

No More Homeless Pets Forum

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Topic: Bite Prevention



When a dog or cat bites someone, a person gets hurt and the animal's life is on the line. Yvette Van Veen of Animal Rescue Foundation Ontario answers your questions to keep animals and humans (especially children) interacting safely and harmoniously.

Introduction from Yvette Van Veen

Rescue organizations face tough challenges now and in the years to come. A frenzy of media activity surrounds dog aggression, although cat-related problems have also begun to gain attention. As agencies that place animals, how do you balance keeping families safe with continuing to make a difference for homeless pets?

What tools do adopters need to decrease post-adoption euthanasia? When placing animals in homes with children, what is important to keep in mind to increase long-term success? What do you do when the worst-case scenario happens and one of the animals you placed is displaying aggression? Where do children fit in all of this? What should children be doing, and what information can put them in harm's way?

Talking about aggression can be difficult at the best of times. Workers in animal rescue face painful decisions daily. We speak for those who cannot speak. But when we adopt animals into families, there are others who cannot speak – children and resident animals. This week, we'll delve into how to handle a politically charged issue that represents not only a safety concern, but a concern to shelters across North America. I look forward to hearing your comments and questions.

Yvette Van Veen Bio

Behavior consultant, columnist and co-founder of Meeting Milo, Yvette Van Veen is an active participant in rescue efforts and is no stranger to aggression in dogs. From "ruining" the neighbor's guard dog at age six by making friends, to ongoing rehab with clients, she actively works to promote safer adoptions, safer communities and successful placements through education.

Her work also includes prevention through classes, seminars and an active community approach. By understanding aggression, and by realizing that aggression reaches beyond the boundaries of being "irresponsible," Yvette hopes to dispel common myths and keep industry professionals, families and children safer.

She writes regular columns in *The Londoner*, answering pet questions, and in the *Community Guider*, where she speaks about pet safety matters. Her work is regularly featured in magazines, print media, radio and television. Community resources are available online at www.meetingmilo.com and www.awesomedogs.ca. Yvette shares her home in London, Ontario, with husband Brian, son Jordan, two mixed-breed dogs (Kiki and Kaya) and Dora the cat, who manages to rule the roost.

Setting dogs up for success in their new homes

Question from Matt: What a timely topic! We were in the same situation recently. We picked up two stray dogs (pit bulls or some mix thereof) and put them directly in foster care. There was just too high of a chance they'd be put down at the local shelter with their breed mix.

They were two young males (one about one year, one about five months) found together, and evidently bonded. They'd cuddle, play together, keep one another company, etc. But we'd noticed the younger one dominance-humping the older one a few times. Both weren't neutered when they were found, and of course we got them neutered right away.

A couple of weeks later, they went into a home together, with mom, dad, and kids. The home visit, everything, seemed to be great and they wanted the dogs for all the right reasons. About a week later, we got a decisive call: A fight had broken out between the two dogs over Greenie treats. According to the adopters, the scrap lasted several minutes, and injuries were sustained. Which must have meant minor scratches, because we never saw any wounds. The result was that, fearing that the aggression would escalate to an attack on their children, they returned the older dog. He was later placed in a different home.

My question is, what could we have done differently, or did we handle this the best we could? Of course we instructed them not to feed the dogs together, especially treats or other desirables, but perhaps they weren't listening.

Response from Yvette Van Veen: Multiple-dog homes introduce greater complexities into the home of a potential adopter. When placing multiple dogs, it is critical, in my opinion, that adopters understand that this presents additional challenges. What can seem obvious to a person who works with rescued animals is not necessarily obvious to the individual who is looking to adopt a nice family pet. And yes, even when we express our thoughts, the average family often does not have the knowledge base to fully comprehend what exactly they are getting into.

This brings some interesting questions to the surface. The first is about the family in question, and the second is about the dog in question. When it comes to the family, rescue workers and volunteers know how to behave around animals. They know what to do, and they know what not to do. It can inadvertently set up a situation where a dog is placed that showed no signs of problems while in the system. Or the problems appeared manageable when the animals are together. And those problems are manageable because the dog has been with experienced, dog-savvy people.

To a novice, albeit nice family, those problems quickly escalate into fights, squabbles and possible injury. A slight difference in the environment or level of experience fans the flame of the underlying issue. In addition, problems that are acceptable to a dog-savvy person are not acceptable in an average home. They are not acceptable, not because the people are not nice. They are unacceptable to the adopter because they become afraid of the animal.

It is possible that all that happened was ritualized aggression. Many average families

find even those displays terrifying. Other families are willing to work with the animal, but are afraid of social pressure, or danger to visitors and children. These fears are real to the adopters. Some of the consequences are real, too. It is completely possible that these two dogs will get into a battle and that someone will try to break it up. It could be the children in the home. It could be a babysitter. And we know that one situation that can trigger a bite is breaking up a battle. I personally have a nice ¾-inch scar on my wrist that came from "saving" my childhood dog from a neighbor's dog. When I was a child, you checked for rabies, maybe got medical attention. These days, people file a lawsuit.

Which brings us to the dogs. Is the problem aggression, or is the problem ritualized aggression? Unfortunately, I cannot say that without seeing the dogs. But since you cautioned the family about feeding the dogs together, I will assume that there was some indication of an unresolved problem prior to the adoption. If you are dealing with aggression, you probably should take a look at splitting them up.

Then obviously, you need to look at separation anxiety exercises when the dogs are in care, and post-adoption. These dogs have not been truly "alone." That means they are vulnerable to high levels of anxiety if you do choose to separate them.

Other suggestions in hindsight include beginning rehabilitation exercises immediately. A five-month-old is still a baby. Left untreated, the problem is most likely going to escalate. The odds of it not escalating seem almost impossible.

One tool that I am very much in favor of is temperament testing. And I know that topic can bring controversy to the table. But I can say without a shadow of a doubt that compassionate, accurate testing helps in increasing successful placements. When we see an animal for what they are, rather than what we hope they are, then we have the opportunity to find a home that will accept and love the animal as they are. Most importantly, adopters can work with the animal from day one.

The clock for the five-month-old puppy is ticking. Each day is an opportunity to make significant headway into changing this behavior. If it does happen that the dog will guard valuables from people, that is a crucial piece of information for you in terms of placement. That dog cannot go to a home with young children.

I also very much believe in finding someone who is experienced in testing dogs who will work with your group. You can take the exercises that were started in foster care or in the shelter. Then the trainer/consultant can pass that information to the new family through a home visit. This gives families the tools they need.

