

GOOD DOG

A Program to Help Dog Owners Address Aggression Problems in Dogs

by Sue Alexander, CPDT, CDBC

Introduction

Families living with dogs with behavioral problems need assistance to overcome these difficulties. The Good Dog program incorporates management, desensitization, and counter conditioning, and training of new behaviors to address some of the multiple factors that influence the outcome of an aggression case. The program comprises three phases: (1) one-on-one work to address the family's particular needs and develop basic handling skills; (2) the Good Dog Class (including a Walking Class), which offers clients a safe and controlled environment in which to practice the skills they have been working on at home; and (3) Group Dog Walks, in which dogs are reinforced for appropriate social interactions with one another. We support the families closely, providing three opportunities per week for contact with our staff. We also provide a venue for participants to share their experiences with one another during our group classes and off-leash dog walks.

Behavioral Profile of Dogs Suitable for the Program

The Good Dog Program is suitable for dogs who are confidently aggressive, fearfully aggressive, aggressive on arousal, fearful but not aggressive, and reactive to given stimuli but not aggressive.

Although we specifically address aggression in Good Dog, we recognize that other behavioral problems may also benefit from a systematic approach to their resolution. We accept dogs into this program who are aggressive toward people or other dogs, who are fearful, or who are highly reactive. Dogs known to have a hard mouth, or those whose bite hardness is unknown, may be muzzled during group outings initially, or may be integrated slowly into class as they are ready.

For our purposes, aggression may be defined as threats, postures, or harmful actions directed toward another individual. Aggressive behavior is a form of communication, by which

the aggressor is attempting to establish greater social distance between himself and the target of the aggression.

Aggression may be the overt behavioral manifestation of fear, where the feared stimulus becomes the target of aggression. The dog may fear a number of stimuli, including but not limited to specific individual humans or dogs, specific types of dogs, specific groups of humans (infants, boys, girls, men, people in hats), inanimate objects such as trash containers, brooms, vacuums or shovels, and noises or flashing lights (thunder and lightning, for instance).

Arousal, too, may be manifested as aggression. The dog may exhibit aggression only when excited, as during play or training, or when presented with high-value stimuli such as toys, chew items, other dogs, or new people. We use the table in Appendix 1 (page 61) to describe the levels of arousal that we see. (At each level we give an example of a behavior typical of that level of arousal. It is important to note that "typical" does not mean the behavior correlates perfectly with the arousal level; a dog may be sitting yet be in level seven, frantic and verging on being dangerously out of control.)

The Components of the Good Dog Program

People find out about the Good Dog Program from their veterinarian, from brochures, or by word of mouth. (Table 1) When clients contact us, we assess the problem over the phone to determine whether their dog may be suitable for the program. If they seem suitable, a home visit is scheduled, and we begin working with the family.

Private Consultations

All clients begin with at least four weeks of private consultations, during which we visit the home and work with the family to implement a combination of management techniques, changing the dog's motivation or emotional response to the target or stimulus of their aggression, and training alternative behaviors.

In the first meeting, we take a history. (Please see Table 1 for a summary of the information that we seek from each client.) Where possible, we prefer to include the veterinarian and get any relevant information from him or her. If we believe the behavior problem is medical in nature, we refer the client directly back to the veterinarian.

During the first meeting, we also educate the client about our three-pronged approach

to dealing with behavior problems: management, changing the dog's motivation, and training new behaviors. We also use a pamphlet to help the client understand factors that might contribute to a dog's bite (Appendix 2, pages 62-63) and a chart that we have developed outlining arousal (Appendix 1, page 61). Finally, we fill out a bite history sheet if the dog has bitten anyone (Appendix 3, page 64). All clients are required to sign a waiver.

At the end of the first consultation we meet the dog and begin working with it. Clients are left with a homework sheet outlining exercises to do with their dogs. Each client is provided with homework appropriate to the needs of the individual dog.

