which can often manifest as fear and aggression later in life.

All of the hard work in socialization and teaching good manners can go to waste quickly during adolescence if one does not make an effort to maintain a dog’s appropriate behaviors and positive interactions with people and animals. It is essential that owners continue to expose their dog to new people and dogs throughout his adolescence. Enroll the dog in positive reinforcement training classes, such as clicker training classes, just after six months of age – before the dog has had a chance to develop and strengthen undesirable behaviors.

Be sure the trainer chosen does not incorporate any type of punishment or aversive training methods, such as choke, prong, or shock collars. This type of training can have detrimental effects on a young dog’s social development. Scientific studies have shown that pain can create a negative association with the owner, induce fear, inhibit learning and, at times, create aggression. The use of a head collar, such as the Gentle Leader™ or a no-pull harness, such as the Easy Walk, can be a helpful aide in managing an overactive adolescent dog on walks and during training. Above all else, make sure the training is a positive experience for both owner and dog!

Believe it or not, behavior problems are the number one reason owners give up their adolescent dogs to animal shelters. Fortunately, most behavior problems can be prevented through proper management, training and socialization. Please consult the Behavioral Medicine service if you are experiencing problems with your pet or patient’s behaviors, or if you have questions regarding finding an appropriate trainer.
Is a “guilty look” a familiar dog behavior to you? If so, was it associated with a misdeed such as a ruined shoe, stolen steak, or other yummy food?

If you answered “yes” to this question, you probably misinterpreted the meaning of the “guilty look”, relying on anthropomorphism. However, you have probably noted some recognizable guilty-looking behaviors such as: dog avoids looking at you, turns eyes aside, cowers, or slinks back in a submissive way, etc. So where do those behaviors came from?

To answer this question, Alexandra Horowitz, a scientist at the Horowitz Dog Cognition Lab at Barnard College, New York, examined what situations precede the “guilty look.” In her study, she recruited 14 owners and their dogs. The owners were told that the researcher was testing their dogs for obedience at a distance.

Owners were asked to instruct their dog to not eat a treat and then leave the room. After they returned to the room, owners were asked to greet the dog if it had obeyed and did not eat the treat, and to scold the animal if it had disobeyed and ate the treat. During several trials, owners were purposely misinformed regarding whether their dog had disobeyed.

Horowitz found no association between the “guilty look” perceived by owners, which prompted the scolding, and whether the dogs had obeyed or not. However, more guilty look-associated behaviors were seen when owners were scolding their dog, whether the dog had eaten a forbidden treat or not. Guilty behaviors were associated, not with the dog disobeying, but with the perception of guilt by the owner. The study did not disprove that dogs cannot feel guilt. Rather, it showed that what we think of as a dog’s “guilty look” is just a response to the appearance of a scolding human.

This is an important message to convey to your clients. Proper obedience training is always a better choice to teach a dog how to behave appropriately, as opposed to scolding or reprimanding.

Low-Stress Animal Handling-Part 4
Criteria for Evaluation of Low-Stress Handling Techniques — For Dogs
C.A. Buffington, DVM, PhD, DACVN, T. Shreyer, MA, M. Herron, DVM, DACVB

We define “low-stress” handling techniques as those that minimize activation of the stress response system (SRS) of the patient. One may evaluate evidence of the extent to which any technique accomplishes this goal by evaluating physiological and behavioral evidence for the state of activation of the SRS in the patient while subjected to the technique. Parameters to consider include:

**Behavioral**

**Maintenance of normal:**
- Temperature
- Heart rate
- Blood pressure
- Respiratory rate
- Pupil diameter

**Absence of:**
- “Sweaty” paws
- Excessive shedding
- Flushing
- Shivering
- Urinating
- Panting with tongue extended

**Physiological**

**Decreases in:**
- “Whale eyes”
- Freezing, hiding or other fearful body postures
- Trembling
- Hard stare, rigid forward stance
- Hard body language
- High tail wagging that suddenly stops
- Lip lift or lip curling
- Mouthing
- Nipping/biting
- Jumping up/“Hugging”
- Rigid and highly aroused
- Head and eye aversion (turning into a C)
- No attempt to engage with handler
- Growling, snarling, repeated barking, whining
- Lip licking, yawning, Shaking off the handler and other displacement behaviors

**Increases in:**
- Affiliative behaviors (approaching, leaning in etc.)
- Interest in food
- Positive response to exposure to the technique
- Effectiveness of the technique with repeated use
- Indicators of relaxation and confidence:
  - Relaxed mouth and ears, soft eyes, soft body language

**In the long term,** the effectiveness of low-stress handling techniques can be evaluated by evidence of reduced fear and increased affiliative behaviors at subsequent visits to the practice, as the pet learns that the visits are positive, non-threatening experiences.
Do You Have an “Alpha” Dog?

