

WHAT CAN I DO???

The Program

This is the reality of their relationship, at least in the dog's mind. But when the owner leaves, against the dog's wishes, the pet is predictably upset, and problem behavior occurs. This can involve barking, chewing, pacing, self-mutilation, off-schedule bowel movements, urination around the house, etc.

The Leadership Problem Can Be Turned About

... by presenting a different reality to the dog; one in which the dog is pleasantly, but firmly and consistently told to perform some simple act, such as "sit" whenever it attempts to gain attention or affection, or whenever the owner wants to give the dog some attention. All "sits", or whatever command is used ("down" is a good one for highly bossy dogs) are praised happily as 3 to 5 seconds of petting is awarded; then the dog is cheerfully released with an "OK" or "Free" (Free is a good release because OK is too common a word.)

If a really bossy dog refuses to obey, and many do when they realize their relationship is being turned around, simply ignore the situation, turn away and go on about some other activity, ignoring the dog. Some dogs have refused to respond for as long as four days before coming to terms with a follower relationship. However long it takes, after a few days the dog's image of itself seems to evolve from one of giving direction to taking it with compliance prior to being petted, getting dinner, going out the door, getting on the couch, etc. In moving around the house, whenever the dog forges ahead, simply about-turn and go the other way. This must be repeated until the dog walks patiently behind or, better yet, doesn't even follow. It is also helpful, but not vital, to practice down-stays of increasing length during several evenings a week.



Images of Hyper-Emotionality

Most "home alone" problem dogs get extremely emotional when their owners get home; some even get excitable when regular departure times approach. To supplant these emotionally over-stimulating images, sit quietly for about five minutes before leaving, in the area where the dog will be left. No eye contact or speaking is allowed. Then get up and go without looking at or speaking to the pet.

At homecoming, enter quietly and ignore the dog until it quiets down completely. Then it is greeted happily, but briefly away from the door of arrival. This subdued routine soon replaces the dog's highly emotional mental images of returns and departures with calmness and serenity.

Here's the tough part for most all dog owners: When coming home the place is a mess! Pillows have been chewed, or the chair is tattered again, or a pile of poop graces the doorway, or some other problem is evident. If we keep in mind that the dog has in the past suffered from conflicting images at homecoming, it is imperative that no emotion, or even attention, should be directed at the remnants of the problem; such as chewed up magazines, shoes, defecation, etc. Instead, after five minutes of ignoring the dog, it should be greeted away from the scene of the misbehavior, and then pleasantly taken outdoors or to another room and left alone while the mess is cleaned. This avoids creating new (or reinforcing old) conflicting images of emotional reactions to, or interactions with, the debris, defecation, etc.

I have always called this "the secret clean up". It has worked wonders as part of programs ranging from digging in the yard to housetraining puppies. The lack of an image of the owner and the mess is more beneficial to correction than is the image. So, there it is.....

Dogs think in images and we can mold and change their behavior in hundreds of ways if we will think as they do.

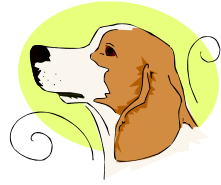
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Solving Separation Anxiety Problems



"Dogs think in images and we can mold and change their behavior in hundreds of ways if we will think as they do."

Solving Separation Anxiety



Have you ever seen a device or a program designed to correct a dog behavior problem that explained how smart dogs are and how they think? Most plans or gadgets enable owners, literally, to declare war on their hapless pets. Little or no concern is afforded to what the dogs happen to think about them. INFACT... the implication is that dogs don't think at all.... Either they just react to external stimuli like robots, or respond according to genetically controlled "drives". Dogs are rarely credited with the ability to solve a problem mentally; to analyze a situation; imagine ways to manipulate or control it, then take a pre-planned course of action toward a goal that was preconceived in the dog's mind. In short, the dog is considered a real dummy.....then treated like a dummy. **But this concept is NOT correct. Dogs are smart.** They can, and usually do, think rings around their owners. And they can do it because most owners have never learned how to think like a dog.