Table 1. Information we want to glean when we take a history:

- ◆ Name, address and phone number
- ◆ Dog's name
- ◆ Dog's date of birth
- ◆ Dog's breed if known/otherwise a physical description
- ◆ Dog's weight
- ◆ Any significant illnesses
- ◆ Current health
- ◆ Other pets in the home
- ◆ Name, gender, and age of each person living in the home and any regular visitors
- ◆ What the dog is eating and how much
- ◆ Where the dog sleeps and any information we can get about the quality of the dog's sleep
- ◆ Any medications the dog is taking
- ◆ Details of the dog's regular exercise regime
- ◆ People friends of the dog
- ◆ Dog friends of the dog
- ◆ Training history (we are especially interested in early puppy history)
- ◆ Details of the problem behavior, when it began, any triggers for the dog, any mitigating circumstances that may have led to the behavior problem, and details about what led the clients to decide to seek help

In our consults we record information on a palm pilot and use prompts to remind us what questions to ask. We have chosen the information to collect based on the questionnaires available in *Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Small Animals* by Overall (1997) and *Handbook of Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat* by Landsberg, Hunthausen, and Ackerman (2nd ed., 2003)

Each week, we meet privately with the client, usually in the home. We work initially on management and safety concerns, and help the family set up their situation so that they give the dog two weeks with no occurrences of the problem behavior. In our experience, this "vacation" from the problem can give the family and the dog time to relax. Families can take the opportunity to review their goals for their dogs and obtain some perspective regarding how they

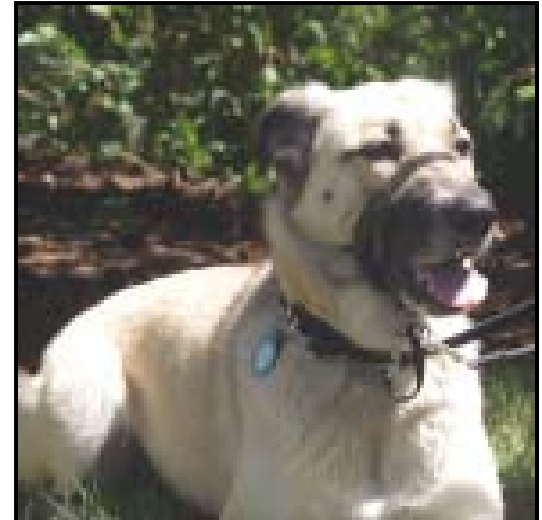
would like to live with their dogs over the long term.

We also work with the family early in the process to develop basic handling skills and control over their dog's behavior. Clicker training methods are introduced in the first lesson to help the dog's handlers identify and mark discrete desirable behaviors. We will use the clicker in Good Dog Class and in Walking Class, when dogs are asked to interact with soft eye contact. We use head halters and a balance leash (any six to ten-foot leash with a hook at each end; see sidebar for a picture of how the leash is attached to the halter and the collar on the dog. Generally we find that the Halti™ brand head halter gives the best control, because the nose band falls lower on the dog's muzzle and gives better leverage should the client need to physically close the dog's mouth. Where a Halti™ does not fit, a Gentle Leader™, Snoot Loop™, or other head halter may be used.

Optimally, the client will work one on one with us once a week for two to four months, as well as attending a weekly Good Dog Class and Group Dog Walks. The next step is for the client to see us less often one-on-one, but continue to attend the weekly Good Dog Class and Group Dog Walks for a further three to five months. As the family becomes more proficient at handling their dogs and the dog's behavior improves, we again decrease our one-on-one involvement to a single meeting per month, although the client still attends the Good Dog Class and the Group Dog Walks. Typically, we expect dogs to complete the program in between eight months and a year, and be prepared to participate in a regular obedience class or live peacefully in the owner's home without further weekly support.

The Good Dog Class

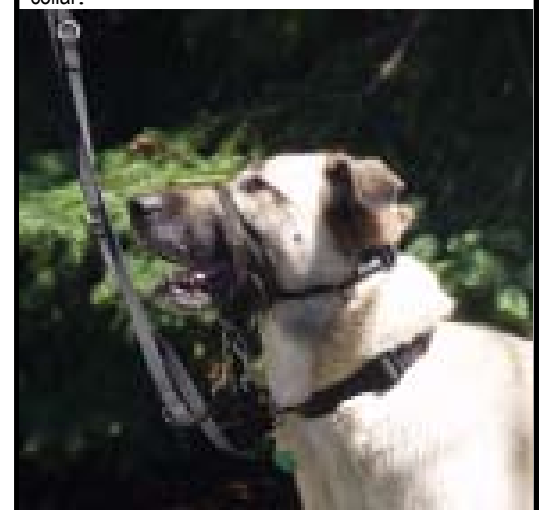
Ideally, the Good Dog Class includes four to seven dogs at any given time. The objective of this class is to enable owners to safely engage in desensitization exercises. Although we encourage family members to come together



Molly wearing a head halter and double ended leash attached to both her head halter and her collar.



