

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

Whole Dog Journal™



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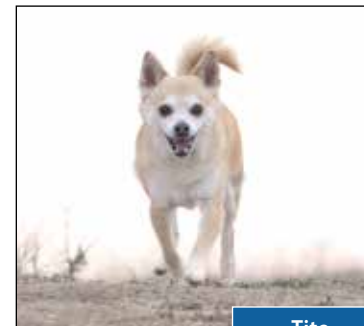


A Cautionary Tale

If you own a dog-aggressive dog, you already know you have to manage him or her carefully. Learn from my mistake, too.

BY NANCY KERNS

Last month, I told you that WDJ's Training Editor Pat Miller and I had been discussing the possibility of writing an article about dogs who kill other dogs; over the span of a few months, Pat had received calls from *three* different people who had a dog killed by one of their other dogs. After much thought and discussion, Pat wrote a terrific article on how to manage a beloved family dog who, incongruously, appears to have the potential for this horrible deed.



Tito

What I *didn't* tell you is that I had been pressing Pat for this article because I was still struggling to understand how, late last summer, one of my foster dogs caused the death of my tough little Chihuahua-mix, Tito – and why I didn't see it coming.

I haven't discussed it in any WDJ forum yet; only my closest friends (including long-time WDJ contributors) and family have known about this traumatic experience. I'll tell the long version of what happened on the WDJ website blog page (wholedogjournal.com/blog), but suffice it to say here that I have been punishing myself ever since for a fatal lack of foresight or ability to recognize (Pat would call it a lack of experience) these things: that even a dog who appears to be happy and unstressed on the day of the tragic event could, in fact, be suffering from the effects of stress experienced during the previous days or *weeks*. And that even *happy* excitement can trigger a physiological response that's chemically – hormonally – identical to the "fight or flight" body chemistry of a highly stressed dog, which can put a dog-aggressive dog into a dangerously aroused state. And that *any* difference in size, strength, and speed between a dog-aggressive dog and other dogs around them can spell doom for the smaller, weaker, or slower dog.

After reading Pat's article, which starts on page 8 of this issue, and re-reading an article she wrote that was published in the October 2010 issue of WDJ ("A New Threshold"), I understand what happened a lot better. I don't *feel* any better about it, and I'll never forgive myself for failing to recognize the seriousness of the aggressive behavior of the foster dog (a Corgi) or failing to protect Tito. He got hurt, and despite immediate and thorough medical attention and hospitalization, he died a day later from his injuries.

My dad used to say, "Nobody's perfect!" when someone was upset about an error they made. After 20 years of writing about dogs, though, I'm still mortified and grieving about my mistake and the fact that Tito paid the ultimate price for it. And I'm hoping that if you have a dog-aggressive dog, you read Pat's articles carefully, and think about Tito, may he rest in peace.

NK



Shameless Protection

We compared a number of comfortable, effective “recovery collars” that your dog will be happy (or at least not ashamed!) to wear.

The term “recovery collar” is becoming the standard term to refer to what has been called an Elizabethan collar, a pet cone, or more humorously, a lampshade, a pet radar dish, and, of course, the misnomer “cone of shame.” There is no shame in needing help! The term Elizabethan collar is still heard frequently, but because it tends to be shortened to e-collar and because that’s also a shortened version of electronic collar, the phrase is falling out of use for this application.

It is normal for dogs to lick a wound, incision, bug bite, or irritated skin as part of normal grooming; it’s when that licking becomes excessive that a barrier device becomes necessary in order to prevent further injury.

Most dogs adjust to wearing a recovery collar fairly easily, but it can be an additional trauma for other dogs. Some will not eat or drink while wearing one and thus the collar must be temporarily removed at these times. Particularly shy or fearful dogs often have more difficulty navigating and become more concerned with the world when they have to wear a recovery collar. Some dogs become hypersensitive when their peripheral vision is hindered. And *all* dogs who are in discomfort and stressed will be more likely to act out aggressively in situations that would not normally bother them – and the stress can hinder healing, too!

Fortunately, there are many alternatives to the classic “cone” to protect your dog’s stitches, hot spot, wound, or what-have-you. Some are designed to prevent the distress that some dogs experience when wearing a recovery collar; others are designed to work better with dogs of certain proportions (i.e., dogs with “no” necks, dogs with very long bodies or long legs, very small dogs, etc.).

WHAT TRAITS TO LOOK FOR

If your dog is bothered by the impairment of his vision, look for products that allow him to look around, or are made of translucent material.



The sound of Velcro® or generic hook-and-loop closures can be scary to some dogs, so if your dog is one of these (or is phobic about odd noises), consider products that fasten with some other mechanism. These fasteners might also be problematic for dogs with long coats. A final consideration about hook-and-loop: its (the use span of the collar may also be reduced as the material degrades).

Properly fitting collars should be short enough to allow eating and drinking, yet prevent the wearer from reaching the area(s) of concern with his tongue or teeth. It should fit securely – you should be able to fit two fingers comfortably between the collar and neck – and yet not restrict breathing or swallowing. Unless provided and fitted by your veterinarian, you’ll need to know the circumference of your dog’s neck. An easy way to measure this to

The author’s mixed-breed dog Tico wasn’t ashamed to model many of the products reviewed for this article; in fact, he minded wearing only one of the products we tested.

remove your dog's collar and measure the collar length. You may also need to know the length of your dog's muzzle. Follow the manufacturer's guide for measurements.

BEST PRACTICES FOR USE

It's a great idea to shop for a recovery collar *before* your dog's surgery, when he's still feeling well. (If your dog is, fortunately, not scheduled for surgery, consider buying one in advance of any injury that might befall your dog!)

If possible, have your dog "try on" several different products, wearing them around the store for as much time as you can afford, to see how he deals with each product's challenges. (And if your dog may have to wear one of these products for an extended period of time, consider buying a couple or several, so you can find the one that works best for him.)

Once you've settled on a product, and it's time for the rubber to meet the road – or rather, for the dog to meet the collar – allow him to become familiar with the product before putting it on him; let him see and smell it first. Arm yourself with extra-delicious treats, and take your time when putting it on, rewarding him richly for his cooperation. Continue to offer him praise and reinforcement (treats) as he learns how to navigate wearing the new accessory. Carefully monitor your dog on his first days wearing a recovery collar, to see whether he can reach his wound around the collar – or reach the collar itself and destroy it!

Assist and guide your dog through doorways and up and down stairwells, as stairs can be a tripping hazard if they come into contact with the collar. Owners might consider clearing pathways and areas of items that can be knocked over by an inadvertent swipe of the recovery collar. Remember to give your dog breaks from wearing the collar when you're home and can monitor him closely, so he doesn't take the first opportunity to lick his wound.

Collars can get gross. Do take them off and wash them occasionally. Check daily around your dog's head and neck for any area of irritation. Be aware that

Just a Little History

Recovery collars were formerly referred to as Elizabethan collars, the name inspired by the popular neckline ruffs worn by people during the Elizabethan era, the epoch in English history marked by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603).



Frank L. Johnson invented the first recovery collars in the late 1950s; he received a patent for "Protective Devices for Dogs" in 1962 that included this description:

"An object of this invention is to provide a protective device of such form and construction that it can be applied as a collar to protect animals such as dogs from self-inflicted injury caused by chewing and gnawing on themselves . . . [It] is so formed that when placed on a dog's neck and fastened, it takes the form of a truncated cone with the base of the cone extending forwardly in the direction of the dog's mouth, thereby forming a barrier between the dog's mouth and any part of his body upon which he desired to chew or gnaw or to bite himself."

this accessory can get caught on objects, and paws can get caught in the collars themselves. When used for long periods, be mindful of your dog's ears; some of these collars can trap moisture and heat, resulting in yeast growth or other ear issues.

WHAT'S BEST? IT DEPENDS

There is no single style of recovery collar that fits all dogs and protects all wounds. Every dog is different in shape, flexibility, and emotional response to a recovery collar. The products reviewed here are sturdy, made of tough, flexible materials, reusable, and easily cleaned; all of them will store flat and some you can trim to size. Some will work better than others for certain dogs.

