



No More Homeless Pets Forum
July 4-8, 2005

Critters for Keeps: Helping Pets Stay in Their Homes

Allergies, moving, housebreaking issues ... we've all heard the reasons that otherwise loving homes consider giving up a pet. The folks at the **Best Friends Network and Emily Weiss, Ph.D.**, of SAFER give you the tools to counsel would-be relinquishers so they can keep their pets in the family.

Introduction from Dr Emily Weiss:

Few shelters across the country are viewed as a resource for the community, where clients call for assistance as opposed to just coming to our doors to relinquish animals. Research has shown that people who relinquish pets go through a process, including seeking help (often in the wrong places), before bringing their pets to shelters.

Working with the Wisconsin Humane Society, I developed a program called Shelter Smart. This program is designed to help change the cycle for relinquishment by providing services before the problem becomes overwhelming to the adopter.

We will spend time this week looking at the importance of changing roles for shelters - viewing ourselves as outreach and sources of assistance to our human clientele to help decrease relinquishment. Let's discuss programs for the animals in our care and in our community to help assure that our clients will run into fewer problems, develop better bonds with their pets, and become advocates for our facilities. There are tools that all organizations can use - even with few resources.

Introduction from Troy Lea of Best Friends Network:

"We need to find a new home for our dogs right away!"

"I've tried everything, and my cat is still peeing on my kid's clothes! I have to get rid of her!"

Do these pleas for help sound familiar? Many people who work or volunteer for grassroots groups tell us that one of their most challenging tasks is responding to these types of requests for help. Here at Best Friends, an average of 500 calls and e-mails come in each week from people across the country asking for help with animals. And a large number of these calls are from people who are thinking about relinquishing their pets.

If you have questions about how you can manage these requests, we'd be happy to share the approaches, information and resources that the Best Friends Network uses to get people involved in a solution. Oftentimes, what callers need more than a place to relinquish their pets is help with how to keep their animal companions.

Dr Emily Weiss Bio:

Emily Weiss, Ph.D., certified applied animal behaviorist, has dedicated her life to developing positive, humane animal behavior programs in order to make life better for all creatures. She divides her time among improving welfare for animals in shelters, companion animals, and zoo animals.

She developed the SAFER test, an aggression test now used by shelters across the United States. Dr. Weiss also created the Matchmaker program, or Meet Your Match, an adoption program designed to match dog to guardian based on behavior. She has developed programs to reduce stress and improve interaction with wild-caught animals housed in zoos.

Dr. Weiss is on the board of directors of the Animal Behavior Management Alliance, and is section editor of the Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science. She travels across the country lecturing on various areas of applied animal behavior, works with individual clients nationwide, and is the animal behavior consultant for the Wisconsin Humane Society, the Kansas Humane Society, and many others.

Troy Lea for Best Friends Network Bio:

Troy Lea started working in the animal field 12 years ago when she was hired to work at Ralston Purina Pet Care Center. She was instrumental in setting up a socialization program for their cat area. Though she loved working with the cats there, she knew that her passion was in the animal welfare movement.

In 1999, after doing some research, she decided to visit Best Friends. She fell in love with the sanctuary, was offered a position, and still works for Best Friends six years later. Troy started her job when the Best Friends Network was brand new. For a while, she was the only coordinator, but the phone calls and e-mails became an onslaught and now there are 11 coordinators. Troy says she has watched the Network change and grow into something that she is proud to be a part of.

Her favorite part about her job is being able to educate and empower people in need of assistance. She says, "It's an incredible feeling to get an e-mail or phone call from someone who took the information that I shared with them, ran with it, and now has a great success story to share."

Three years ago, Troy moved back to her hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, and became the first Network coordinator to work remotely. She shares a home with her five cats - Jett, Sunshine, Zorro, Lennon, and

McCartney - and her dog, Lily. They have been very nice about letting her live in their house - that is, as long as she doesn't run out of treats!

Biting cat returned twice

Question from Kim:

I am in a small rescue group that does adoptions out of PETsMART. We currently have a cat that was returned twice for biting. How do we get the adopters to call us with the problems instead of just showing up back at PETsMART with the cat in his carrier?

We are now concerned about adopting this cat out again. Will he bite someone else? How do we get him to stop?

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

When a cat is adopted from PETsMART, I am assuming you are given all of the contact information for the adopter.