Gaby ready to work in Good Dog Class, wearing a head halter, attached to a tether and leashed at her halter and collar.



Molly

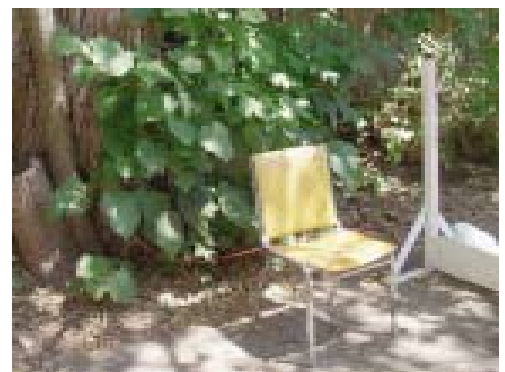
to this class, for safety and liability reasons we do not allow any children under the age of 16 to attend. We usually have one person in the family as our primary contact and handler, and other supporting members of the family are encouraged to attend as many activities as possible.

The intent of Good Dog Class is to always work sub-threshold; no discrete behaviors (such as sitting, lying down, or going through a tunnel, for instance) are taught. Clients are required to attend a first Good Dog Class without their dogs. Classes run continuously rather than in blocks of six or eight sessions; new clients may join at any time. This format provides real benefits to the dogs: For instance, the dogs who are progressing are exposed to "rude" dogs as the latter begin the class, while those new, "rude" dogs receive exposure to dogs who are under better control.

We promote dogs to our Walking Class as they become ready for that level of work. Dogs are ready for Walking Class when they can cope with an hour of Good Dog Class while maintaining an arousal level below five and when outside of class they have learned to walk on a loose leash, sit or lie down and stay on leash, and tolerate a variety of stimuli in their environment without reaching an arousal level higher than five. Students will occasionally attend both classes at once as they transition between the phases of the program. Occasionally students will be asked to attend Good Dog Class for a few minutes after Walking Class, because doing so can be a very rewarding experience for a dog who has worked hard for an hour to cope with the stress of walking through an urban neighborhood. Classes are friendly, and some participants return to Good Dog Class to visit their friends and offer support.

Walking Class provides a safe context for students to practice their leash-walking skills in an urban neighborhood. We also teach students to teach their dogs how to sit or lie down and stay in the presence of unexpected stimuli such as you might find in an urban neighborhood.

Good Dog Classes proceed as follows. Clients leave their dog in their parked car and go into the training area. Either the consultant or one of the assistants will tell them when they can come into the classroom with their dog. Dogs come in one at a time and each family is assigned a place to work with their dog. Dogs are tethered to a secure object. (We meet outdoors during the summer, when we use eyebolts in the side of a building, a fence, and a large tree; indoors, we use bolts secured in the wall). The humans are provided with chairs, and visual barriers block off the line of sight between working stations. It is important to keep everyone safe and calm at all times, including and perhaps especially the dogs.



Chair with tether and visual barrier.

Once all the dogs have arrived in class, the consultant and assistants will spend time with each of the families and their dogs. The consultant and assistants will approach dogs as they are able to handle close social contact, and coach students in classical conditioning techniques. As needed, one of the assistants or the consultant may handle an “uncle”—a confident, calm, trained dog—approaching the reactive dogs as they are desensitized to the proximity of dogs in class. (Uncle dogs are discussed further under “Group Dog Walks,” below.) As the reactive dogs develop the ability to remain calm in the presence of dogs behind barriers, the barriers are decreased or removed. We look for signs of calmness such as attention to the handler, a low rate of respiration, and a cessation of focus on the uncle dog to indicate when the dog is relaxed enough for barriers to come down. When a dog is able to remain calm and relaxed in Good Dog Class, the students will be instructed to begin asking their dogs to follow cues from their handlers in the presence of the uncle dog. Once the dog is able to follow cues from the handler with the uncle dog approaching and the assistants approaching, he or she is ready to be promoted to our Walking Class.

Dogs leave class each week much as they have arrived, one at a time and under control. If needed, an assistant will accompany a client to or from the car with the dog. At all times the goal is to keep everyone safe. If needed, the dog may be muzzled during class, although this is usually not necessary as all the dogs are secured with a tether. We sometimes choose to muzzle the dog between the car and the classroom area in the interest of safety for all concerned.

