



Paws, Claws & Wings

Physical and Behavioral Rehabilitation for Animals



Puppy

Puppy is a +- 4 year old Jack Russell Terrier, spayed female, adopted (3 years ago) after being found tied up in an empty building.

Puppy was adopted by Michelle, the owner, after she was found at about 1 year of age, tied up in a building that had been abandoned. Michelle has had Puppy for about 3 years and also has a Fox Terrier (14year old, spayed female) called Foxie who she adopted from her ex-husband 10 years ago. Foxie is becoming increasingly frail as she gets older and has recently been diagnosed as a diabetic and her health is failing fast. Puppy and Foxie have never gotten along well, they just ignore each other and as Foxie spends her time in the lounge (Michelle and Puppy spend most time in the TV room) and is quite reclusive this has never really been a problem as she has never really featured as a large part of Michelle's life. Lately (last 4 months) Puppy has begun to fight with Foxie when she comes near Michelle. Puppy has never hurt Foxie, it seems to be mainly posturing and warnings, but Michelle is worried about Foxie being hurt. Michelle is not as concerned about the fighting as she realises that Foxie will not be in the house for much longer. Michelle also would rather keep the dogs apart for the next while until Foxie is gone but is willing to try and work on the fighting, but not too much.

(Therefore I have concentrated on Puppies problems rather than the aggression towards Foxie). Puppy has always been a very demanding dog, she always wants attention and is constantly with Michelle, on her lap, shoulder or pawing at her for attention. Michelle is getting very frustrated with this behaviour as she never is left alone. Michelle especially hates it when she is trying to relax in bed or on the couch as Puppy jumps up and is constantly pawing and jumping on her.

Attention seeking behaviour:

The reasons that I have decided Puppy is attention seeking is that she fits the profile: she will always seek out her owner and will try never to let her out of her sight. She is continuously barking at / pawing / nudging / chewing on / barking at her owner and 'never leaves her alone'. It also seems that when Puppy does get attention it just makes the problem worse and she never seems satisfied.

Protective aggression:

Protective aggression is defined as - protecting certain people (usually 1 person is singled out) from other people or dogs, standing between person being protected and other people or dogs. Barking, growling, snapping and biting and the reactions worsen the closer the other person or animal comes. Puppy is also only aggressive towards Foxie when Michelle is present. I feel that Puppy fits into this category well and her behaviour is clearly trying to protect Michelle from Foxie.

Solutions:

Sr Emmylou Rivers

Veterinary Nurse

emmylou.rivers@gmail.com

082 576 7647

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Attention seeking behaviour:

Puppy cannot get attention on demand. She must be ignored if she tries to get your attention. You will give her attention on your terms only. If she paws you, remove her paw and ignore her. If she sits quietly she can get a treat. When she is not looking for attention is the best time to call her over and make a big fuss of her. When you come back from work, ignore her until she is calmer, and then greet her. If she jumps up on people, turn your back on her and ignore her. Just remember to reward her (treats, affection, voice) each time she behaves well. Do not allow Puppy to get away with not listening to you, this does not mean you must punish or reprimand her, but continue to persevere until the behaviour you desire has been performed. At times it may seem easier to just let her get away with whatever she is doing, but remember letting her perform the unwanted behaviour without any consequences will only reinforce the behaviour and you will have lost all the ground you have gained. The aim is to remove all positive consequences of behaviour and in this way make the behaviour extinct. What is referred to as an extinction burst may occur, this is when a dog tries harder and harder to get the desired result as the behaviour that normally works is not working anymore, so they will make the behaviour more and more intense until they finally give up, and then the behaviour becomes extinct. The main rules for any interaction between yourself and Puppy are that any interaction must be initiated by you, attention must only be given when Puppy is behaving well and is calm, Puppy must earn your attention by performing a task for you. The main causes of this type of behaviour are: Puppy never learnt appropriate social behaviour and responses when she was young and this resulted in her not being able to react appropriately now she is older. Puppy may have had a deprived social environment when she was younger and she now is feeling very overwhelmed by the social environment she finds herself in. If an owner reacts inconsistently to a dog, they do not know what to expect and this will worsen the problem. As a dog ages their cognitive function (thinking ability) decreases and they may begin to look for excess attention to comfort themselves. Always remember that any dog does need a certain amount of attention, do not ignore Puppy completely, always ensure that her basic need for interaction and attention is met, just do this on your terms. An easy and enjoyable way to achieve this is to play with her; it will be good for both of you and will relax you both. For animals that are actively and continuously looking for attention, being banished and left alone is the absolute worst thing that could ever happen to them, so be careful about using this technique. If you feel that Puppy needs to be out of the way, place her in an area where she can still see you but cannot reach you. When she becomes calm and relaxed (displays the desired behaviour) away from you, reward her and let her come spend time near you, she must always be given the opportunity to behave well. A pheromone diffuser (eg: DAP - Dog Appeasing Pheromone) may also be used in a certain room if you are battling to get Puppy to relax, these pheromones should help by taking the edge off her anxiety. Dogs need at least two 15 minute sessions of intense quality attention a day, this can be training, grooming, massage or whatever activity is pleasurable for you both. The most important factor in