And yes, I know that many groups struggle with financing. That means that you need to find a way to negotiate a win/win situation with the industry professionals in your community. This allows your group to offer extended care beyond adoption, which in turn gives your dogs a better chance. It also reduces the costs associated with revolving door adoptions and gives your organization a huge boost in the image department. It is possible to get trainers to help without breaking the bank. When it comes to success rates on rehabilitation, Jean Donaldson's exercises for dog-to-dog guarding are the best I have seen to date (she has been on this forum – see the archives at <http://www.bestfriends.com/archives/forums/dogmanners.html>), and I am very pleased

with the results they give. She has a new book out titled *Mine! A Practical Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs* and it is a truly excellent resource.

Avoiding bites in a group shelter situation

Question from Karen: I am looking to find a better way to deal with dog bites when working with a large group of unknown dogs in a shelter environment. What can we do to better prepare ourselves when entering dog runs on a daily basis? When dogs begin to bite, what is our first defense? What safety precautions do we consider before we even get close to the dogs?

Response from Yvette Van Veen: Your first defense lies in your senses and your ability to "read" a dog. Unless you are dealing with a seizure disorder or other medical condition, almost all dog bites can be replicated or predicted in some way. There are overt signs of aggression that most people are aware of. Then there are subtle signs of stress that are additional tools that can be helpful. Is this dog social and does he want to be with you? That's important. If a dog doesn't want to be with people, it's a warning sign that the animal may have been under-exposed to human contact. It can be a sign that the animal has developed some negative associations. It can also be a sign of stress. If a dog is not social, it puts me on my toes.

Even if a dog is social, most people who work with dogs on a daily basis might comment on a dog "turning without warning." It can seem like the animal has a Jekyll and Hyde personality. One minute the dog is friendly and the next minute – bam. A button gets pressed. In my experience, this is usually a dog who is guarding something of value. In a kennel this can be the kennel, the sleeping area, a bone, toy or food dish. Guarding can involve people, places and things. Dogs will guard what is of value to them, even if you disagree. I have seen severe cases where dogs who are incredibly malnourished will guard their own body waste.

Err on the side of caution. Temperament testing is very helpful to determine if you have a guarder in your care. I personally believe in preventative exercises for all dogs – even if they show no signs. The problem is so difficult for the average family to manage that prevention is worth every moment spent. In a shelter, resources can quickly take on increased value. On the Meeting Milo site (<http://meetingmilo.com/>), there's a list of signs that are common warnings. Dogs who hide under tables or in other rooms with a bone or toy would be a very big warning sign to me. In a run, if there is a secluded area, you might see a dog habitually retreat to it. That would make me pay attention.

Watch to see if a dog tenses or shows obvious signs of stress like panting. It is possible to train yourself to count the dog's rate of respiration just as a doctor watches your breathing during a checkup. If a dog starts to breathe too quickly, pay attention. It does not mean you will be bitten, but it does mean you need to be careful.

Watch where the dog is looking. Dogs tend to watch whatever they feel threatened by. I suppose that is no different than a human who watches a scary stranger on a dark street. When something is wrong, you keep your eyes on either the threat or the object that needs protecting. But usually it is the threat. Is the dog tense and watching your arms? Then you need to be wary of your arms.

There is a difference between intentionally testing a dog and daily working with a dog. Someone who tests dogs is taking a personal risk to themselves and is mentally prepared at the time. You never test alone. If you can have a dog assessed, or re-assessed if the dog is in long-term care, then you should have that information made available to you. Then you can walk, move and behave in a manner that hopefully avoids a bite. If you know a dog is head-shy, then it would be foolish to pat the dog on the head outside of rehab exercises. That is asking for a bite. Looking a dog in the eye is usually asking for trouble. I like to incorporate the calming signals from Turid Rugaas (<http://www.dogwise.com/itemdetails.cfm?ID=DTB527>), but you also need to be flexible. If you do something and your gut tells you the dog is tensing, then you need to rethink your strategy.

You can also take small safety steps to minimize harm. Never work alone around unknown dogs. Get a puncture-resistant liner to place under your shirt sleeve. Get a dog out of the way and secured before moving valuables. If you have a bag or pack, carry it in a manner so you can place it between you and a charging dog. No guarantees, but the goal is for the dog to bite the bag instead of you. Remove jewelry that can get snagged and cause harm to you. Use common sense. A group of animals and chew bones and treats can make a volatile combination. Think ahead and plan each phase until you see each dog for what he/she is.

Finally, remember to breathe and be relaxed. Move slowly. Dogs respond to stress in the humans around them. You do the best you can to prepare for a bite. Chances are that nearly everyone in rescue will be bitten at some point. But the dog that charges at you from across the room does exist. When the worst happens, you need to remain calm and focused. In the meantime, smile, enjoy the dogs and get to know them one by one. The more you watch them, the better you'll become at reading them. And that can give you the few seconds of warning you need to prevent a bite.

Animals who bite “all of a sudden”

Question from Michelle: Thank you for handling this difficult and emotional topic. What if a dog has shown NO history of aggression at all (to humans or other animals) while in foster care or at adoption events, yet when placed in the new adoptive home, the dog bites a human? To me, there is some difference between an "air snap," a "bite" that touches but does not break skin, and a bite that DOES break skin.

As a rescue, I don't feel we can legally place a known "biter." Even if the dog was in a stressful or fearful state, a bite is still a bite. With so many "non-biting" dogs waiting for good homes, I feel like there is little alternative, other than euthanasia, after a bite. What do you suggest? Thank you!

Response from Yvette Van Veen: You also bring up a painful topic: When does one put down an animal? That is a tough question that I hate to think about. It is a moral question, a legal question and it is also about the welfare of the animal. Some of the animals I have seen are in a constant state of anxiety, and I do not for one minute believe that there is quality of life in an animal who is constantly in a panic. At that point, an organization has to realistically evaluate what resources are available to them. Can you rehabilitate? Do you have a sanctuary that meets the needs of the animal? Or will the animal spin in a four-foot-square cage? It can be helpful for a group to put testing

procedures in place. This way, you can know what you are dealing with. You also need to put into place a clear position statement of what you are able to handle, what you cannot handle and if there are alternatives for animals in the grey area. Education is also important.

Personally, I take air bites very seriously. I do rehab. An air bite to me says, "There is something wrong here and now. Figure out what the trigger is and start fixing it BEFORE it escalates or the dog's stress level decreases his threshold." I often begin rehab where others might leave well enough alone, and I do this because I can. If the behavior of the animal can be improved, why not do so?