In the interest of keeping the dog as comfortable as possible, we use the least invasive muzzle necessary to keep everyone safe at all times. Grooming muzzles are often chosen because they allow the handler to treat the dog from the front and because they are similar to a head halter in design. We sometimes use basket muzzles for particularly powerful dogs. As the dog becomes safer, we graduate to a looser muzzle and then to a tight head halter, and finally to a normally fitting head halter.

Walking Class

When dogs are ready to move out of Good Dog Class, they are introduced carefully into Walking Class. Walking Class is similar to a regular obedience class in that all the dogs are working on discrete behaviors such as sitting, lying down, walking on a loose leash, going through or over agility equipment, and tricks. The activities carried out in Walking Class are dictated by the abilities and readiness of the dogs participating. The key differences between mainstream dog classes and Walking Classes are outlined in Table 2.

When dogs arrive for Walking Class, they go to a designated place and work on eye contact while the class members gather. Once all the dogs have arrived and everyone has had

Table 2: Comparison of Walking Class with Mainstream Obedience Class

Walking Class	Mainstream Obedience Class
80% or more of the dogs in this class have arrived there via Good Dog Class and have some sort of significant behavioral problem. Our uncle dogs, handled by student dog trainers, make up the other 20% of dogs in the class.	Dogs may or may not have a behavioral problem, but behavioral problems are not expected.
Several activities are available for instructors to choose from.	A set weekly lesson plan is followed.
New dogs may join the class at any time.	Classes usually have the same dogs from week to week.
The curriculum is flexible to meet the needs of the dogs attending.	The curriculum and learning goals are set and independent of the needs of the dogs enrolled.
Dogs may attend Walking Class for the remainder of their lives to maintain skills.	Dogs usually finish a class and move to a more advanced class.
Dogs may leave class early if they are not comfortable.	Dogs are normally expected to habituate to any stimulus in class that might cause them stress.

a chance to warm up to one another and the environment, the lesson begins. Usually, the instructor will lead the group through a quiet activity such as a group sit-stay on leash to allow the dogs to have a successful experience on leash. Next, the

instructor may teach a new exercise such as a trick (nose touch, paw touch, rolling on the side, rolling over, getting on a pause table), agility obstacle, or obedience move. When the instructor feels that all the dogs in the class are ready, he or she will lead the participants on a street walk in an urban neighborhood. If a particular dog is not yet ready for this level of activity, he will be assigned a place where he can watch the other dogs and his handler will work on desensitizing him through classical conditioning.

Street walking is conducted in a very structured manner, depending on the needs of the dogs attending class. The instructor may have everyone walk in a group, walk one by one all in one direction around a block, or walk in either direction around the block so that members of the class can pass by one another. Dogs who are working on passing other dogs may pass handler to handler, dog to dog, close to one another or on opposite sides of the street.

After taking a street walk, the class gathers again and the instructor assigns homework activities based on what he or she has seen in class. Homework activities may include desensitization activities or obedience exercises, again depending on the needs of each dog. It is common for every dog in the class to have a different homework assignment.

All exercises in Walking Class are conducted so that the dogs remain below their thresholds

for reacting with aggression. Because of the added risks of working in public, dogs must have already attained a high degree of comfort with their environment and the handlers must be well prepared to deal with any eventuality that may occur on the street.

Group Dog Walks

Group Dog Walks are organized, off-leash dog walks that take place on local hiking trails. We choose our locations with an eye to avoiding dogs who are not a part of our social group. Dogs on the group walk may be in any of various stages of the Good Dog Program; also participating are the uncle dogs who share their lives with one of the consultants or assistants. We meet at the trailhead in cars. Where necessary, dogs are muzzled before they start on the walk. Dogs are taken out of the cars in an orderly fashion and remain on leash if need be during the initial excited greetings. For a few dogs, this activity is far too arousing and would result in dangerous interactions even on muzzle; we encourage these dogs' owners to attend with another dog or without any dogs.

Uncle dogs are an important element of the program. An uncle dog is an adult dog who is fluent in inter-dog social relationships, who has been seen to successfully decrease the arousal of other dogs during play, and who has enough training that he can be reliably called in or will reliably lie down in position at a distance. We have found that neutered males are the most common uncle dogs, although we suspect that unneutered males may have a special role to play. We rarely encounter unspayed females and have never used one as an uncle dog in our program. A very few spayed females work well as uncle dogs. (See ENDNOTE, p. 55)

It is vital that uncle dogs be continually socialized with dogs who do not have behavior problems, in order to continue to support their special social skills. Uncle dogs are reinforced liberally for making the correct choices when interacting with all dogs, and particularly during Group Dog Walks with dogs with behavior problems.