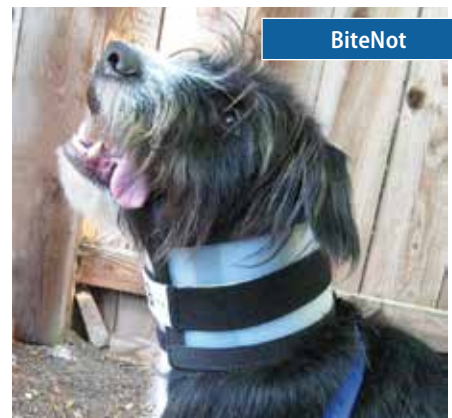
We've provided manufacturer information for the collars we reviewed, but bought them through Amazon.com. While we love the fast delivery (and often, the prices) from online sources, if the product doesn't fit well, or fails to prevent your dog from reaching his wound, it might be more of a hassle to return it to an online seller than to take it back to a local pet supply store or veterinary hospital. (And, of course, you can bring your dog to a store and try them on there.)

Note: The products we reviewed are described in alphabetical order.

BiteNot

The BiteNot is designed like a cervical collar used by humans, and limits how far the dog can bend his neck, thus limiting the movement and reach of the dog's head. It's constructed with flexible plastic and foam, and wraps around your dog's neck. It's secured by a hook-and-loop (Velcro-like) closure and a harness strap that threads underneath the dog's front legs and buckles at the back of the neck. The manufacturer states that it protects the back, rump, base of tail, flanks, chest, abdomen, and genitals. It is not designed to protect the ears or face, and the dog can reach the lower portion of his legs.

The BiteNot doesn't interfere with the dog's peripheral vision or ability to eat and drink. The length of col-



lar must fit from behind the dog's ears to the top of his shoulder, so sizing is key. This is the only collar of those reviewed here that caused a noticeable change in my dog when I tried it on him; he immediately became subdued. Which, if you need your dog to recover from something, might not be a bad thing – or a very bad thing, for a dog who got freaked out by the restriction of his neck movement.

PROS: Easy to put on. Does not inhibit vision. Interior nicely padded. Difficult for dog to remove. Machine washable.

CONS: Must be sized properly or it can hurt shoulders or ears. Heat and moisture can build up beneath collar. Has some potential for rubbing. Edges are hard; could be padded more.



Comfy Cone

Comfy Cone

The Comfy Cone is a soft cone-shaped collar constructed of water-resistant nylon fabric, laminated to ½-inch foam, producing a cone that is soft and yielding, yet sturdy and protective.

It comes with removable stays that provide extra stability and stiffness for dogs/situations that call for this. The vertical Velcro-type strips allow for varying adjustments in size and fit; however when collar is fitted for maximum circumference the extra hook-and-loop strips are exposed and only one extra strip cover is provided. When the stays are removed, the edge of collar can be folded back to facilitate eating and drinking; but if you can fold the collar back, so can your dog.

The collar direction can be reversed for shoulder, chest, or upper back issues, as well as to cover IV lines and feeding tubes. When worn this way

(see photo on cover), supervision is needed to ensure that your dog's paws don't get caught in the inverted cone.

PROS: Both a soft collar and hard collar. Water-resistant but machine washable. Has reflective binding for night safety. Conforms to different shapes. Heavy-duty hook-and-loop fastener secures collar well. Seems generally comfortable.

CONS: Solid fabric blocks peripheral vision. Interior is black; becomes hot and humid. Because edges can bend, some dogs may chew on it. Heavy duty Velcro-type fastener is noisy.

ElizaSoft Recovery Collar Trimline Recovery Collar

These soft-sided collars provide protection and freedom of movement for the head, neck, and body. Some veterinarians like this design because dogs tend to like it so owners like it, resulting in good compliance. Durable construction, it withstands chewing and clawing, and is water repellent and machine washable. Sizing is flexible as the drawstring tie adjusts to different

ElizaSoft &
Trimline
Recovery
Collars



neck sizes. These work especially well for dogs in close confinement and for long recoveries.

PROS: Lightweight. Easy to put on. Built-in tie fastener is highly adjustable. Springs back to its original shape. Allows dog to sleep and lounge in comfort. Can be worn reversed to protect shoulder/back areas.

CONS: Because it is very flexible, dog can easily cause it to crumple and fold. Limits vision, as it is solid fabric.

Custom Collars

Sometimes, none of the purpose-made recovery collars will work. My friend Joanne made her own recovery collar for her dog out of foam and heavy-duty fabric; I think she should start production and sales! At times, temporary measures are needed. With a little creativity, you can quickly create a makeshift collar with a few household items. People have been known to use cardboard, actual lampshades, wastebaskets, and plastic flowerpots. Whatever works!

Erin Einbender, a volunteer at Chicago-area rescue group One Tail at a Time and an artist studying at the School of Art Institute in Chicago, combined her passion for dogs and photography and created the Cones of Fame project. Think "art meets dogs meets recovery collars."

Erin not only creates art using recovery collars as a canvas, but also helps find homes for the canine models. While we can't recommend using these types of collars for actual recovery, we do support the endeavor. Check out the Cones of Fame (and adoptable dogs!) at: eeinbender.brushd.com/work/26959/cones-of-fame.



Photo credit: Erin Einbender, used with permission



FOREYY Recovery Pet Cone

The FOREYY Recovery Pet Cone is a “softer” version of the standard plastic collar. It’s a slightly truncated cone with a wide band of breathable mesh fabric at its base. The “cone” is made of clear plastic, affording good visibility for the dog; this material is firm without being rigid, and the plastic edges are covered with fabric. This collar should provide good protection of most body parts if fitted correctly. The snap and buckle closures are secure and easily accessible.

One caution: This product has a built-in stainless steel D-ring, intended as an attachment for a leash. Leading a dog by the “cone” could seriously injure him; disregard this ring!

PROS: Snap closures (no Velcro). Allows dog to relax and sleep comfortably in any position. Easy to clean.

CONS: Limited size range; available only for small to medium dogs. Some dogs may reach tail and front paws. Might aggravate noise phobia.

KONG Cloud Collar

The KONG Cloud Collar (a.k.a. the airplane neck pillow that I am taking with me the next time I fly) is a well-designed and comfortable recovery collar. It allows dogs to eat, drink, and sleep and does not interfere with peripheral vision.

It is easy to put on – simply thread your dog’s regular collar through the interior of the pillow and inflate via

the pinch and blow air valve, inflating to full but not hard. Its security is dependent on the fit of your dog’s regular collar; if the collar can slip or be pulled over his head, he will be able to get the Cloud Collar off, too. My dog Tico had this collar off in seconds off by putting his paws behind the donut and pulling his head right out.

The Cloud Collar is not good for any issue around the face or ears and may not prevent access to some areas on the body, such as the tail. It is a good option for brachycephalic dogs because it’s difficult for them to get off. Some users report that the hook-and-loop closure can rub.

PROS: Machine washable, scratch-, tear-, and rip-resistant fabric. Does not mark or scratch furniture. Great for playing and easy for dog to adjust to. Seems to be more comfortable than other styles. Dog can eat, drink, and sleep easily.

CONS: Has potential for deflating (popping/leaking air) and for irritation due to heat. Prevents dog from being able to lie flat.



NACOCO

Perhaps the goofiest-looking recovery collar we tried, the NACOCO is made of soft, hollow, expanded polyethylene foam, covered in a water-resistant nylon fabric. Very soft and lightweight, it’s potentially useful for shoulder and chest issues. It doesn’t impede the ability to eat, drink, see, or hear. Because it is so large, I thought dogs wouldn’t like wearing it; surprisingly, none of the dogs I tested it on had any difficulty adjusting to it.

PROS: Does not hurt when it collides with humans. Lightweight. Flexible enough to bend when going through



a narrow doorways and to allow dogs to lay down comfortably.

CONS: Can be an impediment to movement of the front legs; does not work well for short-legged dogs as it hits the ground. Flexibility also poses potential for chewing or for dog to reach his wound around collar. The fixed snap closure does not allow for any adjusting of size.

Novaguard

The Novaguard is much narrower than standard plastic cones, giving the dog greater freedom of movement. It resembles a transparent knight’s helmet – but one that’s ergonomically designed to fit a dog’s head.

The plastic is hard and the edges are not padded, but the manufacturer addresses this with the explanation that this keeps the product affordable; it suggests that customers can create custom cushioning or trim the edges if necessary with medical tape.

The pre-scored grooves at the outer rim allow for individual sizing for muzzle length. This is a good option for dogs with long, lean necks or long muzzles. The company also makes The Optivisor, for eye and face protection.