By Nellie Wilbers, Behavior Club President, Ohio State College of Veterinary Medicine Class of 2015

Although times are changing, dominance theory in regard to the human-dog relationship is still running rampant through our society. It is often used as a way of explaining common undesirable behaviors such as jumping up, ignoring commands, and aggression. Many of the methods and misconceptions surrounding dominance training are based on a study of wolves that was carried out in the 1940’s.

We have since learned that this information was misinterpreted and misapplied to our companions, the domesticated dog. Unfortunately, this information is still being perpetuated by convincing trainers, charming television personalities, and the misinformed public. Scientific research has been telling us for years that dominance theory should not be applied to the human-dog relationship. Yet dominance theory is so deeply ingrained in our society that we cling to it, sometimes imagining it is working, when in reality we are just suppressing a behavior instead of addressing the underlying emotion. Let’s review some behaviors that are commonly attributed to our dogs trying to dominate us and what we can do to prevent them.

Walking through the door ahead of us

Myth: When your dog walks in front of you through the doorway, he is demonstrating his higher rank over you.

Truth: Walk time is a really fun time for most dogs. They get to go outside and experience new smells, people, and other dogs. When their leash is on and they’re ready to go, it’s hard for them to inhibit their excitement. Consequently, many dogs end up heading to the end of the leash and trying to get outside as fast as they can. We often inadvertently positively reinforce this behavior by allowing our dogs to pull us in the direction and speed they want to go.

This is an easy problem to fix: any time our dog pulls at the end of the leash we can simply stop walking until there is slack in the leash again. We can also teach our dog a basic command such as “wait” or we can train them that anytime a door is opened they are not allowed through until we give them a release signal. This will help teach the dog a certain level of impulse control as well. Once we have taught our dogs these behaviors using positive reinforcement, we can easily walk out the door in front of them if this is what we desire.

Jumping up

Myth: When our dogs jump up on us they are asserting their dominance over us.

Truth: Remember the adorable little puppy that jumped up on your leg for attention? She was so cute and little you just had to shower her with love and attention. Every time this happens we are reinforcing the behavior of jumping up. If a dog greets us at the door by jumping up, it is simply because they are excited to see us and in the past jumping up has earned them attention, even if that was yelling. Everything that we want our dog to do/not do as an adult we should expect them to do/not do as a puppy.

If we teach our dogs that they receive absolutely no attention for jumping up, we can extinguish this behavior. We should also let our dogs know what will earn them attention. We can accomplish this by giving scratches and treats when all four feet are on the ground or they are in a sit position. By using positive reinforcement, they’re going to be more likely to repeat this behavior, but may still jump up in the beginning. The jumping up may actually get worse at first, but this is not a vie for power. This is called an extinction burst, during which the dog struggles to gain our attention by desperately jumping and possibly adding in some barking, which has worked so well in the past. You must wait this out, and with consistent training, your dog will soon learn he must sit politely to be petted.
**Ignoring commands**

**Myth:** If a dog does not listen to us, it is because they think they don’t have to because they are in charge. We should show them who is boss and assert our dominance over them.

**Truth:** When you’re at the park and your dog doesn’t want to come, there are a million reasons why they may not be following the command you have given them. It is very likely that there are just too many other rewarding stimuli in the environment that mean more to your dog than what you have to say. A smell, a play buddy, or a squirrel are all self-reinforcing, whereas your “come” command may mean, ‘when I eventually come, I get whacked and rolled on my back’.

The decision to keep playing seems like an easy one. Even if you have never punished your dog for not coming immediately, there is a need to ensure that the word “come” means more to our dog than a distracting stimulus. Until we are sure they can perform under a variety of distracting situations, we should not let them off leash. Using a command when you are not one hundred percent sure the dog will respond only weakens its meaning.

Begin by practicing “come” in familiar and non-distracting environments, like your living room, and use operant conditioning and positive reinforcement to reward your dog for coming when you call. Dogs are not good generalizers. Knowing how to sit at home in a quiet room is much easier than sitting in the middle of a crowd at the park. We need to fully train our dogs by practicing behaviors in many different environments with increasing levels of distraction before we can expect them to perform in the most challenging scenario.

**Mounting a person or other dog**

**Myth:** When a dog mounts a visitor, the dog is demonstrating its higher rank over the new person entering their territory.

**Truth:** Mounting behavior towards people or conspecifics can mean several things. It is often a display of excitement or arousal, and can even be performed as a play behavior by puppies or other socially inept dogs. It can also be a displacement behavior when your dog does not know what to do with themselves. Finally, it can be done as a way to alleviate stress when the dog is uncomfortable with the current situation; possibly a new visitor entering the house.