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Veterinary Nurse

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this time is that you are both completely focused on each other and that you are devoting your full attention on Puppy and are not distracted or multi-tasking.

If you are busy and not paying attention to Puppy and she is sitting or backs off and leaves you alone, this is the ideal behaviour we are looking for, so reward her copiously. Always remember Puppy may demand attention in many different ways, she may actively seek attention by jumping or pawing at you or she may do it in a more subtle, passive way such as leaning against you. She will try anything and she will repeat the actions that receive an attentive response from you.

Puppy is not allowed onto the couches unless invited. If she jumps up she must be put onto the floor immediately. If she approaches the couch and doesn't jump up, she can get a treat (small chunks of cheese, polony, carrots or whatever is her favourite). When you want her on the couch she must be asked to get on and then lie quietly next to you. If she gets too excited and jumps onto you, she must be put on the floor immediately. A water pistol can be used to encourage her to get off the couch. If Puppy still refuses to leave the couch or bed, you can throw a treat on the floor for her to get and then do not allow her back up. Always remember that for a dog, any attention (even if we perceive it as bad or negative attention - shouting, pushing etc) is good attention and will result in her repeating the behaviour as you have inadvertently re-enforced it. Dogs will see being pushed out of the way play, a pushing game, and as this is fun, they will continue with the behaviour. Be extremely aware of the times when you are distracted, as at these times it is very easy to slip up and reward Puppy inadvertently. You will need to be very vigilant at all times and aware of your behaviour. If Puppy is being very persistent, do not try to physically remove her, as this is giving her attention, rather ignore her and leave the area.

Protective aggression:

The first thing you must do is determine which dog is more dominant in the majority of situations (as discussed, each dog will be more or less dominant with regards to different resources, but there will be one who is more dominant overall). This will also be linked to breed, the length of time the dog has been in the house, if one dog has been spayed and the other has not, and age. Both dogs should be sterilised as this will remove the hormonal component of the aggression. It seems mean and even cruel but the dog who you have determined to be the dominant one, must be reinforced, this dog must be fed first (always feed the dogs separately so they cannot fight over food), given the preferential sleeping place (nearest to the bed or where people are most of the time) and this dog must be greeted first and give attention first. The dominant dog must be allowed to control all of the resources and exhibit dominant behaviour such as growling and mounting, but be alert for any sign of overt aggression or a fight about to start. Never try to separate the dogs if they fight, they will bite you if you get in the way and they are unable to get to each other. This is called displaced aggression, when they are unable to do anything to the focus of their aggression they will turn that pent up aggression on the nearest other thing. As Puppy is now both sexually and socially mature she is trying to re-enforce her place in the house, and she seems to be

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the dominant. At the moment the hierarchy in the house seems to be upset and this is probably caused by Foxie's age and frailty.