This is one of those products that will either fit your dog perfectly or not at all, depending on his shape. Even though we had this fitted snugly on one of the models (and it has the potential to be set too tight) the construction is such that it slipped forward and then off the model's head without undoing the hook-and-loop neck strap.

PROS: Slim design, fits closer to head and thus protects eyes and muzzle. The dog's ears are outside of collar, eliminating sound amplification and buildup of moisture or heat around ears. Should protect most areas of trauma except ears.

CONS: Not many adjustment points. Hard plastic could be uncomfortable; potential for rubbing. Assembly required.

ZenCone Soft Recovery Collar

A hybrid design, ZenCone is made of alternating bands of soft canvas and plastic windows, which offer peripheral vision. It attaches to the dog's regular collar with elastic loops, and the cone shape and size easily adjusts with strips of hook-and-loop material.

PROS: Flexible and comfortable for sleeping. Human- and house-friendly. Easy to put on and take off. Fabric reduces the distortion and amplification of noise caused by some cone designs.

CONS: When sized for smaller dogs, exposed strips of unused hook-and-loop fasteners can collect lint and stick to carpet and fabrics. May not be deep enough and too flexible to prevent long-nosed or determined dogs from reaching wounds. 🐾



Barbara Dobbins, a former dog trainer, writes about dogs and studies canine ethology. She lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her mixed-breed adolescent dog, Tico.

RECOVERY COLLARS AND THE BEST ALTERNATIVES

4 PAWS = GREAT 3 PAWS = GOOD
2 PAWS = ADEQUATE 1 PAW = INADEQUATE

PRODUCT Company information	Price	Sizes	Fastener	Vision	Hearing	Comfort	Ease of Movement
STANDARD CONES (for comparison; not reviewed) Stiff, opaque, plastic cone from your veterinarian Numerous manufacturers	Prices vary widely	Many sizes	Usually tied to your dog's collar with gauze	🐾🐾	🐾	🐾	🐾
BITE-NOT COLLAR KVP International, Inc., Chino, CA (888) 411-7387; bittenot.net	\$22 to \$36	7 sizes, 3½ - 8 inches	Hook-and-loop fastener, strap with a buckle	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾
COMFY CONE All Four Paws, Santa Monica, CA (310) 314-7768; allfourpaws.com	\$14 to \$40	8 sizes, XS-XXL, and a 2-inch extender option	Hook-and-loop fastener and elastic loops attached to dog's collar	🐾	🐾	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾
ELIZASOFT RECOVERY COLLAR TRIMLINE RECOVERY COLLAR VetOne, Boise, Idaho (888) 694-8381; vetone.net	\$10 to \$17	6 sizes, XS-XL	Fabric tie	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾
FOREYY RECOVERY PET CONE Made in China foreyy.com	\$13 to \$17	4 sizes, S-XL, for small to medium dogs	Buckle and snaps	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾
KONG CLOUD COLLAR The Kong Company, Golden, CO (303) 216-2626; kongcompany.com	\$10 to \$18	4 sizes, S-XL, for small to medium-size dogs	Hook-and-loop and the dog's collar	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾
NACOCO Made in China doglemi.com	\$17 to \$20	Six sizes, XS-XXL	Snaps	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾
NOVAGUARD JMI Pet Supply Inc., Washington Court House, OH (877) 335-5121; jmipetsupply.com	\$11 to \$24	Five sizes, from mini to large (4-99 pounds)	Hook-and-loop	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾
ZenCone Soft Recovery Collar Zen Pet USA, Carlsbad, CA (844) 493-6738; zenpetusa.com	\$15 - \$24	4 sizes: S-XL	Hook-and-loop and dog's collar	🐾🐾	🐾🐾	🐾🐾 🐾	🐾🐾 🐾



Preventing a Death in the Family

Intra-family aggression can lead to tragedy if it's not recognized and appropriately addressed.



This extra-tall, permanently installed (not pressure-mounted) gate keeps the senior dog safe from being annoyed by the adolescent dog – and both of them safe from being hurt in the fight that can ensue if no one is there to notice just how annoying the teen dog is being!

I cringe a little whenever I get a call from a prospective client regarding aggression occurring in the home between their own dogs, but in the past year, I've gotten increasingly sensitized to this situation. The number of families who have contacted me for help with intra-family canine aggression has spiked – and this number includes three families who called me because one of their dogs *killed* another of their dogs. In the prior 21 years Peaceable Paws has been in existence, I had *never* gotten this call. To have three of them in the span of a few months boggles my mind.

This behavior is sometimes called “intra-pack” aggression. But in recent years we have moved away from the concept of *canis lupus familiaris* as true pack animal, toward an understanding that a collection of multiple dogs – whether running loose as “street dogs” or cared for in a home – is most commonly a loosely organized social group of unrelated canines, not a real “pack.” Members of your family, yes, for sure. But a true pack, as in a

group of closely related canids – mom, dad, and several juveniles who haven't yet struck out on their own . . . no. Hence my new term, “intra-family aggression.”

Whatever you choose to call it, it's not fun to live with. Until a few years ago when old age took our 13-year-old Australian Shepherd Missy from us, our life was a constant management challenge. When we first adopted Missy at age eight, our then five-year-old, very assertive Cardigan Corgi Lucy took exception to Missy's excited greetings when I would come in the back door, and fights would ensue. We managed this by gating Lucy in my office when I went out so I could greet Missy at the door, then greet Lucy once Missy had calmed.

Even prior to Missy joining our family we had already made a habit of giving our dogs high-value chews only when they were safely shut in their crates, and high-value toys only under direct supervision, as Lucy had shown at an early age a strong penchant for fierce resource-guarding. Though our other two dogs defer to Lucy most of the time, we still carefully manage and monitor mealtimes to make sure no one offends her by trying to play musical food bowls.

It can be exhausting to micro-manage the dogs' every movement – but it's *critical* for a peaceful existence in a household with one or more dogs likely to do harm to each other.

YOU MUST MANAGE

If you do nothing else about the aggression between your dogs, you *must* scrupulously manage their movements and activities. Every time your dog successfully engages in a behavior that you don't want her to exhibit, it makes it that much harder to convince her that it's not a useful behavior strategy. Every time your dog

aggressively communicates to another canine family member, it increases the potential for unresolvable aggression between the two and serious injury to one or both.

In this case, management means using leashes, tethers, baby gates, crates, closed doors, and kennels to control the dogs' movements and access to each other. Some households even have segregated floors, with Dog A restricted to the first floor, Dog B to the second floor, and Dog C in the basement.

Whatever management tools you choose, it's important to prevent escalating tension between dogs. If your canine family members are snarling at each other from opposite sides of a baby gate, or one is defensively aggressive because she's trapped in her crate while her tormentor dances around the outside, it's not going to help your quest for world peace.

Behavior-altering medications for your dogs might also help. Consultation with a veterinary behaviorist or a behaviorally knowledgeable veterinarian will help determine appropriate medication(s) and purpose – whether to calm the aggressor, reduce stress of the victim, or otherwise alter the mindset and behavior of one or both. Absent access to one of these professionals, your veterinarian can arrange to do a phone-consult with a veterinary behaviorist; many of them offer this service at no charge to other veterinarians.

MANAGEMENT IS CRITICAL BUT IMPERFECT

You may choose to manage your dogs while you work to improve their relationship with behavior modification, or you may simply choose to manage behavior for the life of one or both dogs. Lifetime management can be a perfectly reasonable choice. Either

If one of your squabbling dogs is small or weak, and the other is bigger and stronger, it will take perfect management to protect the more vulnerable dog.

way, there are a couple of things you need to know.

Some trainers warn their clients that management *always* fails at some point. I prefer to say management has a *high likelihood* of failure at some point. If you are considering management as a long-term solution, you need to consider two things: the **likelihood** of failure to successfully manage your dogs, and the **consequence** of failure.

There are several conditions that increase the **likelihood** of management failure:

- **Children in the home.** From small children to teenagers, children are generally less attentive to and more unreliable regarding ability and willingness to comply with management protocols.

- **Non-committed adults in the home.** Adults who are not interested in the welfare of the dogs may not pay attention to your management protocols, or worse, if the adults are in any way resentful of or irritated by the dogs, may actively undermine management efforts.

- **Lots of visitors.** It's not reasonable to expect visitors to comprehend and comply with your management protocols. If you have frequent visitors, consider things like hasps and padlocks rather than just closed doors. If you rarely have visitors but are having family staying for a week over the holidays, consider boarding for one or more dogs.