Punctures always concern me. Legally, we are entering into a new era when I think shelters will need to have to get legal advice before something happens. Currently in Ontario, dogs are being put down for the smallest sign of aggression. It is sad to me when an animal has found a new home and then something happens and the dog is put down. The aftercare of a facility combined with due diligence is something we need to look at for the future. Insurance is something that should be looked at by groups as we look at new laws.

As for the dog in question, it is really important to understand that behavior is about a combination of the temperament of the animal AND the environment. A dog who is antisocial will not likely react if the foster home gives the animal some space. That same dog may bite if placed in a home where the new adoptive family gives the dog a hug. The threshold of the animal can also come into play. For example, a person may be usually nice. But one day, the car breaks down, she's late for work, the boss writes her up and then she comes home and her spouse says, "Did you forget to buy milk?" Then the nice person snaps. It's not about milk. It's about the cumulative effect of the day's stressful events. Similarly, the same animal may be good one day, but may snap on a day when there is road construction outside and lots of strange visitors, and the fire alarm goes off as you burn dinner.

At the risk of being repetitive, it is very, very important to remember that "pet people" do not interact with dogs in the same way that rescue people do. People in shelters or rescue groups move in a way to calm the dog. If they have children, those children are usually dog-savvy. We learn how to behave so as not to trigger a bite. We do not take bones and food away because we are trained not to do that. The average family either believes in Lassie, or believes that because there is no history, the dog is bomb-proof. Neither is accurate.

Becoming dog-savvy is something that comes with practice – lots of it. Setting general rules is probably the quickest way to get results. Children need to learn to be safe first. Adults benefit from these lessons, too. I can't tell you how often parents have said they benefited from learning how to visit with an animal by turning sideways and holding a hand under the dog's chin. I have also lost count of how many parents have been stunned when they realize that simple things – like dog training or head patting – can be dangerous. It is dangerous because a young child will transfer that knowledge to other dogs. Those other dogs may not have a temperament that is suitable for child/dog interaction.

Some other suggestions when it comes to planning ahead include looking at factors such as age, the warning level the animal provides and the scope of the problem. There

is a substantial difference in my opinion between a four-month-old animal who is biting and a three-year-old animal. The younger animal probably has more flexibility, which is why it is really important that each group surrounds themselves with the best help they can get. Set standards for trainers to help you out. What does your group stand for and believe? Write a position statement and invite all who want to help to work under your head trainer. Give your foster families access to someone that they can ask for help at any time. Give new families all the information you can give them. Give people tools and the animals will benefit from it. In a nutshell, you need to provide the total package.

Humane education details and business tips

Question from Kathy: We are a small, no-kill facility in Alabama located near the Gulf Coast. We are in the process of starting a speakers' bureau for our group that would go around to area schools, organizations, etc., in hopes of educating people about pet responsibility, spaying and neutering, disaster preparedness, reading animal body language, etc. We plan on having one speaker for youths and one for adults. Do you recommend a comprehensive program or should people requesting speakers have a list of subjects they could choose from? Thank you!

Response from Yvette Van Veen: Great question. Personally, I am a huge believer in stealing successful business practices and incorporating them into the shelter/animal rescue environment. By this, I do not mean that we reduce animals to a commodity. But, if you can take advantage of what works, then it makes sense to do so! So the first thing I would recommend are two books. The first is called *The E-Myth Revisited* by Michael Gerber (<http://www.e-myth.com/>) and the second is titled *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell (<http://www.gladwell.com/>). They are available in the business section of most bookstores. Why are these two books relevant? Because the first is about policies and procedures. You are asking what procedure would work best to get the word out. The second book is about taking an idea and tipping it into the daily social fabric of a community. And you are trying to do that also. These are business books, but the lessons can very easily be incorporated into a rescue organization without sacrificing values.

Policies are important because they allow you to present a clear and consistent message. You can pick and choose topics based on your policies and anyone coming into the program can make educated decisions about future topics. You can clearly spell out in your mission statement items such as "Who do we want to reach? What message is critical to get out? What are our guiding principles for topics?" Even if mentally you have these ideas prepared, put them on paper! Your organization needs clear direction when creating a program. It will save you headaches down the line. Written policies and procedures also save time, which means you have more time to do more and avoid burnout.

Then you can look at how to best reach your target audience. Seminars are great, but if they do not reach an audience or effect a change, then they miss their full potential. It can lead to "preaching to the choir." Which is why I would recommend doing a little work investigating what various organizations may want to hear about. Reading animal body language is a "fun" topic, but might not effect very much change. I might expect the topic would get interest, but it also has a downside. The topic usually appeals to people who already are well educated in animal care.

In *The Tipping Point*, the author talks about how one woman wanted to get information about breast cancer to African Americans in her community. Despite having great resources and information, her program was not getting results. Finally, she realized she had been missing her target audience. Most did not go to the facilities she was reaching out to. But they often spent hours getting their hair braided. So she began targeting hair salons that did weaving, and the word spread like wildfire. Small change, big results.

The other topics you propose are brilliant, and what I would do is find a way of making the topics salient to your target audience. If you approach a community center and "sell" your seminar on pet responsibility as "How to become a responsible pet owner," chances are most people will think, "I am responsible, so I do not need it." But, if you can try something along the lines of "New puppy owners: free housetraining advice and preventing the number one reason for serious attacks," people have a reason to attend. Free housetraining is a nice draw and the aggression prevention leads right into backyard dogs and chaining. In other words, responsible pet ownership.

You take the preaching out of your seminar and turn it into something that reaches the people who need it most. In a nutshell, you start to follow a very basic premise in business called WIIFM ("What's in it for me?"). Take some time and find out what pitch would work in Alabama. The cultural factors are likely different from the North.

To wrap up, the answer to your question is "Both." If a facility is interested in a particular subject, then great. But as you reach out to your community, be prepared to target the demographics in that place. What problem is specific to that area? What message do they need to hear? And then the big one: How are you going to make that topic appealing enough that your target population will choose to give up watching their favorite TV show and listen to you?

Thanks for making a difference, by the way!

What about cats who bite when overstimulated?

Question from Cindy: I have a cat that is a sweetheart most of the time but when she wants to be touched, she will go underneath my hand from head to end of tail numerous times. After several times, she will sit down and try to grab my hand with her claws and, if she retrieves it, she will bite my hand, causing pain. It's like she wants me to pet her, but then gets mad at me when I do. What could I be doing that she doesn't like?