Puppy must now be taught that Foxie is no threat to her and Michelle. She is confused as there has been a change in Foxie and this has disrupted her place in the family. You can keep them separate but just remember that there may be a mistake and they would be able to get near to each other. If this does occur Puppy may not growl loudly or attack Foxie. If she does you can spray her with the water pistol or throw the noise can next to her (The use of these items has already been shown to the owner). If that doesn't distract her enough, she must go for a time out (either alone outside or closed in a bathroom for 10mins, increase the time by 5mins each time she needs to go back. No longer than 30mins in total). If she behaves herself after the time out and doesn't repeat the behaviour she can be treated. Demonstrate to Puppy that if she sits quietly and behaves well in Foxie's presence she will be rewarded (either with treats or attention). Puppy and Foxie can be given treats at the same time, if Puppy snaps at Foxie, she doesn't get her treat. If you need to towel Puppy dry or do something else that she does not enjoy, do it but in a calm way, tell her what a good dog she is (she will recognize the tone of your voice and maybe even the words, as encouragement) and reward her as soon as the unpleasant experience is over. Just make sure she does not try to intimidate you by showing signs of aggression. The last thing we want is to encourage Puppy to be aggressive towards you. Here are some of the signs to look out for if Puppy is being aggressive or threatening: Her tail and ears will be down, her hackles will be raised, her eyes will become dilated, she will crouch down and she will growl. As you know Puppy well you will pick up her specific warning signs, and as far as I can tell you already have as you are able to describe her posture and movements before she attacks. You must try and avoid putting Puppy into situations that trigger her aggression (spend time with Puppy and Foxie separately and ignore Foxie if she comes up to you, treat her and spoil her when you can take her into a separate room away from Puppy. Distract Puppy with enrichment toys when Foxie is in the room with you. Just be careful as territorial aggression often will develop in these situations so be on the lookout for Puppy trying to guard her territory from other people, and never reward her for territorial behaviour.

Conclusion:

Please remember that no matter how bad you feel ignoring Puppy, it is for her own good and will make her happier in the long run. Just like a child, she needs rules and boundaries to make her feel safe and independent. Be careful using the treats as the dogs must not eat so many treats that they begin to pick up weight. Remember you can use the lure method with a treat to get Puppy to do what you want, but don't teach her an unacceptable behaviour by mistake.

This plan is to get Puppy to feel more secure, at this point she is quite anxious. She needs to understand that Michele is dominant and is capable of being in control without her. She will be more independent and secure in her knowledge that she is greatly loved without having to receive constant reassurance. She can begin to be more of a dog and concern herself with doggy things. Her position within the family (pack) will be

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reconfirmed and she will not have to keep asserting herself over Foxie. Consistency is key and as long as you react in an anticipated way, Puppy will pick up what she is supposed to be doing quickly, just remember from time to time she will test the limits, and your resolve. Also important to remember is that these rules must be reinforced by everyone in the house to avoid Puppy from getting confused about what is expected of her. Remember that for this program to be successful, everyone in the house needs to behave the same way and treat Puppy the same. There must be a set of rules to follow regarding how to handle Puppy in certain situations. If Puppy is not handled consistently she may become anxious and her attention seeking behaviour could become much worse. Puppy has in the past learnt what she needs to do to get attention and if at any time, you lapse and allow Puppy to get the attention when she demands it, you will have just reinforced her behaviour and will have to start from the beginning again. Puppy now has you trained to give her what she wants as soon as she demands it; this relationship is not healthy for either of you. In an ideal situation a dog must defer to the owner and in this way be rewarded with attention. Basically what we are doing is changing the roles in the household; previously Puppy has been in charge and has received anything she demands. This will cause anxiety as she has no role model or discipline in her life. Now what we aim for is to give Puppy leadership and in this way she will become more relaxed as she knows what to expect in each situation, also the decision making in the household has been taken away from her and this will also relieve her stresses.

Prognosis:

Puppy will learn to tolerate and leave Foxie alone again if she is constantly reinforced for ignoring Foxie. If Michelle is consistent in giving Puppy attention on her terms only and when Puppy has earned it by behaving well, the prognosis for puppy relaxing and becoming much less demanding is good.

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