Seeds of A Misbehavior Problem

Almost every one of us has mental imagery. Often, just the thought of a loved one conjures up their image. This can apply to sounds, as well. Think about your favorite musical piece and you can often hear it in your "mind's ear." These are Positive Images. They are emotionally pleasant. At the other end of the scale, recalling a terrifying experience can not only create its images, but sometime even make us shudder. This is an example of Negative, Emotionally Unpleasant Images.

So it is with our dogs. When we are late getting home, or if they over-miss us because we spoil them with attention and petting every time they demand it, they very likely worry in images, too. **They may well recall images of us and our activities.**

As a result of this, they often engage in activities which....involve them with these images: Pillows wind up on the floor, albums or magazines are moved or chewed, a chair seat gets dug up, shoes are brought out of the closet. If they can't have us there, they try to interact with things that symbolize us.



The Puppy Dilemma

What's going on in its mind's eye or ear? It probably imagines hearing footsteps, perhaps even sees the door open...which doesn't happen, but it should. This introduces conflict between what it wants and expects and what is really happening. Conflict creates frustration. Frustration produces anxiety, which triggers an even greater adrenaline rush. The pup searches for something real to satisfy its desire to "experience" the owner..... a magazine or book it saw the owner reading recently. It is rich with the owner's scent. If it cannot have the owner there, it can at least have their genuine odor or taste. So it sniffs, tastes, maybe even swallows parts of the article. Naturally, this does not fully substitute for the whole owner, so the puppy's social appetite is not really satisfied.

Finally, here comes the owner..... The puppy innocently launches into its joyous, semi-hysterical ritual. The owner starts to join in, BUT spies the pulverized magazine or book. What's this? Naturally, if **not wisely**, the owner angrily grabs the pup, drags it to the demolished object and scolds it, or slaps it's snout or rump, or both. The Pet's single-track mind is riveted on the owner. It yips, rolls over, or struggles vainly to escape. Punishment concluded the owner angrily picks up the remnants of the article and storms to the trash basket.

Psychic Trauma

The net result of this is a totally confused pup with conflicting set of images of its owner. This sort of shock to the nervous system is called PSYCHIC TRAUMA in both animals and humans. A conflict has been instilled between the positive image of the owner (happy Dr. Jekyll) and the negative (Mr. Homecoming Hyde). This creates frustration and anxiety about homecomings that grow in severity if the scenario is repeated a few times.

(It is interesting that in many cases, owners tell us that the pup was fine for a day or so after the first punishment. This may equate to the human experience of repression, in which memory of the traumatic experience is suppressed, creating a sort of "backwards amnesia".) Even when this occurs, since the punishment was not associated with the act of chewing up something, the puppy seeks out another article, perhaps a shoe, and the cycle is repeated until the total relationship between owner and dog is tainted with emotional ambivalence. Mixed feelings are eating away at the positive qualities of their relationship. Negative emotional impressions may start to dominate it.

At about this stage, many owners conclude that the punishment may not have been severe enough. That's why the correction was not permanent. So they intensify it. The relationship erodes further as weeks go by. Enough of this cascading negative effect and the owner is ready to take drastic action. The dog, now hypersensitive to its owner's mood change, feels something is wrong. **This often is reflected by new problems, such as submissive wetting when the owner comes home or approaches the dog at other times; off-schedule bowel movements or urination occur.**

Many pets act insecure, currying more favor when the owner is home, and hence, missing the owner **even more acutely** when left alone. Frustration and anxiety build, while the isolation-related, tension-relieving behavior mounts. **The unwitting owner, who originally may have thought the dog is "getting even" for being left alone, begins to consider it incorrigible.**

WHAT CAN I DO??? The Program

Dogs that are unduly upset when left alone usually enjoy their owner's attention and petting whenever they ask for (or demand it) when the people are at home. To apply the imagery concept to this relationship, we could say the dog "sees itself " as directing, or leading the owner. When it wants some petting, it nudges or otherwise stimulates the owner, and the owner complies. The dog wants out, whines at the door or at the owner, and the door gets opened. Mealtime approaches, dog whines and prances, and dinner gets served. When the owner goes from room to room, the dog is either ahead, leading them, or close behind