Response from Yvette Van Veen: In some ways, I find it interesting that cats and dogs are treated so differently. Both species are thought of as companion animals. When it comes to dogs, many people expect them to be friendly and tolerate anything. When it comes to cats, many people let the animal "be." There are enough jokes floating around that I think it can be said that cats often are left to do as they please.

Recently, I had the opportunity to discuss aggression in animals with a health unit representative. It was quite surprising to me to learn that cat bites and scratches were a very significant and important health and safety concern. Locally, a "bite" is defined as anything that breaks the skin. The reason health units use this marker is because a break in the skin can lead to infection. In fact, just this summer a local woman who rescued a number of cats spent several weeks in the hospital due to a small bite that

resulted in an infection that spread. I think that how cats are viewed might be changing. As our most common pets, we want more from our cats these days.

When it comes to dogs, for years we have followed the advice of Dr. Ian Dunbar. Most groups stand firm on the notion that dogs need to be socialized. We do handling exercises so our dogs love to be touched. We do guarding prevention so we can take bones away. We work with our dogs.

But I do not see that same level of attention given to cats. I think those exercises are great for cats, too. Some organizations have begun cat education programs. Best Friends has online resources (www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/petcare), and San Francisco has launched a cat education program. Why? Because we want our cats to be companions. We want them on our lap.

Fortunately, learning theory works for all species of animals. My cat shakes a paw, plays fetch and does a number of other fun tricks. Learning theory works on cats because they are trainable. This means why the animal does something is less important than "What is the animal doing and how can I change it?" I find that many cats get sensitive when stroked. Cats have a rich area of nerves at the base of their tail. Which means I don't think it is you. I think your cat is sensitive to touch and gets overstimulated.

What I would do is work with the cat using counter-conditioning and desensitizing. It is no different than what dog trainers have been doing for years with a dog that is sensitive. You teach the animal to relax and enjoy the process. You can also teach your cat to divert some of that energy to something more acceptable, such as a cat toy.

Part of that is learning to read a cat. Many cats will begin a slow flick of the tail when they have had enough. Work below threshold. Over time, teach your cat to relax to human touch. As you progress, sometimes massage can help, too. I find that most animals have certain areas of their body that are less sensitive. Others are more sensitive. It can make your progress smoother if you start with the easy areas and work toward the more difficult ones.

Do particular breeds call for caution?

Question from Jason: Do you think that there are any particular breeds that call for more caution than others? For example, does the fact that those dogs in an earlier question were pit bulls point to the fact that we should have known that there was a potential for dog-to-dog aggression?

Response from Yvette Van Veen: In my heart of hearts, I know the answer to this is "absolutely not." Here are the reasons I believe so passionately that breed has nothing to do with aggression:

Each year I talk to hundreds of people with aggressive dogs. Because of all the calls and e-mails I receive, I know that all breeds are susceptible to showing aggression, which means if you focus on the "muscle" or "bully" breeds of today, you probably won't see the tense poodle who bites.

Out of all the dogs I see each year, the vast majority are not pit bulls. Most are so-called

family-friendly breeds. And most are the popular breed of the day. Locally I am seeing the something-a-poos, labradoodles and goldendoodles. Most are from puppy mills. And a trend to note is that many mills are cleaning up the sanitation of their facilities. Cross contamination prevention, sanitation, automatic feeders and so on. People see all of this and think, "Wow! What a great place!" What they do not know is that these animals are nearly devoid of human contact and socialization until they go to their homes. The dog is already set up for phobias, fear and aggression. It can help to keep an eye on the trends in your community, and it can help to get educational material out as soon as you see a problem emerging.

If I walk a two-block area, there are six dogs that are an accident waiting to happen. Not one of them is a pit bull or a breed typically thought to be aggressive. How do I know there is a problem? Most are outdoors on chains or behind a barrier fence, fighting. They are outdoor dogs that daily feel the frustration of crashing a barrier. Two of the six go indoors, but have barrier frustration that you see when the dog is on a walk, or when the curtains are left open. There are far more obvious signs of aggression than breed alone.

Muscle breeds of choice are known to change over time. When I was a child, Doberman pinschers were the breed to be feared. I can clearly remember people talking about inbred, king Dobermans that would kill you in a minute. That problem was so pervasive that the stories made it to TV shows. Recently I saw an episode of a *Quincy* rerun that focused on Dobermans being trained for aggression. I would love to see a major television program do an episode on dog fighting and Staffordshire terriers. It has the potential to create an enormous ripple effect in the social perceptions of the general public.

Breed banning does not help the matter. People choose another breed, and if you focus on the breed of today, you might miss seeing the first signs of the problem of tomorrow. Since I write a public column, I know that people are looking for replacement breeds. They have actually called and asked for suggestions. It breaks my heart.

It only takes a few years to affect the genetic lines of a breed of animals. Within five or so years, breeders can absolutely change the characteristics of a breed. Despite having hundreds of years of fighting in their lines, a few years can change the standard. Studies on foxes have been done to see if they could be bred for sociability. It appears they can, and in no time at all.

History combined with testing gives you two things that breed identification cannot. You can look for dogs that have been formerly chained. You can look for signs that an animal did not go through a bite prevention program. You can spot red flags. The test lets you look at each animal as they are, and breed will not cloud your judgment. Toy breeds have killed young children. Set breed aside. The dogs and the families that adopt them will have a far better chance if you take things one dog at a time. You will also have a better chance as you work with these animals.

Retraining a biter

Question from a member: I am currently fostering a snowshoe female adult cat from Hurricane Katrina. She was presented to my organization about 24 hours before giving birth to five kittens. The kittens are 7 weeks of age. In the last 2 weeks she has begun

biting. First, she bit your leg when either I or another caretaker left her room. I assumed she wanted you to not leave the room as she was starved for attention.

As of last night, she started unprovoked attacks. For example, our usual routine is for me to sit on the bed and she jumps up on the bed to be petted. Last night, the same, but in a few short minutes she attacked my hand and arms.

I scuffed her and told her no. Well, it got worse from there as she repeated the attacks three more times. As I was leaving the room, she attacked and bit my leg. Only one bite barely broke the skin. I have never had a foster cat who attacked. May I please have your advice on how to correct this behavior and how long I should wait after her last attack to put her up for adoption. The kittens are weaned and can be removed from her now. She will be spayed in two weeks. Thank you.

Response from Yvette Van Veen: Poor cat! Hurricane Katrina was tough on everyone, animals included. I can't imagine the fear and terror these animals went through. In addition to starvation, being preyed upon by other animals. What a terrible time for so many. Then on top of all this, the cat in your care was pregnant. How awful that must have been. Plus we all know that pregnancy can cause a surge of hormones that can turn the nicest being into a maniac. My husband will vouch for that!