The benefits of walking in a group are manifold for both the dogs and the clients. The dogs have opportunities to practice good behaviors that they have learned in the course of the private sessions and to interact with dogs who will behave predictably. The consultant and assistants will intervene as necessary and interrupt behavior that might escalate into aggression. They are also able to coach the people participating on the walks and teach them safe methods of intervention; they "split" between two dogs who appear to be getting highly aroused, they provide alternative activities, and they continue moving the group along. (We have found that we see fewer interactions between dogs that may escalate to an aggressive incident if we keep moving than if we stand in one location.)

Everyone on this walk uses the same protocol for greeting dogs, requiring them to sit before getting any touch, treats, or other attention; this benefits dogs who are shy with people or who might jump up to greet.

People who participate in our walks benefit by being able to discuss their own dog's behavior, ask questions of the consultant and assistants in an informal manner, and interact with each other and the dogs in an informal way.

During our walk, dogs are permitted to explore and interact with one another as they wish, provided that they are not becoming highly aroused. We find that although chase games are often exciting for dogs and interesting to watch, they often result in aggression when one or another of the dogs becomes either highly aroused or frustrated with the game. There is a difference between chasing in fun and frantic chasing; we encourage the former while interrupting the latter.

Interactions between dogs that become tense, brittle, or highly aroused are defused by splitting between the dogs (a human walks between the dogs and stays there until the dogs disengage), catching and leashing dogs, and using Jean Donaldson's protocol (*Fight!*, Kinship Communications, 2004) by which a warning signal is called out and the dog has the opportunity to make a better choice; if the dog chooses to disengage, we click and then treat all the dogs, and if the dog doesn't disengage, we use a conditioned negative punisher (the phrase "too bad") and leash the dog for thirty seconds to three minutes, after which we permit him to return to play. Because these walks are typically attended by seven to ten dogs and six to twelve humans, the freshly released dog often finds another dog to interact with and has an opportunity immediately to make better behavioral choices.

The Group Dog Walk usually lasts between forty-five minutes and an hour, and we cover between two and four kilometers during this time. We make a point of stopping three to five times to call the dogs in or ask them to lie down at a distance. With novice dogs, especially dogs who do not yet have a reliable recall, the "call in" serves to reinforce their recall skills. For dogs who have no recall whatsoever, the act of having all the handlers call in, leash up, and feed their dogs often helps these dogs to make their very first recalls in an informal situation. If a dog will not return to the handler when cued, the other dogs on the walk are restrained and one of the uncle dogs is permitted to play with the dog who will not come when called. Then the uncle dog is called in and reinforced. Often this will entice the other dog in and allow us to reinforce him and release him to play again. This can be repeated as often as necessary in order to teach the novice dogs to come when called and establish a history of coming, being put on leash, and being released to play again.

Dogs who are specifically aggressive on leash often have better social exchanges if they have the chance to play with a group of dogs before being required to walk on leash. For these

dogs, we may keep them on leash for a few minutes after the dogs are released from the group recalls, reinforcing heavily. As the dogs are ready, we begin to put all the dogs on leash for short periods of time, walk together, and then let the dogs off one by one.

A few words are in order about the fact that dogs are not leashed during Group Dog Walks. We are encouraging social behavior, and we believe that there would be significant danger to the dogs if they were to become tangled in a leash during play. We walk in areas where the dogs cannot get directly to a roadway. Most of these areas are abandoned rail beds that have been converted to trailways where a road crosses the trail once every two kilometers, and the trail is bordered on either side by farmland. By changing locations for the dog walk and by keeping the group moving along, we prevent dogs from establishing patterns of behavior involving resource guarding of particular locations (especially entry to bodies of water) or becoming so familiar with a location that they feel confident enough to leave the area and explore farther afield.

ENDNOTE: I have personally seen a number of intact adult male dogs who have had an extraordinary ability to smooth out interdog encounters. I suspect that, as with humans, there is a special role for mature male dogs in the lives of younger members of the species, particularly those who are just on the verge of social maturity. My suspicion is that with so many male dogs neutered in today's society we rarely see a "normal" male-other dog relationship. If, as has been suggested, the decrease in aggression between males who have been neutered is a result of other dogs perceiving those males as pseudo-females (Dunbar I., video, *Dog Aggression: Fighting*, 1998, James & Kenneth Publishers), then the role of intact males may be to induce other dogs to interact differently than they might with an intact or spayed female. Frequently, I have seen intact males elicit appeasement behaviors from other dogs without overtly "acting" in any way. I suspect that this may be in part due to pheromones that they emit. I also suspect that there may be a role for intact males in facilitating participation in "adult" activities as young pups hit adolescence.