- **Persistent or particularly strong dog(s).** The more dedicated one or



What you can do

- *Manage, manage, manage. Without management, tension between your dogs will likely increase, making modification exponentially more difficult.*
- *Eliminate as much stress from your dogs' lives as possible.*
- *Implement an appropriate behavior modification plan to improve your dogs' relationships with each other.*
- *Engage the services of a qualified force-free behavior if the aggression is serious, and/or if you have any doubts about your ability to keep everyone safe as you work with your intra-family aggression challenges.*

more of your dogs is to doing harm to the other, the greater the chance that management will fail. The dog who constantly looks for the opportunity to push through a door, knock down a baby gate, or jump a fence is far more likely to breach management than one who just takes advantage if opportunity presents itself.

What about the **consequences** of failure to adequately manage your dogs? How you answer this question may suggest how you choose to proceed with your squabbling canines. If there's just a little (or a lot of) sound and fury but no blood, then management may be a reasonable long-term option. For example, in a home with two dogs of a similar size and weight and good bite inhibition, even if there's a management glitch, there's no serious harm done.

At the other end of the spectrum of seriousness, however, is a home where there is a big difference between the size and strength of the dogs, or where one dog exhibits poor bite inhibition – that is, when he bites, he *always* does serious damage. In cases like this, where a management failure in your family of dogs means that someone

will likely end up in the emergency clinic (or worse!), your management has to be scrupulous and infallible, with all family members on board, and you need to make a serious commitment to a behavior modification program that will ease tensions between dogs.

STRESS MANAGEMENT & BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Note: Intra-family aggression can be a complex and difficult behavior to manage and modify. For purposes of this article, we are discussing dogs who normally get along reasonably well,

and for whom aggression occurs only under certain circumstances. Dogs who consistently and seriously aggress at the mere sight of each other are a whole different challenge, and definitely require the guidance of a qualified force-free behavior professional.

There is actually a wide variety of canine behaviors that behavior experts would describe as “aggression” – or more accurately, “agonistic behavior” – but most dog owners are aware of only the most dramatic ones, such as growling, lunging, snapping, biting, and fighting. More subtle agonistic be-

haviors such as a freeze, a hard stare, or even a lack of eye contact, may go unnoticed and unaddressed. It’s hugely helpful for an owner to learn to recognize the subtle signs of aggression, perhaps with help from a canine behavior professional, so that management and modification can be put into place well before the aggressive acts result in injury (or worse).

It’s also important for owners to understand that aggression is caused by stress. Dogs who don’t have a worry in the world have no need to behave in an aggressive manner! They use aggressive

A SAMPLE LIST OF STRESSORS AND STRATEGIES

Here are some examples of things that might be on your dog’s list of stressors, and strategies that are most appropriate for each one. There are many other possibilities; my clients’ lists usually contain between 10 and 20 identified stressors. Be sure to include even those things that may cause your dog to be even mildly stressed; the more stressors you can remove, the better.

SAMPLE STRESSORS	Change dog’s opinion of the stressor with counter-conditioning and desensitization	Teach the dog a new behavioral response using operant conditioning	Manage the dog’s environment to minimize exposure to the stressor	Get rid of the stressor	Live with it (most appropriate for low-level stressors)	Additional solution and/or resource
The other dog	✓					
People passing by outside the living room window	✓		✓			Block access to windows
Threats to his resources	✓	✓	✓			
Doorbell ringing	✓	✓				See “Knock, Knock,” 2/2010
Car rides	✓				✓	See “Riding in Cars With Dogs,” 10/2006
Trips to the vet hospital	✓				✓	See “Fear-Free Vet Visits,” 12/ 2015
Nail trimming	✓	✓				See “Touch Me Not,” 8/2004 and “Positive Pedi-Pedis,” 8/2012
Thunder	✓		✓			Possible use of appropriate anti-anxiety medication
Fireworks	✓		✓		✓	Possible use of appropriate anti-anxiety medication
Arthritis			✓			Possible use of pain-reducing medication
Recurring ear infections				✓		Explore medical treatment and diet; allergies?
Underground shock fence and/or shock collar training				✓		See “Simply Shocking,” 2/2003 and “Shock or Awe,” 2/2006
Prong collar				✓		
Use of physical and harsh verbal corrections (punishment)				✓		See “We’re Positive,” 1/2007
Owner stress			✓	✓		

Double fencing, with at least a few feet between the two fences (more is better), can go a long way toward preserving the peace between two dogs who have to be kept apart. Without the gap between the two fences, feuding dogs will almost always start barking and fence-fighting, adding to their stress.

behaviors to change the conditions that contribute to their stress, in order to reduce that stress.

For example, it's stressful to be fearful or anxious about the approach of a strange person or dog; a dog may exhibit aggressive behavior in an attempt to put more distance between themselves and the person or dog she perceives as a threat. It's stressful for some dogs to be concerned about having a toy or chewie taken away, or to worry about losing access to the most comfortable bed or proximity to a favorite human is being threatened; some of those dogs may try to mitigate their stress by aggressively defending their valued commodities.

The more stressors that a dog is subject to, the more at risk he is for behaving aggressively. And because it's impossible to predict which stressor might push him over his stress threshold into hurting another dog or person – stressor Jenga! – it's particularly useful to identify as many of his stressors as possible and eliminate as many of them as you can. (For an article that explains stress thresholds in depth, see “A New Threshold,” October 2010.)

Try to list everything that you can think of that stresses your dog; the list of potential triggers for intra-family aggression is endless. The solution to eliminating each stressor will depend on what it is, but there are five major approaches that can be used on just about any of them; see “A Sample List of Stressors and Strategies,” on the opposite page.

While you are doing that, consider appropriate steps to modify the behavior, depending on what your dogs' triggers are.

Here are some of the most common triggers for intra-family aggression,



and what you can do to manage and/or modify the behavior:

TRIGGER: Competition for tangible resources – food, treats, toys, etc.

- **Management:** Restrict access to guardable resources. Dole out treats and toys in controlled circumstances (crated, or one-on-one interactions) rather than leaving them lying around or tossing treats indiscriminately. Some dogs are okay if you feed treats directly to each mouth, others may aggress in that situation.
- **Modification:** Use carefully controlled counter-conditioning to convince dogs that the presence of the other dog makes more good stuff happen. Note: This can be tricky with dog-dog resource guarders! (See “Counter-Conditioning Procedure,” page 12.)

Alternatively, consider a Constructional Aggression Treatment (CAT) procedure, using negative reinforcement (dog's behavior makes a bad thing go

away) to help your dog be relaxed about the presence of another dog near valuable resources. (See “Constructional Aggression Treatment,” on page 13.)

TRIGGER: Competition for attention

- **Management:** Separate dogs during high-competition times such as humans returning, sofa-cuddling time, etc. Be sure to make time to give dogs adequate individual attention.
- **Modification:** Use negative punishment (dog's behavior makes a good thing go away) when one dog acts inappropriate in response to the approach of the other. Use a neutral or cheerful no-reward marker such as “Oops!” and walk away from the dog who is inappropriate.

TRIGGER: Space-guarding – beds, passageways, kitchen, etc.

- **Management:** Restrict dogs' movement in guarded areas, making sure only one dog at a time has access.

■ **Modification:** Teach a solid “go to place” response so you can send dogs away from each other as needed. Use counter-conditioning or CAT procedure to help dogs be more comfortable in these spaces.

■ **Management:** Identify and avoid situations where one dog is offended by the other dog’s social behavior. These are most often situations where Dog A believes Dog B should defer, and Dog B does not.

behavior. Alternatively teach Dog B to perform deference behaviors on cue (lower head, look away) and then cue those behaviors when needed.

TRIGGER: Social tension – one dog’s perception that another is behaving inappropriately

■ **Modification:** With the aggressor on a leash, counter-condition in the presence of the other dog’s social

TRIGGER: Pain. This may involve actual pain caused by the other dog, pain perceived to have been caused by the other dog, or the anticipation of pain that might be caused by the other dog.

Counter-conditioning Procedure

Counter-conditioning and desensitization (CC&D) involves changing your dog’s association with an aversive or arousing stimulus from negative to positive. While the easiest way to give most dogs a positive association is with very high-value, really yummy treats, this presents a significant challenge when dealing with resource guarding. You must very carefully manage the dogs’ proximity to each other as you present the high-value treat. I recommend tethering the guarder (Dog A), and having a second handler approach with Dog B on a leash to prevent him from coming too close to Dog A.