Still, we do not know what this cat's life was like before the hurricane hit. She could have been an outdoor cat that was poorly socialized. She could have been abused, kicked or hit. We just don't know. I will assume that full medical checks have been done on the new mother, especially conditions that present with aggression. Medical is always the first item to rule out. Spaying this cat is also a good idea and should decrease hormonal fluctuations that can be very difficult for a cat to take.

Then, all you can do is create a plan to address what this cat is doing. Is it possible that this cat was kicked or hit in the past? Maybe. We do not know. Is it possible she is undersocialized and she is showing feral tendencies? Possible too. Again, we do not know. Which is why it is so nice that we can desensitize any species of animal. Ask yourself, "What do I want this cat TO DO?" For example, I want this cat to jump up and lie beside me. I want this cat to allow me to touch her. I want this cat to allow me to pet her. When I leave the room, I want the cat to go get one of her toys.

All of these things can be taught in one way or another. You can be prepared with tiny treats and you can feed her while she sits beside you. When the cat is comfortable with this, you can feed her in conjunction with a few touches. The order would be as follows: You gently reach for the cat (might not even touch her the first few times). Give the cat a valuable treat. Back your hand away. All the items are trainable in the same way you would work a dog. No different.

The one thing that you cannot do with this cat is scruff it. The risk is too great. This cat might have a history of being hit, lack of socialization. When you scruff this cat, you might possibly suppress the biting. But you will not gain the trust that you need from this animal. Frankly, I have not found it necessary to scruff any animal to get the results I want.

When can you place this cat? I recommend having a full evaluation by another person every two months when an animal is in rehab. In conjunction with the results, you will be

looking to make a good match. This cat probably shouldn't go to a home with children. It is not fair to the cat, and not fair to the children. You will need to disclose that this cat has bitten. When you find a home that loves her for who she is, and who will continue teaching her to trust, then you will know the time has come to put her up for adoption.

Heading off an unprovoked attack

Question from Mary: Two weeks ago, my 1 1/2 year old shar-pei mix bit my neighbor in an unprovoked incident. Since I have had her (one year and she is a rescue dog), she has always "bumped" the backs of my knees when I come home. My other dogs also gather around me to sniff and beg a pat. A couple of months ago, a friend who was over said she thought Sandi had tried to bite the back of her leg. I said, "Oh, she does that to me too; I think she is just bumping the back of your legs."

Well, she did the "bumping" to two other people that I know of, then this incident of an actual bite. I read in two different books, including a vet's book, that the "bumping" she was doing was a preliminary "strafing." Had I realized this, I could have begun a behavior modification prior to a human bite. But [the book said] that now the option of behavior modification would meet with limited success and euthanasia was the only other option ... because I wouldn't be able to trust her again after this encounter.

For two weeks I have stressed obedience, that is, doing "sit," "down" and "let's go" on leash. She has not been off leash around anyone else. Any other ideas for what I can work on? I hate the thought of euthanizing her if there is any other way!

Response from Yvette Van Veen: Well, I can see that my response is going to be a bit lengthy. Sorry, but this question packs a punch! There are so many things to get to that are important. So let's get to it.

What is provocation? Legally, people often think of one person hitting the dog and the animal retaliating. And yes, I would say this was provocation. But it can also be subtle. As an analogy, think of something you truly fear. Something that ties your stomach in knots. For the purpose of this example, let's say your answer is spiders. Then, let's say I ask you to sit at a desk to answer 50 math questions. These are questions that you are capable of doing under normal circumstances. But, then I say that you must do these questions at a desk that I have dropped a bucket of spiders onto.

If you truly fear spiders, you might try to run. You might thrash, push or hit me. You might not act rational. I can tell you over and over again that you have no reason to be afraid. I can tell you that your fear is not rational or justified. It does not matter. That fear is real to you.

Provocation is very much the same in my opinion. Provocation varies from person to person and animal to animal. You may not think there was any provocation for a bite to happen. But the dog was provoked. And since we are dealing with the dog's behavior, and the dog's former learning history, that provocation is REAL TO THE DOG. Does not matter if you cannot see it. It is there. That is what a trigger means to me. What button do I need to push to get a dog to react? There are common triggers. Most know that some dogs will bite if you take away their bone. Some dogs will bite if patted on the head. Some are more subtle. Some dogs that guard will show aggressive behavior at

the door. "My house." And do not be fooled. Some dogs have had prevention exercises, like Dr. Dunbar's Sirius-based puppy program. These are the exercises where you pet a dog as it eats, or create positive associations between you touching a bone and giving treats. Some dogs love to play fetch and drop the ball. They drop the ball because they have learned that the human will throw it back. But many people do not know that they need to do prevention on places and people. Those are very difficult to catch. You need to watch for it.

Then we move on to nose bumping. What do all those things that dogs do really mean? I do not know. There are some behaviors that can mean a number of things. So what we can say is, "Often when a dog flicks his tongue over his lips, he often show other signs of tension, and it is reasonable to assume that the dog is tense." It can also mean the dog started to salivate because they know you have cookies and they just happened to lick at an annoying drip. It is nearly impossible to say x means y. Some dogs use their nose and learn to bump for affection. Other dogs have learned to herd people with a nose bump instead of a nip. The nose bump alone really does not provide enough information to say too much of anything.

Then we get to obedience. Have you ever been to an obedience show and watched the dogs? Quietly and calmly stood back and enjoyed watching the dogs just "be"? I did that recently, and I watched as a champion shepherd left the ring. Five minute later, he snarled and lunged at a passing dog. You can have a champion at obedience that bites. And you can have a dog who is friendly but has no idea of the meaning of "sit." A local farm has two such dogs. As you pull into the drive, both come bouncing to greet you. You can pat them, hug them, play with them and feed them. Friendly dogs who do not know they are supposed to have an education.

How is this possible? Because temperament is one thing, and obedience is another. Treat them separately. You can always teach a friendly dog to sit. That is frankly quite easy. Rehabilitation on an obedience champion that will bite and puncture is not easy. It is not easy because emotion will always take priority over learning. Just like our spider analogy above. Fear is an emotion. It will kick in and supersede any training when emotions run high.