Case Study

<i>Date of First Consultation:</i>	October 27, 2003
<i>Dog:</i>	Molly, female spayed, 1.5-year-old dog of unknown heritage, approximately 60 pounds
<i>Presenting Problem:</i>	Interdog aggression, both on and off leash, reacting to dogs passing by the home when visible through the living room window by barking and lunging at the window and racing around the home
<i>Duration of Problem:</i>	Molly came from a shelter in the Toronto area. She began to exhibit the problem behaviors within the first two weeks of living with her current family. Molly's history is unknown and she was adopted as an adult.
<i>Feeding:</i>	Feeding Canidae, 2.5 cups per day (she currently eats about 2 cups per day)

<i>Exercise:</i>	1-hour walks daily on a long line where she can wander and run
<i>Sleep:</i>	When first adopted, Molly was isolated in the basement at night. She is currently given the run of the house at night but chooses to sleep in the basement alone. During the day, Molly will sleep in her dog bed in the living room or wherever the family is. Molly also likes to sleep out of doors, basking in the sun. Her sleep seems to be deep and undisturbed.
<i>Previous Training:</i>	Spent one round of classes at a local training school where they worked on systematic desensitization with minimal results. Worked with a local veterinarian, who muzzled her and then introduced her to several different dogs. Initial greetings were videotaped and the video was provided. On video, we could see that Molly was excited at seeing other dogs and when let off leash charged them and bowled them over. After about ten minutes of posturing, snarling, and other inappropriate social behavior, she would back off and interact more appropriately. Molly will sit, lie down, and usually walk on a loose leash. She had no recall when she started the Good Dog Program.
<i>Health:</i>	Molly is in good health and has had no major illnesses over the past year.
<i>Family Members:</i>	Molly is the only animal in her home. She lives with Janet, an adult woman, and Bruce, an adult man. Janet is Molly's primary caregiver.
<i>Other People:</i>	Molly is friendly to all people.
<i>Other dogs:</i>	Molly did not have any other dog friends before starting the Good Dog Program.

The history that follows is not strictly chronological, because private work, Good Dog Class work, and Group Dog Walks overlap in time.

Private Consultations

I met with Janet and Bruce for about a month. Initially we worked on management, avoiding triggering Molly by blocking her access to the living room window, and choosing times to walk her when she would be unlikely to encounter other dogs. Any time that Molly's arousal rose above four (see Appendix 1, page 61), Bruce and Janet were to intervene and ask Molly to lie down. At the end of two months, I began working with Janet alone to classically condition Molly to associate dogs passing the home with food treats tossed on the floor. We also worked on her ability to tolerate dogs on leash and in small social groups using only dogs who would tolerate her poor greetings if she were to become aroused.

We worked hard to make certain that Molly never engaged in her lunge-and-bark routine on greeting, and we let her off lead to play with other dogs only after she had calmly greeted them on leash. Through classical conditioning, we were able to change Molly's greeting pattern so

that she was able to stay in control of her behavior. We also used a clicker to mark when Molly made soft eye contact with a dog she was about to meet.

At the end of about the third month, Molly was introduced to a larger group of dogs off lead. Any time Molly's arousal reached six, we would call her back and ask her to sit and then we would feed her and release her. The quality of Molly's greetings improved to the point where she was able to recognize dogs she had met on leash and socially interact with them without any untoward incidents. Janet was somewhat apprehensive about Molly's potential to harm another dog, so we kept Molly on her muzzle for the first ten to fifteen minutes of most off leash dog-dog interactions for the first eight months even though Molly had never actually caused any damage to any other dog.

About the fifth month, we began to work with Molly on walking in urban neighborhoods, using classical conditioning to teach her to associate the dogs who approach her on lead with food treats. Janet has also taught Molly to heel formally with constant eye contact to help Molly learn an alternative behavior to barking and lunging toward other dogs. Although Molly generally appears to be more relaxed about other dogs, when she is aroused it would sometimes appear as though she does not know what to do when she passes other dogs. At these times, Molly will engage in some barking and lunging and some conflicted approaches and retreats, reminiscent of her earlier behavior but at a lesser intensity

At the end of eight months, Molly boarded with me in my home while Janet went on vacation. During this time, Molly became comfortable enough with the dogs in my house (she had walked with these dogs weekly or more often for the past six months) that we were able to integrate her into our home. She spent considerable time loose with the other dogs in the house or the yard and went on Group Dog Walks with these dogs and others during her time boarding with me.

