

DOES YOUR DOG HAVE Behavioural Issues?

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What are behavioural issues? Basically, if you're not happy with a behaviour, it's probably an issue! Some people are quite content with behaviour that others would find irritating, disgusting or scary...

It is easy to spot a change in behaviour of a pet that we have had for a while, and perhaps we can spot the trigger for that change; bereavement, moving house or a new baby or pet. It is also possible that as your dog reaches old age, diminished hearing or sight may reduce their confidence, leading them to behave differently, barking for example. Ageing can also cause ailments such as arthritis which may lead to different behaviours where the root cause is discomfort.

Having done voluntary work for refuges in the UK and France over many years, I know that everyone involved does their very best, and I admire those people that week in and week out, rain or shine, turn up for these deserving animals, working with them to give them a better quality of life, and the chance of a future home.

Some issues are usually identified by refuges, such as the ability to mix with other pets or children. The refuge will also be aware of the dogs character and should be able to give advice on this. In the majority of cases, the rescue dog goes onto its new home, settles in, and all's well.

However the possibility of 'The New Job' scenario also exists. You know what it's like; you have just started a new job, keeping your head down and your nose clean. Learning who's who and what's what. Then, when you have your paws - sorry FEET! I meant feet - under the table you start to feel that you can exert your personality a bit and make your mark.

We all love our dogs and want to be loved by them. We have to provide a home where they feel safe, secure and their physical and mental needs are met. If needs are met, generally, dogs are balanced, well behaved members of the family and we are all happy.

Sometimes habits start off as endearing or are endured but then grow out of proportion. Barking or pulling on walks individually can be a nuisance, but when the two are combined and directed at other animals or people they can be embarrassing or downright scary.

It's easier to nip unwanted behaviour in the bud but usually we wait too long trying solutions from Google, You Tube, Facebook

and that nice old chap from down the road who's owned well behaved dogs since humankind first decided that putting something between our feet and the rocks would stop our legs from wearing out! When we eventually do decide that we need specialist help, the behaviour often has become entrenched.



So what does a Behaviourist do?

We do not arrive with a sack of magic dust and instantly fix all problems. Instead we come to your home and by following a structured process, as below, find the reasons for and therefore a solution to the problems.

1. Assessment, usually including a walk without the owners.
2. Analysis and Diagnosis.
3. Plan of Action.
4. Ongoing Support

On arrival I like everything to be normal, I want to see the

real home and not just the dog. The surroundings and interactions and daily schedule are clues to behavioural issues. I want the dogs story from the owners, so as to better understand their views. When I walk the dog it's possible to see how the dog reacts to things, and when, also its state of mind if it reacts. I also learn how responsive the dog is to commands and corrections.

During Analysis and Diagnosis I consider everything that has been identified and, in my opinion,

the causes of the behaviours that are problematic. I can then formulate a realistic plan to change the behaviours.

The Plan of Action will vary depending on the issues and lifestyle of the household, but will normally involve everyone. Certain issues can be resolved by a behaviourist, but to maintain that and improve on it everyone needs to be involved with the plan and possibly changes to routine. Consistency is the key to success.

On-going support is crucial, in reviewing progress the

plan can be adjusted where necessary. It's taken a long time and a lot of dogs for a behaviourist to learn their trade, for an owner to get there in just a few hours is a big ask! So some plans deal with the 'low hanging fruit' first and then evolve in order to succeed.

In the end, the aim is to create a real change in your dogs behaviour, removing bad habits and creating a stable environment that provides for your dogs needs with minimum impact on your lifestyle.