Where do you go from here? You need an accurate diagnosis. Often it is best to have someone who does not know you or the dog to observe. When you are emotionally attached, it can be difficult to be objective. Here are some of the things I would be looking for: Does the dog show any signs of tension or stress? Is she breathing too quickly? Are there any other times when the dog becomes tense? You may think they are unrelated, but they may not be. When the dog is near someone's legs, is the dog soliciting attention or pushing the person away? It could be that this dog wants your attention and wants others to leave. Be careful that you separate the two. Is this dog social with people? Is location constant? Was there any movement on the part of the human when the problem happened? How does the dog behave with valuables? Go through each tiny little piece of information until you have enough to say, "There it is ... there is the button(s)." Unless you are dealing with a medical problem, they will be there. They always are.

Off the cuff, I find that dogs that are highly anxious and who have a tendency to guard will react near doorways and toward strangers. They often react when someone has been stationary for a period of time and then moves. It seems like Jekyll and Hyde. The

other possibility is that this dog has learned that nipping works and is escalating. I do not see that as often, but I have seen it often enough. These dogs learned as puppies that nipping got attention. When they do not get the attention they want, an extinction burst kicks in. The dog expects to receive attention. When they do not get the attention, they escalate their behavior.

Another example or analogy that people might relate to is the child in the grocery store that has a tantrum over not getting candy. If the child is used to getting candy to pacify a tantrum and the parent decides it will no longer work, most often the child will get louder. They might kick or scream. They might threaten to hold their breath. Things get worse before they get better. In some dogs, the nose bump escalates to a nip and escalates to a bite, especially if the dog has learned in the past that escalating works.

If you want to send me more details, send me an e-mail off-line and we can go through some questions to see if we can't get this dog a more specific diagnosis. When you have one, then you can create a plan of action.

Training in multi-pet households

Question from Sue: How does one retrain and desensitize aggressive behavior in a dog when one has many dogs in the house? As I never have less than six dogs in my home and even higher numbers depending on foster home availability during critical rescue times, it becomes very difficult to reward any behavior with a treat. Is it even possible to address desensitization with mass numbers present?

Response from Yvette Van Veen: My son just started junior kindergarten. It might seem unrelated to your question, but bear with me. In his class, there are about 20 children who are between 3 and 5 years of age. There is one teacher. Often there is a parent volunteer who does odd items around the class. But generally, it is 20 young children who are there to learn under the supervision of one adult. I can say that the management skills of the teacher are critical to ensure that each child receives the attention they need and to avoid utter chaos. The hands of a kindergarten teacher are as full as someone who has numerous animals to train.

Since teachers seem to be able to manage, why not adopt some of the strategies they use to make life easier and your training effective?

Good teachers are prepared. They know what they will be working on, and plan ahead for problems. When a new student comes into the class, they ensure that the other children have activities that require less supervision. Good teachers have contingency plans in place just in case things fall apart.

Good teachers manage well. They know how to use routines to keep everyone on track. First you go to the circle with a book. Then we do attendance. Then we do the weather. Habits and routines get everyone on the same page.

Your timing can have a big impact. Good teachers rarely leave any space between activities. As soon as one is done, the children start the next. The pace is quick and there is no time left for little hands to get into trouble.

Individual attention is given where needed. When a problem is seen, teachers ask for help. "Dear parent helper, can you please sit with Johnny separately from the others, as he seems to lose focus when another child is near." They work at the level of a child.

Good teachers stay calm under pressure. No matter how bad the day goes, I would expect a parent to go through the roof if they saw a teacher lose it in a classroom.

Teachers are consistent. "When you put your book away, then you can pick a toy. If you do not put your book away, you can wait until you decide to put it away." Calm and very consistent.

Good teachers have an emergency response that children respond to. When children get fidgety, it might be, "Hands on your head." When children are lining up one by one, they participate in a song as they wait their turn. (Too busy singing to get into trouble while waiting.) To settle noisy lips, they do, "Finger on your lip and a finger on your hip."

All these strategies are just as effective when working with animals. Plan ahead, and when a new animal comes into your care, think how you will manage the others during the adjustment phase. Use routines, especially with resident dogs. If your dogs have a routine, they will stick to it, and hopefully stay out of your hair when new additions need more attention. Keep the animals busy doing something. If your resident dogs have a great sit/stay, ask them to do it while you work with the other dog on something new.

Ask for help if you need it. Stay calm. Dogs react to stress in the human. If you feel tense, move at half speed, breathe deeply and smile. Consistency is always important. How else will your animals ever learn how things are done? Prepare an emergency response. If you have a dog with issues, you can make a portable tether to use for safety purposes.

How nice would it be if all your resident dogs had the habit of going to a spot when the doorbell rang? "Bing-bong!" All the dogs go to their spot for a nice sit/stay. All you have left is the dog you want to do rehab with. If you need safety parameters in place, you can use tethers. Calmly teach this dog the routine or work on rehabilitation exercises as needed. It is completely possible to manage multiple dogs. One of our fosters has many dogs and she fosters both adults and puppies. The organization built a puppy room for her, and her dogs are some of the best in the system. She knows how to manage.

Preventing resource guarding of all kinds

Question from Liz: I became involved in rescue and fostering after adopting my six-year-old Doberman. His background was hazy, but I did learn he was tied outside year-round. He came to me overweight, with a skin condition and raw, bloody paws from licking. After months of medicine, patience and love, he blossomed. I had him almost a year when I started fostering dogs. I was very cautious about introductions and never left them alone, always giving Tyler lots of attention. Tyler was "tolerant" of the fosters, not really engaged but interested.

One evening, Tyler, eager to go to bed, leaped over our 13-year-old sleeping foster. Startled, she snapped and Tyler turned on her in a fit of rage I had never witnessed before. I grabbed him and he sunk his teeth into my hand and just when I thought it was

over, he jumped me from behind and continued with the rage. I later learned from a behaviorist it was redirected aggression; he felt threatened and turned predatory. The scars on my back are nothing compared to the scars left on my heart when I made the gut-wrenching decision to put him down. I guess my question is, what signs did I miss? Even if there were no other dogs in the household, would something else have set him off?

Response from Yvette Van Veen: There have been times when I have been called by clients or a rescue group and they describe something similar. In one recent instance, a dog that I had personally tested on intake was placed in a foster home. He tested beautifully. You could do anything to this dog and he was happy to be with you. Lovely dog. Then the foster family called and said that this foster dog had attacked the resident dog. No other details were available. At that point, I went and retested the dog in the home, wondering how something was missed in a system that very rarely misses anything. Retesting showed the same friendly and happy dog that we had brought in weeks ago. Thankfully, the damage had been minimal. No punctures, no injuries requiring veterinary attention in this case. But the resident dog was avoiding the foster.