One program that we know is very helpful in retention is follow-up contact with the adopter. The basic rule of thumb is a call or e-mail at 3 days, 3 weeks and 3 months. By giving the client the opportunity to discuss issues, or even just vent, we can increase retention in the home. Lets not wait for adopters to call us – we need to contact them.

It is important to make sure your questions are open-ended questions such as “how is it going?” “Are there any questions about the cat?” Moving toward questions about bonding... “Is the cat behaving as you expected?” “If you could change one thing about your relationship with your new cat it would be...”

In many cases our adopters do not see the shelter or rescue as a resource. This can be further hindered by doing adoptions out of a site other than your own – as the adopter might call PETsMART for advice, instead of you. This makes that follow-up contact all the more important.

It does sound like in this case that the cat might have some behavioral issues. It is impossible for me to tell you whether or not this cat will bite again...especially without more information. Is the cat biting when it becomes overly aroused? Is he biting to avoid handling? I would be concerned about liability issues at this point, as you now know that the cat has bitten in two situations. If the cat bites again, they could build quite a case against you.

I would have the cat assessed, getting good information from the previous adopters about the cat's behavior and working with a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist before placing the cat up for adoption again.

Response from Best Friends Network:

Adoption returns are a complication that all rescue groups face occasionally, so I am sure most people reading this forum can relate to your frustration.

At Best Friends, we provide post-adoption counseling, as well as written information in the form of fact sheets or other reading materials to help adopters who have opened their homes to pets with special challenges. We ask adopters to let us know immediately if there are issues for which they need help. You may want to consider asking the adopter to sign a contract stating that they will inform you immediately if a behavior problem becomes apparent, so as to allow you to address the behavior before it becomes necessary for the person to surrender the pet.

Also, it's very important that you inform potential adopters up front about possible behavior issues so they can make an informed decision about whether they can manage the behavior.

As you probably know, aggression problems can sometimes be caused by a physical ailment, so a checkup with your veterinarian to rule out any health problems would be a good idea.

If a medical problem is ruled out as a possible cause for aggression, you may want to contact an animal behaviorist. A behaviorist may be able to pinpoint the cause of the aggressive behavior and also give suggestions on how to minimize or cure the behavior. Ask your veterinarian or a local animal organization to recommend a qualified cat behaviorist.

Another option is to ask your vet to consult with Tufts University or one of the other university behavior clinics. For help in finding a behaviorist, visit the Animal Behavior Society website at:

http://www.animalbehavior.org/Applied/directory_cert9_97.html

You also could try using a behavior help line. Here are some examples:

- ASPCA Companion Animal Services Behavior Help Line (New York), 212-876-7700, ext. 4357.
- San Francisco SPCA Behavior Help Line, (California), 415-554-3075. You may leave a voice mail message 24 hours a day. Within 48 hours, a behaviorist will return your call (collect) or they will send you written information.

- University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Clinic, 215-898-3347. If the clinic is not open at the time of your call, their recorded message will give you their call-in hours for the week.
- Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Clinic (Massachusetts), 508-839-7934. This clinic offers consultations for a fee.
- Feline Health Center, Cornell University, Dr. Louis J. Camuti Feline Consultation and Diagnostic Service, 1-800-KITTYDR, open 9 am to 4pm EST, Monday - Friday, except holidays. You will be charged a \$35 fee on a major credit card.

Several good books are available to help understand and manage behavior problems in cats. You may find it helpful to read one of these books:

- "The Cat Who Cried for Help" by Nicholas Dodman
- "Think Like a Cat" by Pam Johnson-Bennett
- "If Only They Could Speak" by Nicholas Dodman

Based on the limited information provided, I am not able to answer your question about whether or not the cat should be adopted out again. If the aggression is found to be caused by a medical problem and can be treated, it's likely the cat can be placed in another home, provided the cat's history is given to the potential adopter so they will know what to look for if the aggression returns.

Other factors to consider would be:

- Whether or not the biting occurs when the cat is over-stimulated. If this is the case, instructing adopters to watch for signs of over-stimulation can go a long way to preventing the aggressive behavior.
- If the biting occurred while the cat was living with children, the biting may no longer be a problem in an adult only household.

For additional information about dealing with cat aggression, see the fact sheet at this link:

http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/cats/aggression_toward_people.pdf.

Puppies aren't just cuddles and good smells!

Question from Helen:

I am asking a question for a co-worker of mine. Her family purchased an Australian Cattle Dog puppy. The puppy is about 5 months old and they are having some behavior issues. They are enrolling in

obedience classes at their local Petco store but they don't start for 2 more weeks so I was wondering if you might make a few suggestions to help them out.