Molly continues to improve in her ability to interact with dogs, and Janet meets with me every two to three weeks to support her efforts in modifying Molly's aggression toward other dogs.

Good Dog Class

Bruce and Janet attended Good Dog Class without Molly for one week to learn about how we proceed in class. Molly came to Good Dog Class from her second week in the program on. Initially, she came to class for a very short period of time to allow her to have a successful experience. Over time, Molly was able to join the class for a longer and longer period of time until she was able to attend for the full hour. Initially, Molly attended our evening Good Dog Class but when we started an afternoon Good Dog Class Janet switched in favor of the smaller

class. During class, Janet shared her frustrations with other class members and was the source of much inspiration to new students, particularly as she become one of the longtime participants.

Group Dog Walks

Janet began to join our Group Dog Walks without Molly at the beginning of about the third month. By the beginning of the fourth month, Molly was ready to participate. At the Group Dog Walk, Molly met not only the dogs she had been walking with during her private lessons but also some additional dogs. For the first two months, Molly was muzzled at all times during the walk. Over this time, some dogs joined our walk and others left, but a core of six dogs belonging to the consultant and assistants has remained constant. Molly now tolerates new dogs on the walk admirably and rarely engages in any barking and lunging. Molly is slightly bossy and will occasionally bully another dog, but usually she prefers to explore the environment in the company of the other dogs without necessarily interacting closely with them. Occasionally Molly will engage in a game of chase with another dog on the walk; we will permit this so long as her arousal level stays below six. Molly's recall and down at a distance are coming along nicely and she is often the first dog to arrive when we call dogs in for reward and release. Molly understands the protocol of a warning signal and will often break off if her arousal is rising and we are able to mark a moment where she can make a choice to self-regulate her behavior. Molly is more socially adept with dogs than with bitches, and we are now working on Group Dog Walks to address this.

Currently Molly attends the afternoon Good Dog Class and the evening Walking Class.

Notes and Perspective

Janet has invested an extraordinary amount of time in Molly's success. Molly is now able to participate in most Group Dog Walks without her muzzle, she makes dog friends cautiously, and she is beginning to be able to walk through her neighborhood with grace and ease. Molly and Janet have participated in a tracking workshop, and they regularly have coffee in our local city square. Molly will likely always have to participate in some sort of organized dog activity, but we expect that Janet will need less and less support over the coming months provided she continues to participate in walks or classes on a regular basis.

Level	Description
10	So far out of control that the owner cannot communicate with the dog
9	Dangerously out of control, but can still be restrained
8	Out of control but will still respond to a very high value stimulus (e.g.: click, conditioned negative reinforcer, certain noises, perhaps touch)
7	Frenzied Activity
6	Charging, lunging, running
5	Excited movement; play, training activities
4	Purposeful walking
3	Wandering around, low level exploratory behavior
2	Resting, awake and alert but not moving around
1	Asleep
0	Coma/death

Appendix 1

Arousal

The degree to which an animal is aroused dramatically affects what he will do. If you want to train your dog, he must be sufficiently aroused to offer behaviors and to learn. If you have a dog with problems surrounding aggressive behavior, often you only see those behaviors when the dog is significantly aroused. Recognizing what level your dog is at will help you when you are changing your dog's behaviors because you can learn how to influence the level of arousal that your dog is experiencing.

Appendix 2

The material in this brochure is drawn from information in *The Culture Clash* by Jean Donaldson (1996, Berkeley: James & Kenneth Publishers) and *Dogs: A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior & Evolution* by Lorna and Raymond Coppinger (2001, New York: Scribners). It is intended to be used during a consultation and provide the consultant with a tool to guide clients through the process of understanding normal dog agonistic behavior and the triggers that might predict a bite in their dog.

About Sue Alexander and Dogs in the Park

Dogs in the Park

Sue Alexander is a local dog trainer with over twenty years experience training and handling dogs, both her own and those of her clients. Sue also has over 8 years experience as an obedience consultant. Sue's focus in teaching people is for better relationships at home, not in preparation for competing in obedience.