What did we miss? We had not looked at the temperament or behavior of this particular resident dog because the owner only ever described him as friendly and affectionate. At that point, we tested the resident dog, and it became quickly apparent that the resident dog was an easy to trigger biter. The dog could not settle with a toy around any human. The dog would lip curl, snarl and bite if you approached him when he had something of value. The dog would hover around the food dishes and kitchen to keep all the other animals out. The resident dog was a food guarder.

When something happens between two dogs, it must be remembered that the behavior of both dogs is suspect. I often liken retaliatory attacks to retaliatory penalties in group sports. Someone behaves badly and eventually gets another player mad. When that frustration comes out in a hit, the retaliator gets the penalty.

There is a big critical difference between what happened in the example above, and what you experienced. The dog I worked with was bite-inhibited (held back from causing serious damage). The Doberman was not, and continued and escalated beyond what would have been necessary. Everything else follows pretty much the same pattern. There is a resource involved – in my case, food. In your case, a sleeping area. Remember Jean Donaldson's definition of what guarding can encompass: people, places and things. Your incident involved a sleeping area.

How do you minimize these types of instances and help families who adopt dogs? All dogs should be tested on intake to give you information. I personally use Sue Sternberg's method because it has never failed me. What you choose to do with the information and which dogs you place is a moral and legal question that each person has to answer on their own. I do know that testing provides information that can help give you more successful rehab and more successful placements. Both the foster and resident dogs need to be checked in dog-to-dog situations. You might be surprised what you sometimes find. It can be easy to miss warning signs unless you actively look for them.

You will get more successful placements because the number one reason for the success or failure of rehabilitation is the stubbornness of the owner. They must have the

tenacity of a pit bull to get the job done, manage the parameters. They need to be in for the long haul with their heart. Families that unknowingly take on a problem end up angry at the group, and often resent the situation. Others are afraid of the animal. Others have children or other animals in the home and do not feel they can take on the risk. These are nice people who likely will not be successful because they will not be able to make it through the rough spots.

Resource guarding is common. On Meeting Milo, we have a survey running to find factors that correlate to dog bites (<http://meetingmilo.com/resources-survey.htm>). There are three very significant trends emerging. But one interesting side note is that most dogs that are involved in an "unprovoked" bite will growl or snap over a bone. I have no doubt in my mind that guarding of resources is quite possibly the number one aggression-related problem. If you ask the right questions, you will see it. People call me about a dog that snaps at dogs they pass on a walk. When you dig deep, you often get, "Oh – bones. No way we can take anything away from him! So we stopped giving him bones." Every rescue organization needs to become fluent with guarding. There is no better book for that than Jean Donaldson's *Mine!* Spend the money and memorize it. It is so crucial.

As a whole, I would love to see that every rescue group and shelter have some information about preventing guarding in puppies. The problem is very easily prevented. Untreated, the problem always escalates and becomes challenging to treat. Most often, a child is the first to get bitten. I think that is often because dogs that guard valuables go off into another room. Adults usually find a sense of relief in this. "Thank goodness, the puppy is entertaining himself. Now I can get some rest." But then months later, a child visits for a holiday. The child WANTS to visit with the dog. The child tracks the dog down. The dog bites the child. What we then hear is, "We had no idea. It happened without warning and without provocation. All the child did was hug/pat the dog and the dog bit her/him in the face."

In reality, the family never saw the problem because the dog was alone in another room. The child did try to play, but the dog was chewing a bone or sleeping. The dog backed the child away from the resource by biting. We need to get the word out on education, early warning signs, and hopefully preventing guarding. If we prevent guarding in puppies, we can easily reduce most of the aggression in dogs. The other education piece is backyard dogs.

If anyone wants to see the prevention exercises we use, feel free to let me know and I can e-mail a copy. They are strongly based in Dr. Ian Dunbar's Sirius program. For new adopters, the Milo site (www.meetingmilo.com) has early warning signs of aggression that every dog person should know. The more we prevent aggression, the fewer dogs will enter the system.

Sue Sternberg – really?!

Question from Kim: While I love to read the forums, and find them very interesting, my outlook changed a bit when I read that you rely on Sue Sternberg's assessment "program" for dogs. How horrible is that? Very!

Response from Yvette Van Veen: I know that Sue's test can draw a huge amount of

negative attention. In fact, when I wrote which test I used, part of me was cringing. Then another part of me was thinking that hopefully someone would ask. Because I use the test in a manner that reduces our euthanasia rates. Let me repeat that, because it is so important. The way I use the tool, it reduces our euthanasia rates. I can think of many dogs, such as the "retaliatory" dog who was painfully close to having some tough questions asked. That dog is still doing fantastic in his new home. It is a tool I choose to use in a certain manner.

Why does this test come under such fire? From what I have read, it is because SOME people have raised the bar to the point where you have "perfect" dogs, and dogs that are put down. I have heard tell that some groups have a very high standard and it skews the euthanasia numbers. I have nothing but contempt for practices that use any tool in a way that does not give an animal every chance. Hopefully, after reading the previous posts, you can get the sense that I fight for every dog to the fullest of my abilities.

I use this test because it has worked to save too many lives. I use this tool because in the six years or so that I have been using it, it has never let me down in terms of accuracy. For example, for one dog I restricted the adoption to dog-savvy people only, no children, no off-leash and immediate rehab to begin upon adoption. A staff member at the kennel took the dog home for the weekend and disregarded this advice and the dog went after a little boy at the shoulder. The results let me target rehabilitation more effectively. I prefer to do rehab on "I KNOW the dog has a problem in these areas." Too much of rehab often falls under "I THINK this might be the problem." If you find the trigger, you know. Rehab is far quicker, and far more successful.

The problem gets handled immediately. The test ensures that a dog that is edgy does not go to a foster home with a child. The test means that we can better match potential homes to potential adopters. Our coordinators are known to say, "You are a great family, and we would love for you to have one of our animals. But, Fluffy is sensitive on x and you have a cat in the home. We think this will lead to a rough transition stage. Can we interest you in Buddy or Max?"

Going back to the number one factor in successful rehab, remember that the stubbornness of the new family is the most important thing you need. Families that get a dog or cat and then find out the animal has issues usually call someone like me. If the animal has bitten, I can guarantee you that the person is most likely furious. I can guarantee that someone like me will spend hours hand-holding while people cry their hearts out. "We love Fluffy, but we are afraid the cat is in danger. How do we choose?" I guarantee that person will vent to dozens of people and tell them to never get an animal from that organization.