Here’s how the CC&D process works:

Determine the distance at which Dog A can be in the presence of Dog B and be alert or wary but not aggressing or nearly aggressing. This is called the threshold distance.

1 Have Dog B approach to the threshold distance with your handler-helper, and start feeding your high-value treat to Dog A. (I like to use chicken, canned, baked or boiled.) Pause, let Dog A look at Dog B again, feed again. Repeat several times. (Handler can also feed treats to Dog B during this procedure.)

2 Have your handler move Dog B away, and stop feeding Dog A.

3 Keep repeating Steps 1-2 until the approach of Dog B at that distance consistently causes dog A to look at you with a happy “Where’s my chicken” smile on his face. This is a “Conditioned Emotional Response (CER) that tells us Dog A is now associating the approach of Dog B with good stuff, rather than seeing Dog B as a threat to his good stuff.

4 Now you need to increase the intensity of the stimulus by having Dog B come a step closer. When Dog A alerts, feed chicken as in steps 1 and 2.

5 When you have consistent CERs at the new distance, bring Dog B another step closer, and continue. I recommend you put a barrier such as an exercise pen between the dogs, especially when distance decreases to possible contact, in order to avoid an incident if you should misjudge the dog’s behavior.

■ **Management:** Treat with appropriate pain-relief medication after consultation with vet. Treat as appropriate any medical conditions that cause the dog stress, pain, or discomfort. Prevent physical contact between dogs until condition is under control.

■ **Modification:** May need to do counter-conditioning to undo pain-related associations even after pain/discomfort is treated/under control.

TRIGGER: High arousal. Too much excitement can spill over into aggression during play, especially if you have a dog who functions as “fun police.” This is often a herding dog (like my dog Lucy) who has a strong genetic propensity to want things to be under control at all times.

■ **Management:** Monitor all interactions between dogs, and interrupt play for a time-out if dogs are getting too aroused. Remove “fun police” dog from play arena so other dogs can play appropriately.

■ **Modification:** Interruptions of play is actually a form of negative punishment. Over time, dog(s) may inhibit their own play in order to avoid the time-out.

TRIGGER: Redirected aggression. This is often a result of “fence fighting,” when a dog is being aggressive toward a neighbor dog or a stray on the other side of the fence, and turns on his hapless canine companion, but it can also result from other manifestations of arousal.

- **Management:** Prevent the situations from occurring the lead to this kind of arousal and frustration.
- **Modification:** Modification: Teach a “walk away” cue that invites both dogs to quickly and happily move away from the arousing stimulus before they reach the level of aggressing.

TRIGGER: Aging. As a senior dog loses vision, hearing, and mobility, he may become less aware of a younger dog’s signals, and less able to respond quickly.

- **Management:** This is primarily a management situation. You simply must protect your senior dog from the younger dog’s aggression. Keep them safely separated when you are not there to intervene, and when you are there, be very aware of any interactions that could result in aggression, and be prepared to intervene proactively.
- **Modification:** Teach a “walk away” cue that will invite the younger dog to quickly and happily move away from the senior when you see any sign of tension. (The “walk away” behavior is explained in “How to Teach Your Dog to Trade,” in the February 2017 issue.)

FEELING OVERWHELMED?

I understand if you feel hopeless or overwhelmed – especially if you have been told by other people that you should rehome or euthanize your dog. In my 20-plus years of practice as a canine training and behavior professional, I have not *once* told a client that they *needed* to rehome or euthanize their dog for behavioral reasons. What I *do* say is this: “Here is what we need to do in order to keep your dog(s) safe, and your family and community safe from your dog(s). I will do everything I can to help you with this. And if, at some point you decide that you are not able or willing to do these things, I will support your decision to rehome or euthanize your dog.”

I then go on to discuss why rehoming is often not a realistic option for a dog with significant behavioral challenges, and that there is a significant risk that the dog could be mistreated in a new home at the hands of an owner or professional who still uses old-fashioned, coercive, pain-causing methods. I have had only a very few clients over the years opt for either of these hard choices; most are remarkably committed to helping their dogs stay in their homes.

Intra-family aggression modification is not for the faint of heart. It often requires the assistance of a knowledgeable, experienced professional to guide the program to success. The more

intense the aggression, the more challenging the behavior is to modify. This will be a long-term project, and you must go slowly and manage well. As my trainer friend Gwen Podulka said to me recently, “Think crock pot, not microwave.” However, with excellent management and careful modification, most dogs in this difficult situation can live long and happy lives with their human and canine family members. 🐾

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Constructional Aggression Treatment (CAT) Procedure

The CAT procedure utilizes negative reinforcement to change your dog’s behavior. Here’s how it would work for dog-dog resource guarding:

- 1 Have one person holding Dog A (the resource guarder) on leash in proximity to a guardable resource, while a second person approaches with Dog B on leash.
- 2 When Dog A shows any sign of tension, have Dog B stop. Mark that spot.
- 3 When Dog A relaxes because he realizes Dog A isn’t coming any closer, turn and walk away with Dog B. You just told Dog A that relaxing makes Dog B go away.
- 4 After a 15-second “breather,” return to with Dog B to your marked spot. Wait for Dog A to relax, and leave.
- 5 Repeat steps 1-4 until Dog A shows no sign of tension when Dog B arrives at the marked spot.
- 6 Come one step closer with Dog B, and repeat steps 1-5.
- 7 Gradually work your way closer with Dog B. Ideally you will start seeing affiliative (come closer) behavior from Dog A, as he becomes more and more relaxed about Dog B’s presence near his valuable object. I recommend you put a barrier such as an exercise pen between the dogs, especially when distance decreases to possible contact, in order to avoid a possible incident should you misjudge the dogs’ behavior.



The Scoop on Poop

An investigation into the most environmentally friendly way to dispose of our dogs' feces.



Many of us re-use plastic bags from shopping to pick up and dispose of our dogs' poop. But less plastic would be produced and buried in landfills if, instead, we didn't use plastic bags at all, and bought compostable bags for dealing with dog doo.

Many people aim to be good stewards of the environment. We reduce, reuse and recycle whenever we can, and it goes without saying that we always pick up our dogs' waste. Some of us even use extra bags to pick up stray waste left behind by less-considerate dog owners.

And our poop bags? Lots of us go out of our way to look for biodegradable bags. After all, we want to be earth-friendly in as many ways as possible. Who wants to think of their dog's poop festering away in a traditional polymer bag designed to survive a zombie apocalypse?

Unfortunately, the term "biodegradable" isn't all it's cracked up to be. Truth is, when it comes to dog waste bags, it's not easy to be as "green" as we'd like to be.

THE GREEN GUIDES

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is a U.S. government agency tasked with protecting consumers from deceptive marketing and ad-

vertising claims. The FTC publishes the Green Guides, a resource designed to help marketers avoid making environmental marketing claims that are unfair or deceptive under Section 5 of the FTC Act.

The guidelines are created based on research showing how reasonable consumers understand claims. The publication offers guidance and specific examples for a variety of environmental marketing claims including general environmental benefit claims, non-toxic claims, ozone-safe and ozone-friendly claims, and, specific to consumers of disposable dog waste bags, claims related to product degradability and compostability.

The term "biodegradable" is defined in the dictionary as, "being of a substance or object capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms." This definition offers no parameters as to how long it will take to achieve decomposition.

Section 260.8 of the Green Guides addresses degradability claims, suggesting that marketers making unqualified degradable claims should have "competent and reliable scientific evidence that the entire item will completely break down and return to nature (i.e., decompose into elements found in nature) within a reasonable short period of time after customary disposal." The Green Guides also suggest, based on consumer research, that "it is deceptive to make an unqualified degradable claim for items entering the solid waste stream if the items do not completely decompose within one year after customary disposal."

The key words here are, "after customary disposal." Our society predominantly utilizes landfills for waste management. A landfill is essentially a controlled underground storage facility for solid waste. "They're built to exclude air, light, and water, so things that are in there will be there for lifetimes," says Bob Barrows, a waste-policy analyst with the

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. In other words, even if a pet waste bag is capable of decomposition, unless it can do so within a year of disposal, it should not be marketed as “biodegradable” or “degradable” since it simply cannot degrade in our common landfill environment.