The issues they are having with their puppy are:

- 1) The puppy barks at almost everything, including her reflection in a door, mirror, leaves, the leaf blower.
- 2) The puppy lunges at the TV set when she sees other animals.
- 3) The puppy nips at their feet as she walks with them.
- 4) The puppy nips at their hands and arms.

Sometimes when she explains the puppy's behavior it seems as if the dog is looking for constant attention. I get the impression that the nipping and biting is getting to be a big problem for them.

The family thinks she is very cute and realizes that some of her behavior is puppy behavior but are getting a bit frustrated with her. They have not mentioned getting rid of her but the other day she growled and bit so this added to their frustration. They are hoping the obedience classes will help them, but I doubt that the classes will address all of these situations. I believe that they want to work with her but just need some direction on how to guide their little dog so she will be a member of the family that they enjoy spending time with.

Would appreciate any suggestions on solving these issues.

Response from Best Friends Network:

Thank you for your question. I will try to keep this response short for the purpose of this forum, but please feel free to have your friends contact us directly (benetwork@bestfriends.org) for further assistance if needed. In the meantime, you could tell them (excerpted from <http://www.bestfriends.com/theanimals/pdfs/allpets/choosingapet.pdf> in the Best Friends Caring for Your Pets section, <http://www.bestfriends.com/theanimals/petcare/>):

Sharing your life with a companion dog has great benefits and can bring you great joy. It's best to learn about the needs of different types of breeds to find one that will best suit your lifestyle. Each type of dog breed is different in terms of care, behavior, cost, housing and demands on your time.

After all, if you know what you're getting into, you'll be more likely to have a happy animal, a good relationship with your pet, and an easier time dealing with any challenges that might arise. If you're

thinking about getting a particular breed of dog, you might want to read up on various breeds before deciding what type of dog to get. Different breeds of dogs have different characteristics.

If you have your heart set on a specific breed, please consider adopting a homeless dog or puppy from a shelter rather than purchasing a dog from a pet store or breeder. More than a quarter of the dogs in shelters are pure bred dogs. By opening your heart and home to a shelter dog you will be saving at least two lives. Even if you adopt from an organization that adheres to a "no-kill" policy, you will be helping to rescue another animal by making space available at the shelter or foster home.

By adopting, rather than buying a new companion dog, you reduce the demand that drives the commercial breeding of puppies. Each year, millions of healthy and well-behaved animals are destroyed in shelters and pounds simply because there are not enough homes for all of them.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you consider what type of dog to get:

- If you have children, how will having a dog/puppy affect them? Will everyone in your home welcome an animal?
- If you rent, do you have permission from the property owner?
- How much space do you have inside and outside your home? Will you need a fenced yard?
- How much time do you have to spend with your dog?
- What is your activity level? Are you sedentary or physically active?

Adopting a puppy is a huge commitment, since you cannot leave a puppy home alone all day. Most puppies need to eliminate every two hours or so. Also, in order to co-exist happily with humans, puppies must be taught house-training skills and basic commands. If puppies are not handled often and socialized when young, they will become shy and fearful which in turn could result in fear aggression issues later on.

You'll also want to consider where you live, how much space you have, and what your lifestyle is. For example, larger dogs may not do well confined to a small apartment or living in a big city, unless you are thoroughly committed to providing your dog with plenty of exercise. Dogs need quite a bit of interaction with their humans in order to be happy. Bringing a puppy into your home is making a long-term commitment, since dogs live 10 years or more.

But now on to the more specifics of your question:

During the period of 4-6 months, puppies grow rapidly and you may notice daily changes. Even though puppies are very energetic, you should not exercise your puppy too much – he can overdo it and he

needs time outs just as children do. For more info on puppy development and behavior please go to <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/petcare/dogs.cfm> for some helpful fact sheets.

Dogs need guidance and consistent training from their people if they are going to live in harmony with humans. All dogs must be taught acceptable behavior, and one way to do that is to train your dog or puppy or to pay a trainer to do it. Dogs are happiest when they know who's in charge and what's expected of them.

Positive reinforcement is the most effective and humane way to train animals. The basic principle is to reward a desired behavior with something pleasant. As with so many things, correct timing is essential. To get the animal to associate the reward with the correct behavior, the treat or praise must be delivered immediately. Consistency is also essential – always reward the desired behavior and don't ever reward undesired behavior.