To counter this behavior, simply ask the dog to perform a behavior that is incompatible with mounting. This can be something as simple as a “sit” or complex as “go settle”, where they must go to their designated area and lay down. If your dog is stressed by new people visiting the house, you will want to either manage the situation by allowing them to relax in their crate with a stuffed Kong while visitors are present or use counter-conditioning to teach your dog to associate visitors with wonderful things. This can be done by having new visitors toss treats in your dog’s direction each time they enter the house. As your dog learns, they may be able to approach the visitor and sit for a treat. Only work at a speed at which your dog is comfortable. You do not want to subject your dog to a scary stimulus above their threshold.
Do You Have an “Alpha” Dog? By Nellie Wilbers

**Urinating in the house**

**Myth:** My dog peed on my favorite chair because she wanted to show me she’s the boss.

**Truth:** Whether we’re saying our dog is spiteful or asserting their rank, the truth is we are assigning cognitive emotional processes to our dog that really don’t exist in their repertoire. If a dog urinates in the house (when medical reasons are ruled out) it is likely due to inconsistent training methods leading to a dog that was never one hundred percent house trained. Urine marking in dogs may also be a sign of anxiety. If we used confrontational or aversive training methods, our dogs may have learned that it’s dangerous to urinate in our presence, or perhaps that it is dangerous to urinate in a particular spot on the kitchen floor. However, if we are not diligent enough about watching our dog at all times during house training they may learn that urinating on the soft wing back chair is safe.

The behavior of urination is self-reinforcing because when a dog empties their bladder they feel a sense of relief, so be careful to never let your puppy out of view when they are being house trained. If you do catch your dog in the act, calmly take them outside immediately and reward for going potty outside. If we notice that our dog looks “guilty” when we arrive home and then find urine on the carpet, they are simply trying to say “please don’t hurt me” by offering appeasement behaviors often misinterpreted as a guilty expression (see the “Guilty Look” article on this issue). A dog will do this because he has learned that his owner becomes unpredictable and angry when there is urine on the carpet or trash turned over in the kitchen. By punishing our dog for a behavior that may have been performed hours ago, we are only teaching them to be afraid of us. A punishment delivered even as late as two seconds after a behavior occurs is shown to be far from effective training.

**Establishing dominance**

**Myth:** When our dog displays dominant behavior toward us we should dominate them.

**Truth:** This is the most frightening of all suggestions and unfortunately is still very commonly used. A recent study (Herron et al., 2009) showed that the use of confrontational methods such as “stare downs”, “alpha rolls”, “dominance downs”, and growling frequently elicited an aggressive response. People frequently use the above methods in order to “dominate” their dogs. Unfortunately many of these corrections can be perceived as highly threatening, and when a dog’s “dominant” behavior is rooted in fear, these techniques only serve to worsen the problem.

For some dogs you may perceive an immediate improvement. We watch the dog “submit” or temporarily inhibit their behavior, which is why we think these methods are effective. What we actually are witnessing is a motionless dog, exhausted from struggling, or a dog frozen in fear. By using these methods, not only are we ignoring the initial motivation for the behavior, but we are also inhibiting warning behaviors, such as growling. When a dog growls at us, we should recognize and appreciate it as a warning signal and then work towards addressing the underlying emotion. If we punish a growl, the next time our dog needs to tell us they are afraid or uncomfortable they may go straight to a bite. Owners performing dominance techniques at home often end up with a bigger problem, often a bite, and for many dogs this is a death sentence. When confrontational or aversive techniques are used under the name of dominance training, this can create a fearful response in dogs that can generalize to people, objects, or situations.

We need a paradigm shift in the way we view the human-dog relationship. The desire to dominate and rule by force and fear has been indoctrinated in our society for many years. We now know that punishment associated with the owner only serves to weaken the bond we share with our pet. When dominance is used as a training method, it changes the way we perceive our animals.

Instead of showing them what they should be doing, we wait to catch them behaving inappropriately. Dr. Sophia Yin believes that what “owners really want is not to gain dominance, but to obtain the ability to influence their pets to perform behaviors willingly —which is one accepted definition of leadership.” If we change the way we think about our dogs, we can forget about using dominance to establish a comfortable relationship. The truth is that we need to abandon stereotypes of stubborn, spiteful, guilty, and dominant dogs. The relationship with man’s best friend should be one of mutual compassion and not a constant struggle for power.
You want to adopt a cat and you want to support your local shelter’s effort to re-home cats. How do you find a shelter cat to fit your family? When in a high-stress environment, a cat’s personality tends to be overshadowed by fear or avoidance behaviors. After spending the summer at the Capital Area Humane Society assessing cat behavior for Dr. Tony Buffington’s lab, I picked up a few pointers from veterinarians, counselors, and volunteers.