When it comes to compostability, the Green Guides recommend marketers clearly and prominently qualify compostable claims “if the item cannot be composted safely or in a timely manner in a home compost pile or device,” and that they should avoid potentially deceiving consumers by stating a product is commercially compostable, “if such facilities are not available to a substantial majority of consumers or communities where the item is sold.”

Historically, many marketers have struggled to abide by these guidelines. In early 2015, the FTC sent letters warning 20 manufacturers of dog waste bags that their claims of bags being “biodegradable” and “compostable” may be deceptive.

“Consumers looking to buy environmentally friendly products should not have to guess whether the claims made are accurate,” says Jessica Rich, director of the FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Protection. “It is therefore critical for the FTC to ensure that these claims are not misleading, to

What you can do

- *Quickly clean up after your dog, whether at home or while on a walk. Consider racking up some good “poop karma” by bagging the occasional “stray poop” left behind by less-conscientious owners to help control the possible spread of disease.*
- *Be leery of “weasel words” such as “biodegradable” when shopping for earth-friendly dog waste bags. Instead, look for products adhering to well-defined standards such as ASTM’s D6400 standard specification for labeling of plastics designed to be aerobically composted in municipal or industrial facilities.*
- *Consider asking your local dog park to explore options for on-site composting.*

protect both consumers and honest competitors.”

According to the FTC Office of Public Affairs, there have been no further public actions related to pet waste bags following the issuance of the warning letters.

In a similar effort to protect consumers against misinformation about the post-disposal environmental impact of plastic products, California enacted legislation making it illegal to sell any plastic product labeled “compostable” unless it conforms to the ASTM D6400 standard. ASTM is a voluntary standards organization whose members create consensus standards for materials, products, systems, and services. A product can be manufactured in conformance with an ASTM standard, as well as certified to meet the standard

by a third-party organization. Specifically, D6400 looks at what is required to determine if plastics and products made from plastics will successfully compost, which includes biodegrading at a rate comparable to known compostable materials. The standard also requires that the degradation of the material will not diminish the value or utility of the resulting compost.

COMPOSTABLE IS THE NEW BIODEGRADABLE

Because of the regulatory challenges associated with labeling pet waste bags as “biodegradable,” many manufacturers of high-end, “earth friendly” bags now highlight various compostability claims instead.

For example, BioBag, a manufacturer of a wide range of compostable bags, lists three different composting-related certifications on its website. Its packaging also notes that the products conform with the ASTM D6400 standard, and acknowledges not all areas will have access to appropriate commercial composting facilities.

Poopbags.com offers three product lines, one of which is plant-based, and notes its plant-based product line

BioBag is a leading manufacturer of compostable poop bags (as well as bags for composting food and yard waste). The company supports composting efforts at a number of dog parks.



is safe for composting in a commercial facility. Earth Rated also offers multiple product lines, one of which is marketed as a vegetable-based product “that can be disposed of in a municipal compost environment where pet waste is accepted.”

People often wonder if they can toss a compostable bag of dog waste into the green yard trimmings bin if its contents are headed to a commercial composting facility. Most likely, no!

According to Richard Crockett, a general manager with Burrtec Waste Industries, some facilities don’t fully process the trimmings, creating a coarse mulch product instead. Without full processing, there’s no way to kill existing pathogens. Additionally, experts say the introduction of the bag itself is often the biggest barrier, as compostable bags don’t degrade at the same rate as the bulk of the trimmings.

Even when green waste is fully processed into compost, the introduction of pet waste negatively impacts the organic certification of the compost, affecting aftermarket sales of the end product, explains Lily Quiroa of Waste Management, an environmental solutions company serving 21 million

municipal, commercial and industrial customers in the United States. For this reason, Waste Management facilities are not permitted to accept animal waste.

While some areas have designated bins for manure pick-up, they, too, will likely exclude pet waste since, in many areas, “manure” is defined as accumulated herbivore or avian excrement, and, again, the addition of the bags is likely to slow the composting process.

Pathogen reduction is a significant concern, one that potentially keeps commercial composting facilities from embracing the seemingly untapped pet-waste market.

“Bottom line, if you were going around with a truckload of bagged dog waste, you would be hard-pressed to find even one composting facility that would willingly or knowingly accept it, and you would have to pay a lot (for the service),” says Robert Horowitz, environmental scientist supervisor with CalRecycle’s Materials Management and Local Assistance Division. “Yes, the heat of the commercial piles will kill just about any of the many pathogens in dog feces, but who wants to take that chance?”

DIFFICULT, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE

While traditional composting facilities aren’t jumping at the chance to add “pet waste” to their roster of acceptable feed streams, a handful of forward-thinking entrepreneurs and conservation-minded citizens’ groups are successfully implementing pet-waste composting programs to help reduce the carbon footprint of man’s best friend.

EnviroWagg in Aurora, Colorado built an entire business out of composting dog feces, compostable bags and all, by partnering with a local residential dog waste cleanup service and several area dog parks. The composted waste becomes Doggone Good Potting Soil, available online and in select Colorado retail locations. Owner Rose Seemann even wrote a related book, *The Pet Poo Pocket Guide: How to Safely Compost and Recycle Pet Waste* (2015, New Society Publishers, available in book stores and online).

Similarly, a handful of dog parks and open space areas throughout the United States have started composting programs, including Williamsburg River State Park in Brooklyne, New York.

ALTERNATIVES TO PUTTING DOG WASTE IN THE GARBAGE

METHOD	EXAMPLE OF A COMMERCIAL PRODUCT	INFO/CONSIDERATIONS
In-ground waste disposal system	Doggie Dooley (doggiedooley.com) From \$35 (best prices in pet supply stores and online, not from manufacturer)	Works like a small-scale septic system for un-bagged dog waste. Uses proprietary enzyme product to speed-up degradation time. Sensitive to soil conditions and ongoing water levels.
Disposal systems utilizing existing sewer or septic clean-out trap	Doggie Doo Drain (doggiedoodrain.com) About \$50 from manufacturer, stores, and online	Simplicity itself; device screws into existing home sewer or septic clean-out trap. Allows users to essentially “flush” un-bagged dog waste directly into sewer line outdoors. Requires water to help move waste through the system. (Obviously, only homes with easy access to sewer clean-out pipe can utilize this solution.)
Flushable pet waste bag	Flush Puppies (flushpuppies.com) About \$8 for 60 bags	Made from polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) and designed to degrade in water. Requires owners bring waste indoors, and bag must remain untied. (Tying-off the bag creates a balloon in the toilet!)
Burial	N/A	Mixed opinions among environmental experts. One EPA fact sheet lists burial as an acceptable option, provided the hole is at least 12 inches deep and away from food-growing plants. Others say population density issues create environmental concerns.
Home composting	N/A	Can be challenging for the average dog owner. May require a significant quantity of waste and a delicate balance of nitrogen and carbon to achieve proper temperature. Check out <i>The Pet Poo Pocket Guide</i> (2015, New Society Publishers, available in book stores and Amazon.com) by Rose Seemann to learn more.



Doggie Dooley makes in-ground dog waste disposal tanks that work like a septic system. The owner digs a hole (four feet deep!) and inserts the Doggie Dooley product of his choice, so that just the lid is above ground. Poop, enzyme tablets, and water are added on a regular basis to convert solid waste into liquid, which is absorbed into the soil.

According to Leslie Wright of the New York State Parks Department, response to the program has been overwhelmingly positive. Dog-owning park guests contribute to the enclosed pile using available scoopers or rapidly degradable paper waste bags, or they can dump waste from a plastic bag into the pile and dispose of the bag in the trash. Sawdust is added to create the correct carbon-to-nitrogen ratio, and the compost pile is carefully attended to and monitored by park staff to ensure a consistent temperature required to kill existing pathogens. The resulting fertilizer is used only on ornamental plants and flowers throughout the park, and, as an added precaution, away from children’s playground areas.

WHAT ABOUT COMPOSTING AT HOME?

The success of any compost pile largely depends on achieving the correct combination of carbon, nitrogen, air and water. Dog waste supplies the nitrogen, while materials such as leaves, grass clippings, shredded newspaper, or fruit waste can provide the carbon.

According to the USDA National Resource Conservation Service’s eight-page, step-by-step guide for successful dog waste composting, the ideal recipe for a high-temperature compost (designed to kill pathogens) will use two parts dog waste (nitrogen) to one part carbon-rich materials in a minimum volume of three cubic feet.

For the average dog owner, that might mean collecting and saving waste for an undesirable amount of time before composting can begin.

