

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR BEHAVIOR CLIENTS

-What is a behavioral issue?

A behavioral issue is an abnormal behavior displayed by a dog under various circumstances. Behavioral issues can also be described as a **NORMAL** dog behavior displayed in, what the human would assume, an incorrect setting. Behavioral issues include and are not limited to reactive barking at other dogs, people, objects while on leash or behind a barrier, behaving aggressively towards strangers in home and outside of home, behaving aggressively to the owner or someone in the household, behaving aggressively to dogs in the household, dog is abnormally fearful of new stimuli, dog is overly excited around new people and cannot settle, ect. The list can go on.

-What causes a dog to develop behavioral issues?

Many things can cause behavioral issues in dogs including sickness (some sort of ailment), lack of socialization at an early age, dog becomes imprinted by a negative/positive experience, genetics (mom or dad was aggressive, fearful, etc), dogs disposition (they may be suspicious, fearful, or sensitive by nature), rapid change of environment or routine, new baby, new dog or pet, negative training experience, Etc.

-Does “bad behavior” fix itself?

Dog's do not have need for self help, therefore they will continue to display certain behavioral issues until something changes in their environment; training regime, diet, lifestyle or in most cases all of these. If a dog is displaying behavioral issues as a result of a medical issue, no training will help. Once the ailment is resolved, if the dog has not become habituated to displaying this behavior, then it should resolve. If you think your dog is displaying behavioral issues, we will always recommend they get cleared by a vet **FIRST**.

-Does your dog get enough daily exercise, enrichment, and socialization?

Exercise is important for all dogs and especially if you have a working breed dog. One walk around the neighborhood or an hour romp around the yard is not enough for most dogs. Ensure that your dog gets plenty of exercise by playing his/her favorite game twice/day and going on multiple walks or sniff adventures throughout the day.

Enrichment is the action of improving the quality of life for your dog. How can we enrich our dogs' lives? Get creative! Take daily sniff hikes where you do not have a goal, but to allow your dog time to access environmental reinforcers from sniffing! Incorporate fun ways to feed your dog like kong toys, food dispensing balls, snuffle mats, hiding food in the grass and more. Daily training and games are a great way to enrich your dog's life too, there are thousands of ways to enrich your dog's daily life, you'll be surprised at how much this can help resolve your behavioral issue.

Dogs are social animals, even if they do not get along with other dogs, they will need some form of socialization with their family. Keeping dogs in isolation all day is cruel and will result in some big issues. Be sure to spend as much time with your dog as possible, and if they are social, get them out and about!

-How much agency and volition does your dog have throughout their day/life?

Volition- the act of making choices without being influenced.
Agency- the feeling of control over actions and their consequences.
Benefits: Self modulation, authentic relaxation, social interaction, clear communication, real life application.

In other words, how much is your dog on a leash, in a crate, or behind a fence where their movements and actions are inhibited in some way? How much living space do they have? Do they get a "say" in some things? What are some ways you can add agency and volition to your dog's life?

-Does the dog's disposition or genetics matter?

A dog's disposition are inherent qualities of mind and character. Just like some dogs are born naturally happy and friendly, there are dogs born who are naturally suspicious, fearful, or aggressive. They have a high expectation that something is going to happen. These dogs can benefit from positive reinforcement training to help them relax and gain confidence but they will never be the naturally happy friendly dog who was born that way. If you bought a dog from a breeder whose parents were aggressive, there is a high chance your puppy will be too. Genetics do play a part in dog sociability and character among many other things.

-How long does behavioral modification training take?

Behavioral modification training needs to become a lifestyle. There are no quick fixes when dogs begin displaying concerning behaviors. You will likely have to manage and train your dog for the rest of his/her life to maintain consistency with their interactions. A quote from one of our favorite trainers, Denise Fenzi, fits well here- "Random training produces random results, while consistent training produces consistent results".

-Why use positive reinforcement training?

Positive reinforcement training focuses on what the dog does right, therefore we produce results that we want to see because we reward those behaviors. ALL dog behavior is reinforcer driven (whether positive or negative). We want to set our dogs up for success and use the most scientifically proven best way to train that will produce a confident, relaxed, and engaged dog. Punishment based training will include the addition of force to "make" the dog behave in a way pleasing to humans. This can backfire as punishment will result in a stressed, shutdown, or explosive dog.

-Can a trainer do all of the work for me?

Behavioral training is best done when the owner is actively participating in learning how to train their dog. This will prepare owners to handle problems on their own in an efficient and positive manner and will produce long term results.

-Will my dog ever be “fixed” and never display this behavior again?

Once a behavior is learned, it is not forgotten. We can teach new behaviors that earn higher value reinforcers, and will likely be offered instead of old “bad” behaviors. However it is not likely that your dog will never display the issues again, but you will be better equipped on how to handle it. All training is paired with management of the issue, the less they practice the “negative” behavior, the less likely it is to pop up.

-Should aggressive dogs be adopted out of shelters?

Aggressive dogs should not be adopted out of shelters. If you are considering adopting a dog, ensure you are choosing a dog to best fit your family. Look for qualities that appeal to your lifestyle! Are you looking for a happy, social dog that will greet guests at the bbq? Are you looking for a couch potato that you can enjoy evening movies with? Do you have children that would love to run and play with a loving dog in the back yard that is small enough not to intimidate them? Are you a runner or a hiker and need a buddy to explore with? Ensure your entire family, including other dogs, meet the dog at the shelter prior to taking him/her home. It takes about 3 months for a dog to acclimate to a new environment.

-I am ready to embark on behavioral training for my dog, what next?

Do as much research as possible, checkout the Association of Professional Dog Trainers resource center for additional information <https://apdt.com/resource-center/>. Contact a positive reinforcement trainer (like us!) and set up a consultation. Contact a veterinary behaviorist and have a conversation!