Some adopters will not tolerate aggression of any type in an animal. And regardless of what type of contract the group has, I can also guarantee that animals are put down after adoption. The family will not notify the group. If a follow-up call is made, they will lie. That is sad to me. An adoption should be a great beginning, and if you put the other tools in place, the family will have accepted the animal's challenges willingly. You increase your chances at a home for life.

The statistics for successful placements in my book are measured one-year post-adoption. That to me is success. I love to see people come back a year or two later and say they want a second dog from our group because despite some things they worked

on, they were supported, and now have the best animal in the whole world. They wouldn't dream of going elsewhere.

It is not the test that is bad. It's simply a pity that some people use it to justify putting down an animal that is placeable.

MEMBER COMMENTS

About dogs who bite all of a sudden

Comment from Dani: I just wanted to pass along that Jan Fennell, aka the Dog Listener, has been successful working with families in rehabilitating dogs that bite, along with other issues that dogs may have. She is from Scotterthorpe, Lincolnshire, U.K. Her website is www.janfennellthedoglistener.com. She teaches families to use Amichien Bonding to communicate with their dogs.

I visited Best Friends a couple of years ago and met Tyson, who works with the "aggressive" dogs. I believe even though he wasn't trained using Jan's methods that he inherently has learned what dogs are looking for in a leader and that is why they respond well to him.

About if certain breeds call for caution

Comment from a member: I agree that it is the small dogs who are more likely to bite, as they are given leadership roles: They get to sleep in the bed, lie on the couch and dictate what the human does. They control when they eat, where they sleep and control toys. A dog that is allowed to control the resources is the leader and will act like that to other dogs and humans!

The point I want to make is – yes – breeders can control certain traits in a dog's temperament that influence "drive" and willingness to please, but it is the way we treat dogs that has the most influence on aggression (once we have ruled out a medical condition).

Comment from Amy: As a person involved in pit bull rescue, it's very important that those who rescue dogs, especially those who do "all breed" rescue, have an understanding of the breeds they place. Because of their genetic predisposition toward dog aggression, two pit bulls (even mixes) close in age and of the same gender are not a good choice for even experienced owners, and it's not surprising that these two ended up fighting.

In the case of dogs with specific breed traits, such as pit bulls, this is a management issue, and requires the right kind of home. Otherwise, these results are not uncommon.

About setting dogs up for success in their new homes

Comment from Jenna: I have found that there are two things all rescue groups have to be prepared for when dealing with rescued pets. The first is that no matter how thoroughly you temperament test and no matter how effective a foster home or shelter you have, there are going to be situations that arise anyway. That being said, do a

thorough temperament test upon intake and again and again while the dog is in foster care. Take notes and document behaviors for the adoptive family. If a family is prepared up front that a dog might show dominance behaviors or is resource/food aggressive, it's not such a crisis if the behavior occurs again after adoption.

Second, make sure your rescue has firm intake criteria and euthanasia policies that are set up before something happens. If there is no set euthanasia policy in place, there is confusion among the other rescue volunteers, and it all seems to happen so quickly. Having a plan may be a better alternative for everyone in the long run. Again, that's "maybe" because with animals, every situation is different.

Comment from a member: I know it is hard to separate dogs that have grown accustomed to each other, but I would not adopt out two dogs at once unless the home was experienced in multiple-dog houses. If we want the dog to develop a relationship with new humans, it is really best to have only the one dog. The dogs will be more interested in their relationship, rather than focus on the human. The human becomes the outsider in the pack, if they don't know how to exert their leadership.

I have dealt with issues between two dogs and the issues were so subtle, I missed it. You really have to understand the nuances of body language and canine behavior to be effective in multiple-dog homes. You really need to keep them separate and treat them separately until they accept a new human as leader of the pack.

Comment from Linda: My opinion is that Greenies are not only dangerous (pieces breaking off, causing choking), but cause aggression between dogs! I have dogs (Pekingese) that really love each other, never fight, and play so well together. No problem sharing any toys. Put Greenies in the mix and it's all over! It didn't matter that they each had one sitting in front of them – they would tear each other up to get the other's away! This product needs to be taken off the market and I counsel everyone I know not to purchase them!

About retraining a biter

Comments from Leslie and Rosi: We have had nursing moms in foster home environments bite and behave aggressively, and find that after the kittens are weaned and separated from mom and after mom's spayed, mom completely changes. We have found that it's the hormones, coupled with the stress of motherhood and protectiveness of her offspring while being housed in a strange, unnatural environment, such as a separate room in a foster home where she doesn't have the full run of the house. The mom cats get antsy being locked up with their kittens. We found giving them "time out" away from the kittens when still nursing helps too. But definitely once spayed and recuperated and hormones dissipated (it takes a week to a couple weeks for the hormones to settle down), she's a new cat ready for adoption! We have found once they are spayed and the hormones are reduced, it greatly changes their personality. So after she is spayed, you may see a lot of changes in her behavior.

About humane education details

Comment from Mary: As the only paid municipal humane educator in the State of Alabama, I have found that many people don't know what to ask for when they are

asking for me to come to their class. So, I have a few standard presentations that I offer them. However, I also let them know that we can modify any presentation to be age-appropriate (for example my "Careers with Critters" presentation is targeted to eighth and ninth graders, and I could simplify it for fifth graders.) And I tell them that if they don't see something that strikes their fancy, to let me know and I will be happy to "whip" something up just for them.

Our shelter saves lives with Sue Sternberg's test!

Comment from Joan: Years ago, members of our shelter staff attended a Sue Sternberg workshop that changed our sheltering concepts and helped us save the lives of so many more dogs. We learned the importance of environmental enrichment and mental stimulation in helping to keep our charges from "going bonkers" in a shelter environment. Evaluation of every dog helped us to identify problems and work to correct them as well as making better adoptions.

It sickens me to hear of the abuse that Sue has suffered as a result of her pioneering efforts. Many of those who I have heard condemning her personally have never read her publications, worked with her or attended her workshops. They rely on hearsay, which is deadly. She blazed the trail for changing the hideous conditions so many dogs endured in shelters. Sue also had the courage to say that not every single dog can or should be adopted into a home.

Thank you for explaining that Sue's behavior evaluation (or any other temperament evaluation) is just a tool to give us more insight. Every shelter and rescue has to work within their own resources to determine how long they can work with a pet with issues and to what degree of success. It is not a cut and dry pass/fail.

I really enjoy this forum and appreciate the wonderful people who share their wisdom, and please continue to encourage everyone to respect each other's right to differ without spreading hate.

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