Sue's particular area of training interest is the rehabilitation of aggressive dogs and the resolution of behavioral problems. Sue founded Dogs in the Park in 1993 to meet the needs of her friends who wanted to learn to train their dogs.

Assessing the risk

I use the following numerical system to assess when a dog is going to bite. If the situation contains enough elements to add up to 10, then the dog can be predicted to bite. With each trigger that a dog experiences, assign the appropriate value to that trigger.

Reaction	Value
Freezing	2
Growling	4
Lunging	6
Snapping	6
Biting	10

List any triggers your dog may have and their numeric value.

Trigger	Value

An Example to learn from

If a theoretical dog, "Ruffian" has a freezing reaction to the appearance of a broom, small children, floppy hats, large men, bikes, and thunder, then "Ruffian" would be very likely to bite if your brother came to your home on his bicycle during a thunderstorm, carrying his small daughter and a broom. While this situation is very unlikely, it becomes easy to see how a dog such as Ruffian could bite when she never had shown any sign of aggression previously.

Every dog WILL bite

As said before, every dog will bite, if the circumstances come together the right (or wrong!) way. If you have a dog who is at high risk to bite, please remember to keep everyone, including the dog, safe at all times. This means knowing what triggers your dog and protect him from those triggers. Over time, you can teach your dog not to react to his triggers. When you cannot protect your dog from his triggers, protect those around your dog from being bitten.

Dogs behave predictably

If a dog is going to bite, he is going to go through a predictable sequence of behaviors just before he bites. At the beginning of the sequence is something called orienting. When a dog orients on something, he is noticing it. Usually we would call the object or person or activity that the dog orients on the trigger. Once the dog notices the trigger, he will freeze, or indicate his discomfort in some other way (dogs may weave, drop their heads or pull their whiskers flat to their faces; each dog will behave a little differently). The next thing that a dog will do is to growl. This is the warning that something is going to happen. Growling may be very quiet or subtle. After a dog has growled, he will lunge or snap. This precursor to biting may be very quiet or very noisy, but is usually very very fast. And the final stage of course is when a dog makes contact with his teeth on the target or bites.

A very common problem in dogs is that handlers will physically punish or "correct" the dog if he growls. Dogs thus treated often learn to skip the growl phase of the sequence and skip ahead to the next step. For this reason, it is very important to NOT correct a dog for growling.

Don't worry, he won't bite!

Every day, I hear my clients say these five words with complete conviction that their dog won't bite. And for the most part, they are right, their dog won't bite at the very moment they say that. The fact remains however that every dog WILL bite, just depending upon the situation.

To determine the risk of a dog biting, you need to know a little bit about the dog in question. What are this dog's triggers? How many triggers are there? Has the dog ever bitten someone before? Is the dog fearful? How expressive of discomfort is the dog? How reactive is the dog?



DOGS IN THE PARK

"I Thought You Said He Wouldn't Bite!"

Information for owners of dogs at risk of aggression

**Sue Alexander
519-826-5315**

Appendix 3

The scale of bites is based on the information in Dr. Ian Dunbar's videos *Dog Aggression: Fighting* and *Dog Aggression: Biting* (1998, James & Kenneth Publishers). It is used in the consultation to establish the number and level of bites that a dog has actually engaged in. This page is kept on file for our information and may be added to in the event of any further bites. Due to the risk involved with dealing with dogs with known hard mouths, we use the information obtained in this exercise to determine what safety measures should be taken when handling each dog. A dog who has landed a Level 5 bite is not eligible for the Good Dog Program, and we would offer the client two options: referral to their veterinarian for euthanasia or referral to a board-certified veterinary behaviorist. Although it is theoretically possible to rehabilitate a dog who has landed a Level 5 bite, we do not feel that it is possible to do so while keeping everyone safe at all times. Dogs who have landed Level 4 bites may be accepted into the Good Dog Program at the consultant's discretion.

Bite Assessment Screen

Dog's Name: _____

Levels of Bite Inhibition

Level 1: Snap with jaws: no contact with skin.

Level 2: Single bite and release; bruises only.

Level 3: Single bite and release; puncture wounds and bruising.

Level 4: Multiple bites. Dog may hang on, shaking the limb, dog may even make a series of quick multiple bites, much like a human eating an ear of corn very rapidly.

Level 5: Level 4 bites with severe mutilation.

Level 6: Level 5 and death of victim.

Date	Victim	Level	Details

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