The “hiss” test
This is a popular method of assessing a cat for a multi-pet household. Simply carry the cat around the room and observe its interaction with other cats. If the cat immediately hisses when it sees another cat, this should be a red flag for an adopter who is looking to integrate their new pet into a multi-pet home. Although this is no guarantee for judging personalities, it’s a promising sign when the cat you are holding shows mild curiosity or no interest towards the other cages.

What age group fits your lifestyle?
Many visitors come to the shelter prepared to adopt a kitten, but don’t overlook the adult cats. It’s a common misconception that adopting a young kitten means avoiding behavioral problems before they develop. A kitten will need supervision and training to develop into a well-adjusted adult, and a young age does not necessarily insure a pliable personality. If you don’t have the time to commit to raising a kitten, there are plenty of well-trained adult cats with great dispositions to adopt. There are fewer surprises with adult cats – most reach their full size by one year, and you can usually tell right away if an adult cat is outgoing or fearful. The majority of adults will already be litter box trained, and possibly come with a health history and personality assessment from the previous owner (if surrendered or fostered) or shelter staff.

Utilize the volunteers!
The volunteers in the cat adoption rooms at CAHS are a great resource. They know the personality quirks of almost every cat and are great at matching up families to the breed or disposition they have in mind. Volunteers are also great at bringing attention to shy cats that may get overlooked.

Cage interactions
Take note of how the cat you in which you are interested acts when no one is interacting with it. Does the cat lay in the litter box? Is it curled up, facing away from the door? When you open the door to interact with it, is it difficult to coax out? These are possibly signs of a stressed and fearful cat. If you have your heart set on one of these cats, it’s important to realize that you will need to go very slow introducing it to your household, and it may take extra effort for the cat to warm up to you and come out of its shell.
Student Section, brought to you by the Veterinary Behavior Club student officers

Adopting a Shelter Cat By Carolyn Doerning-continued

Are you a good “forever” home?

A shelter cat has already had a tough life. Whether they were surrendered or found as a stray, every cat deserves the stability and care of a “forever home”. Your adopted cat will most likely live 10 or more years – are you prepared for the expenses of food and supplies, pet-sitting, and annual vet visits? Do you have a plan to cover expenses if your cat is injured or develops a serious chronic illness? Will you have the patience to work through behavioral problems your cat may exhibit, such as urinating or defecating outside of the litter box? If someone in your household develops allergies, are you willing to choose allergy treatments rather than returning the cat to the shelter? Are you willing to take your cat with you wherever you move, even if it means paying a pet rent or having to find pet-friendly housing? These are all important questions to ask yourself, and if you are unsure of the answers, it may not be the appropriate time in your life to adopt a cat.

Be prepared!

Before you head to the shelter to adopt, make sure you have the adequate supplies to ease your cat into its new environment, and a veterinarian lined up for the post-adoption check-up. Dr. Tony Buffington of the Indoor Pet Initiative has provided a great checklist (below) that every owner can use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to buy</th>
<th>Which one</th>
<th>When to buy</th>
<th>Where to put it</th>
<th>How to use it</th>
<th>Got it! ☑</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Hard or soft, opens front &amp; top (or easily removable top)</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Keep the carrier out, place toys or treats inside.</td>
<td>Make the carrier a safe place. Keep a towel nearby to cover it during travel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feliway</td>
<td>Spray and Diffuser</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Spray on carrier towel. Use diffuser in the house</td>
<td>During time of potential stress. Consistently if needed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Reputable brand marketed for your cat’s life stage (kitten, adult, etc.)</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Quiet, accessible, private place.</td>
<td>Feed just enough to keep your cat in a lean body condition to avoid obesity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter box</td>
<td>Larger is better; at least 1.5 times the length of an adult cat</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Quiet, accessible, private place, away from food and water.</td>
<td>1 box per cat plus 1. Scoop daily; wash weekly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter</td>
<td>Unscented and scoopable.</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>The litter box!</td>
<td>Use enough to permit scratching and burying (about 2 inches deep)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scratching posts/boxes</td>
<td>What does your kitty prefer? Vertical vs. horizontal? Material?</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>“public” areas such as sleeping areas and room entrances</td>
<td>Allow your kitty to choose!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>What does your kitty prefer?</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Anywhere you can get them out easily at playtime.</td>
<td>Allow your kitty to choose! Rotate toys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food puzzle</td>
<td>What do you and your kitty prefer?</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Any safe area</td>
<td>According to manufacturer's directions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brushes</td>
<td>What does your kitty prefer?</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Wherever you sit with your cat</td>
<td>Gently to avoid overstimulating your cat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please visit indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/basicneeds for more information.

Remember that the key is to be patient and give the cat a few weeks to adapt to a new home. Research suggests it may take cats four to six weeks to adapt to new environments.