“The fewer animals, the more

difficult it will be,” says Ann Rippy, a practice implementation specialist working with the National Resource Conservation Service. Unlike the Environmental Protection Agency and the various environmental experts we spoke with, however, Rippy says the risks associated with potential pathogen exposure resulting from composting at lower temperatures (as would likely happen in a typical backyard compost pile) might not be as worrisome as they are often made out to be.

“We’re all familiar with dog behavior. We know what they tend to do, and then they go and lick your face,” Rippy says. “If your dog is healthy and you compost responsibly, and use the end product responsibly, it’s not so risky. Every individual must decide in life which risks they are willing to take. In our experience, composting pet waste is a low-risk activity.”

Families considering venturing into composting as a method of pet waste management should not take the idea lightly. “It does require knowledge, caution, and dedication. You need to be well-informed,” Rippy adds.

ARE DOG OWNERS LEFT HOLDING THE BAG?

Despite a desire to contribute less overall product to landfills, it seems the most realistic option for safe pet waste disposal is still putting it in the trash.

“For the health and safety of my family, my friends, and my community, I’m going to bag the poop and send it to the landfill, which is specifically designed to contain pathogens and prevent the spread of disease,” says Jessie

Payne, water-quality communications manager with the State of Washington Department of Ecology. Every ecology expert we spoke with felt the same way.

While it’s disappointing to think of our pet waste bags lingering in landfill, Payne encourages people to look for other ways to lessen their impact on the environment such as recycling newspapers, composting organic food waste, and reducing energy usage.

However, that doesn’t mean the high-grade compostable pet waste bags are without merit. Companies making the effort to produce waste bags that conform to standards for compostability are, in general, striving to be earth-friendly in all facets of the business. Using sustainable raw materials in a plant-based waste bag is still more eco-conscious than producing a traditional polymer bag. For many consumers, even if the compostable bag fails to degrade while trapped in an anaerobic garbage tomb, the earth-friendly manufacturing still justifies the higher price tag.

“It’s a voluntary market differential piece,” says Allison Fick, manager of standards development at ASTM International. “It’s the demonstration of sustainability and being good stewards of the earth. Not only are dog owners being good stewards of the earth by picking up the waste, but they’re making good consumer choices by picking a bag and supporting a company that practices good stewardship.” 🐾

Stephanie Colman is a writer and dog trainer in Southern California. See page 24 for contact information.

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How to Be the Best (Foster) Home Possible

It starts with a focus on the dog's health and emotional needs before "correcting" his behavior.

"I wasn't sure if he was going to make it, those first two weeks," says foster provider Nancy Kerns. Muppet, now Buffet, was surrendered to a shelter by his owner. He was emaciated, and had become gravely ill in the shelter from kennel cough – an infection that rarely debilitated otherwise healthy adult dogs. He had also apparently been kept confined excessively; his muscles, tendons, and ligaments were so unconditioned that he couldn't stand fully upright on the pads of his feet. Instead, when he walked, he padded along on his "wrists" – the back part of his legs. And he was uncoordinated; he was unsure of how to navigate his world.

That was the bad news. The good news was that he wanted to try – to try to explore the world and make new human and dog friends. And he was adorable, with a sweet, enthusiastic personality. If his body could recover from whatever it had been put through in his first year of life, it would be easy to find him a home.

Nancy nourished him in body and mind. He needed two rounds of antibiotics to kick the respiratory infection, lots of high-quality, high-protein food to gain weight and energy, daily off-leash walks to gain strength and coordination. Soon enough, he was feeling well enough to require *lots* of supervision to keep him from chewing things he shouldn't! In roughly six weeks, he was walking almost



upright, recovered from his illness, gaining weight, and was *almost* ready to find a home.

Some of my friends had asked me to keep an eye out for a candidate to be their next dog. When I heard about Buffet, I thought he'd be a perfect match. I made arrangements to foster Buffet for another month or so, so I could assess his needs in order to provide support to my friends after they brought him home.

Following his surrender to and weeks-long stay in a shelter, Buffet's first foster person nursed him through a severe case of kennel cough and then started trying to build his weight and strength.

FOSTERING = SETTING UP DOGS FOR SUCCESS

In my opinion, foster or rehabilitation caregivers not only nurse dogs back to health if they are ill and give dogs temporary shelter before they are adopted out, but also are responsible for bolstering their emotional state and mental well being. Setting up a dog for success is a big challenge but should be the goal for foster caregivers.

As soon as he was well enough, Buffet's first foster person took him on off-leash romps where he could work out how to use his long limbs. The activity filled him with joy.



EMOTIONAL RESCUE

What does it mean to set a dog up for success? Initially, success is meeting the emotional and physical needs of our new charge. This means that we must learn how to read dog body language, so we can understand their emotional state.

If we know when a dog is stressed, fearful, or anxious, we can help to alleviate his anxieties and help him gain confidence, which makes him more adoptable. When a dog is relieved of stress, his ability to learn increases, which also makes him more adoptable. It behooves all foster caregivers to learn how to “speak dog” if our goal is to be the bridge to their forever home. Remember, if we can’t communicate, we can’t bond!

Many dogs in foster homes have come from shelters, so by the time they come to a foster home, they have been in a minimum of three previous homes: One, where they were born; two, their first home away from their litter; and three, the shelter. The foster home is at least number four – and all of these changes can be traumatizing for any dog.

This kind of trauma is often responsible for breaking the human-dog bond. It manifests in stress behaviors such as barking, whining, jumping, mouthing, separation anxiety, and even aggression towards humans and other dogs or animals. If a dog’s first two years of life are interrupted by displacement, illness, or abuse, he will suffer emotionally. It’s our job as foster providers to help alleviate this stress by making our wards feel safe and secure; without this, dogs are unable to learn and thrive, thereby making the return rate to shelters and foster homes higher than need be.



FOSTER PHASE TWO

Buffet came to me already much healthier and thriving, thanks to his first foster provider. His *joie de vivre* wasn’t permanently destroyed by his poor health. He was a happy, goofy, gangly, one-year-old puppy, ready to roll. But he also displayed a lot of anxieties.

My goal for Buffet was to make him feel secure in himself and in the world around him, and that process started with observing him without expectations of his behavior, and trying understand his emotional state. He’d been through a lot and still had a very sweet and willing disposition, and I didn’t want to him to lose that.

Dealing with his anxiety was the first order of business, however. He had been transported to my town in a car with several other dogs who were being moved across state lines to new homes, and even though his part of the journey lasted only about six hours, he had been stressed enough in the car that when he got out, he had diarrhea and a loss of appetite for a couple of days. (I checked with Nancy, who reported that usually he was a voracious eater and had not previously had loose stools.)

There were lots of other clues that Buffet was quite anxious. He frequently barked and whined for attention, “counter surfed” (restlessly looked for items to eat or chew from the counters), chewed any clothing he could get hold of, and humped his bed in an effort to settle himself before he’d sleep. Nancy had reported that he had displayed some of these behaviors early in her time with him, but most of them had faded over the six weeks she had him.

The barking was perhaps the most obnoxious stress signal – but it’s important to understand that he wasn’t being *bad*; he was anxious, and

Buffet expressed his anxiety in a number of ways – barking, counter-surfing, humping his bed. When faced with new situations, his body language expressed his discomfort: with tail tucked, a lifted front paw, ears back and low, and a closed mouth.

Many dogs, including Buffet, bark to alleviate their stress, though many people misinterpret this as spite or aggression.



barking helps relieve an anxious dog’s anxiety. It’s a coping mechanism – albeit not a very useful one, given that many people yell at or punish a dog for barking, which just increases the dog’s anxiety!

Buffet barked when he was frustrated or wanted something, because he didn’t know what else to do, and had never had been taught a more polite way of getting attention from humans. He barked at the dogs to get them to play and he barked at me when he wanted something from me. If I left him in the house while I went out to my car to get something, even though he could see me the entire time through a window, he would bark with anxiety, worried that I might leave him behind. He would also bark when I asked him to do something that he didn’t want to do, like “sit” on cue.

I ignored the barking; again, if someone punishes this stress-based behavior, it often worsens the situation. Within a few days, he stopped barking at me, and barked at my dogs only when he wanted them to play, or when I was giving them loving attention and he wanted to be a part of it. As he began to feel safe and secure, the barking diminished and vanished by the end of our month together.

