

Dog Training Articles By Beth Bradley

Stress and Behavioral Problems

I believe 95% of all behavioral problems stem from one of three areas: (1) Lack of physical and mental stimulation, (2) early puppy/house training and (3) unrealistic expectations from the owner.

Lack of Physical/Mental Stimulation

Dogs are working animals but through domestication and modern technology they are no longer worked. Home alone for 8 hours followed by a walk around the neighborhood or a run in the yard is not enough physical or mental stimulation. Dogs need exercise (walks, swimming, retrieving) but your dog would much rather exercise with you than by itself in your yard.

But exercise with no mental stimulation will make your dog crazy. The working instinct in your dog demands for it to use its brain. And if you don't allow your dog to use its brain for good behavior you can believe it will use it for bad behavior or strange behavior. Types of negative behavior I have seen are: aggression, dominance, animal aggression, fear of everything, excessive barking, jumping, chewing, spinning in circles, excessive licking of themselves, diarrhea, destructiveness, digging, chewing their own tails/feet, hair loss or bad coats, dermatitis, excessive weight gain and lack of attention.

Obedience not only teaches your dog self-control but also allows it to think and respond, i.e. using its mind/work. Teaching your dog anything from tricks to simple obedience commands gives it an outlet and allows thought processes to over-ride negative behavior.

I believe a dog needs a minimum of 40 minutes to 1 hour of exercise (retrieve, running, etc.) a day and a ½ of training a day. All exercise or all work will not control negative behavior. A happy medium of both will make your dog happy and well adjusted.

House-breaking

The first thing a dog learns is house breaking. This is the basis for your dog's future attitude towards training. Negative housebreaking will lead to a negative attitude throughout life and lead to unneeded stress. I never housebreak a puppy. My puppies are crate trained (in a crate when I can not supervise) or kenneled outside in my yard when I am unable to supervise so he/she can eliminate whenever needed. This way there is no unneeded stress placed upon the puppy by the owners. I would never allow even a 2-year-old dog of mine to have free run of my house. 2 years old is still young and I never want to stress my dog when there is a way I can avoid it. Even if you do not yell or hit your dog when he/she eliminates in your home, your body language and attitude show the stress and your dog picks up on it.

If you ask people who own dogs with the negative behaviors that I mentioned above, most will say they had a difficult time house breaking their dog.

Keep it simple: if your dog is eliminating in your home – use a crate or the outdoors when you are unable to supervise. Always put your dog and yourself in a position to win or solve a problem.

Unrealistic Expectations

When you adopt or buy a puppy/dog and bring it into your home, it is important that you remember to treat it like a dog. Some behavioral problems have to do with genetics (and can be controlled early on) but most are learned from the owners. If your dog is exhibiting some unwanted behavior it is the time to analyze how you treat him. Yes, your dog is part of your family but when dealing with him treat him like a dog (like his mother would) not a human. They don't think like humans and they don't feel like humans don't try to associate how you feel with how they should feel – its not the same. My dogs are my family and I would protect them and defend them till my own death but I treat them like dogs. Treating your dog like a human leads to stress. Your dog should feel that you love him but that you are the master and his leader not his equal. Stress results from: when you expect your dog to listen to obedience commands when you hardly ever work him, know that he can only eliminate outdoors, know when someone is welcome in your home rather than a stranger, know that he can jump on you but not your grandmother, know that he can 'play bite' you but not your 2 year old son, know that he should immediately respond to the command 'come' but it's not important to respond immediately to the command 'sit, expect him to sit at home all day long and not want your attention when you come home from work, know when to protect his house and territory and when not to. These are unrealistic expectations that your dog should not have to live up to. In a pack environment the alpha makes the decisions – YOU MUST BE ALPHA and make all decisions. Decision making is stressful and leads to negative behavior. Before you act or react, give your dog a command – give him something to do. Don't allow him to react on his own, for example: give him the command sit/stay when opening your front door or car door.

If your dog does not believe you are 'in command' or 'alpha' he will make his own decisions and they will be negative. You are in charge. My dogs are stress free because I make all decisions – the only thing my dogs have to think about is the command I gave them and that they need to respond.