Another major indicator of his stress was his inability to settle himself. When I would sit down on the couch or at my desk, he would often hump his bed in an anxious frenzy. I knew that I had met his needs for exercise with walks, play, and short training sessions. I knew he wasn’t hungry, didn’t have to go potty, and that he indeed wanted to rest but couldn’t.

I watched his behavior without reaction or words, and with each passing day, the humping became less and less frequent until he didn’t do it at all.

Keep in mind that this is not sexual and not a bad behavior; it's just an anxious behavior. It was his way of winding down in his unfamiliar world.

Buffet stopped the humping behavior completely while living with me, and started it up again after he met his new guardians and stayed with them in a hotel when they came to my town and stayed for a couple of days of visiting and getting to know him. When he got to his new home, the humping ceased within a few days.

Remember, correcting anxious behaviors is wrong. It perpetuates the anxiety and or makes the dog shut down. It's our job as foster caregivers to build confidence and trust, not shut down the dog's emotions. Most anxious behaviors go away by themselves when they are responded to with little to no reactive energy, as long as the dog has opportunities to have his emotional needs satisfied with love and affection.

TEACHING MOMENTS

As a dog trainer, I of course want to further my foster dogs' education, but not at the expense of his confidence or enthusiasm. So I aim to keep all teaching sessions short and fun, and use games and yummy treats. In this way, I was able to build Buffet's self-assurance while helping him overcome his anxieties.

It helps to relieve a dog's stress if you make learning fun and rewarding, by doing short sessions – only five minutes each maximum, and ending on a positive note, about four to six times a day. I teach one cue or trick at a time, and if the dog gets at all “stuck,” I don't try that trick or behavior again for a day or two. Then, when I do go back to it, the dog usually has it down and is willing to give more and with much more enthusiasm.

That said, I always take the time to teach my foster dogs cues in real life situations – because it's real life that will be happening when they go to their new homes! For example, I always teach dogs to “wait” at doors and gates, in the car, and while hiking or in safe public places.

I also teach them to “sit” if they

want a toy or treat; it's a dog version of saying, “Please!”

I take my fosters to the vet clinic for a weight check and treats from the staff, so that going to the vet is a fun time, not anxiety-producing. I practice low-stress handling methods for grooming and vet visits, so my foster dogs are comfortable being touched, positioned for ear checks, blood draws, nail trims, and being brushed; this goes a long way in reducing stress. I teach these things slowly and with treats to make it enjoyable and rewarding for them. I also keep these sessions short and positive, and allow the dog to have a choice in how fast I go.

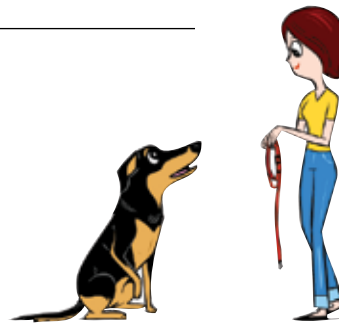
For example, when I took out a brush to groom Buffet, he initially backed away and bit at the brush. He was playing, but underneath his play was an undertone of anxiety about being brushed – or perhaps being forced to tolerate brushing.



Buffet learning to “wait” before getting out of the car; I train in short “real life” sessions to prepare my foster dogs for their next placement.

I stopped immediately and, instead, walked over to a training mat, prepared with brush and treats. (I use a fuzzy sort of bath mat, which gives the dog a comfortable place to sit, stand, or lie down, while also providing a sort of boundary of where I'd like him to remain while we work. I reinforce the dog heavily while he's on the mat, and soon he is happy to remain there, without being forced to do so.)

Buffet followed me to the mat, and I showed him the brush and gave him a treat. Putting the brush behind my back and treat ready in the other hand, I brought the brush out front again,



When the author first attached a leash to Buffet's collar or harness, he'd bark and bite at the leash. He was stressed about what would happen next!

and when he sniffed it, I immediately offered him a treat. After about five repetitions of this, I touched him gently with the brush and gave him a treat. I repeated this about five times. Then I did one brush stroke and gave him a treat. I repeated the same sequence with longer brush strokes (brush, treat; brush, treat), until I was able to brush him without biting the brush or moving away – and all this took only about 10 minutes.

Spending just a few minutes each day on this type of positive reward teaching and low-stress handling in real-life situations helps a foster dog build confidence and trust in you. What better way to bond with a dog,

but especially an anxious, fearful, or stressed dog! While you're in these teaching sessions, pay attention to the dog's body language and emotional state. It will help you to know when to stop, slow down, or keep going.

STRESS RELIEF

Teaching a dog some tricks is a blast – and they don't have to be complicated! A simple “high five” or catching a toy or treat in the air is fun and rewarding. Watching how a foster dog processes new tricks and games gives you more information that you can offer his new guardian, who can then see how fun and easy teaching dogs can be and how much dogs love to learn. Tug of war is another great game, because while playing you can teach a dog to both take (“take it!”) and release (“drop it!”) the toy.

Buffet learned tricks before I taught him any formal “good manners” behaviors, because I saw that the leash

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CASE HISTORY

highly stressed him. When I attached a leash to his collar, he would bite at the leash and bark at me; if I took the leash off, he was eager to learn. I recognized these “bad behaviors” for what they really were – anxious behaviors – and understood his emotional state; it was more important to alleviate his anxiety



Buffet and his new owner, happy in a “forever home” where he is loved, understood, and well-cared for.

Photo credit: Roy Gardner

ANOTHER HAPPY ENDING

When Buffet left me to be with his new family, he was a more confident dog and able to manage stressful situations with ease. He had the confidence he needed to mature into a well-mannered, well-adjusted adult dog.

Just as important, his adopters took the time to learn to be aware of his emotional state, recognize his signs of stress or anxiety, and respond appropriately to those signs in order to help him regain confidence any time he got overwhelmed.

than to worry about the barking and grabbing at the leash. Once he caught on to the teaching process and became enthusiastically engaged, I could put the leash on without him getting anxious and his progress soared.

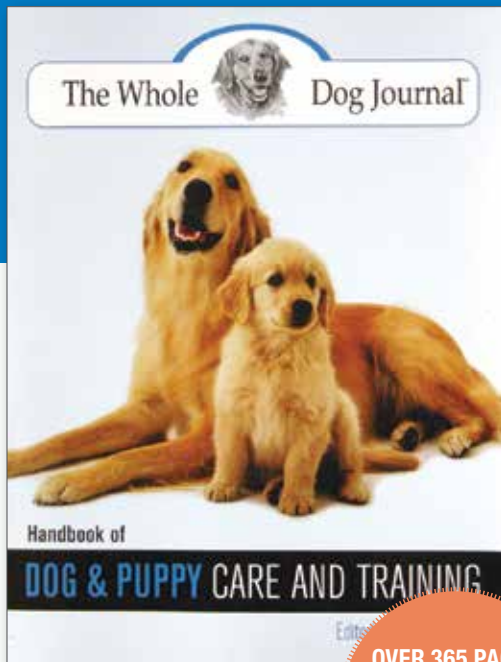
Four to six short (five-minute max) training sessions a day adds up to 30 minutes. I would venture to say that many people spend far more time trying to correct so-called bad behaviors, which ultimately is detrimental to their relationships with their new dogs.

In contrast, short, fun teaching sessions help to alleviate the dog’s stress while building a stronger bond and a foundation of trust. This kind of foundation truly helps prepare a dog for his or her new family, as it’s more important that they are happy, healthy, and willing and able to trust and connect with new people than it is to be perfectly “trained” in conventional “obedience” behaviors. If more attention was paid to foster dogs’ emotional state from the minute they were taken into foster care, I think their placements would go much more smoothly.

We’ve been living with dogs for thousands of years and yet it’s a relatively new idea to learn how to read dog body language to better understand their emotional state. By getting better at speaking dog, we can help to reduce their stress and fear so they can behave “better”– which, in turn, will help them stay in their original homes, instead of being surrendered to shelters.

If we took this education to heart, I daresay that homeless dogs, dog bites, and surrendering dogs to shelters would not be the huge problem that they continue to be today. 🐾

Trainer Jill Breitner has been training dogs since 1978 and is a body language expert. She is the developer of the Dog Decoder smartphone app, which helps people identify and “de-code” their dogs’ body language for a better understanding. She is also a certified Fear Free Professional and certified in Animal Behavior and Welfare. She lives on the west coast and uses Skype for dog training consultations all over the world. See page 24 for contact information.



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