See the info at <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/allpets/positivereinforcement.pdf> for more information and suggested reading.

The reward for good behavior can be a favorite toy, a game, petting, praise, or food treats. Most dogs will work for food, so food is the most common training reward. Use small pieces of soft treats that don't require a lot of chewing, so that you don't lose the puppy's focus on the task at hand. And again - don't overdo it. Puppies have a short attention span. CONSISTENCY is the magic word!

Clicker training is one great fun and effective way to communicate with a dog/puppy. Clicker training works by getting your dog to expect something positive (like a treat) in return for doing something you ask him or her to do. You use clicker so that your pet will associate the treat with the clicking noise. Eventually, you won't even have to use treats: your pet will respond to the clicker alone. For more information on clicker training please go to <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/dogs/clickertraining.pdf>.

However, regardless of the type of training method used, praise and food rewards should be offered every time the puppy is learning a new behavior. After the dog responds consistently to a command, you can praise him without offering any treats. The dog will learn commands better if EVERYONE in the household uses the same commands and the same consistent reward/praise technique.

With lots of love, patience and willingness to work with their puppy, your friends should have a wonderful and rewarding experience in seeing him develop into a loving and devoted family member eager to please and share their lives.

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

You said that your friend purchased this dog – does that mean she purchased from a breeder or pet store? A lot of the behavior your friend is seeing is due to the breed of dog she chose. Australian cattle dogs are tenacious herders. They are easily visually stimulated and will often become overly aroused from movement.

Many of these issues can be addressed with some positive reinforcement training. I think they would benefit greatly from a private session with a Certified Pet Dog Trainer. They can find a certified trainer in their area through the Association of Pet Dog Trainers' web site (www.apdt.com). Be sure that the trainer they choose is certified – not just a member.

Some hints to assist them would be to make sure that the puppy is well enriched. I would feed this puppy out of a roller ball or buster cube, and would make sure she always has something to 'figure out.'

I would also suggest walking the puppy in a gentle leader – it will keep the puppy a bit calmer, and will help them stop the puppy from nipping their ankles on a walk. HOWEVER – it is vital that the puppy has time to get used to the gentle leader before they use it on walks. They should spend a few days putting it on and giving her a special toy, playing with her, or giving her a buster cube – as many dogs find the leader uncomfortable at first. Once she is comfortable in the leader, she can wear it on walks, and if necessary, when she is well supervised in the home – dragging the leash behind her (this should only be done if someone is keeping a constant eye on the puppy).

Finally I would play the "visible- invisible" game with the puppy. They will need to dress well (ankles covered with thick socks) to play this game, as the idea is to ignore the puppy when it nips and chases their feet, and pay attention to the puppy when she directs these activities on appropriate items. They should buy some squeaky, fun, movement oriented toys and place them on the ground. When the puppy picks up a toy, they should all direct their attention on the puppy, being vocal and touching the puppy. The moment she takes her mouth off the toy, they should ignore her. When she puts her mouth back on the toy, the party begins again. One or two very consistent sessions like that and the puppy will learn to keep her mouth on a toy.

I have to spend a moment talking about appropriate placement. I wonder if your friend was counseled on the behaviors she would likely see in her new puppy. One of the great advantages of many of the **shelters and rescues** around the country is that the client can be educated regarding both breed behavior, and specific individual animal behavior – as many facilities assess their animals before placement.

Easy animal-to-animal introductions for low returns

Question from Kathy:

Please give us some tips on introducing a shelter dog/cat to a family's current pet. We introduce them at the shelter, on neutral ground, but what happens when they go home is often much different from what we see at adoption time, and our animal is returned, despite our offer of suggestions to turn the placement around.

Response from Best Friends Network:

Introducing a new animal to an established household should be handled slowly and delicately. Given the existing dynamics, this is never a situation to be rushed and should be handled by patient, calm people, as any animal will pick up on a person's anxiety and will act accordingly.

The adopting organization may want to send an experienced staff member to the home to help with the introduction. Doing so helps to establish a solid relationship with the adopter(s) and therefore, they will feel connected and more comfortable in working through future problems, rather than just giving the new arrival back. It also allows the organization to help the family prevent problems before they begin. For example, is their fence secure or will the new dog be able to find a way out? Are there raw hides or other high value treats on the floor which could create conflicts? Have toys been picked up, are shoes on the floor (some dogs/puppies view anything on the floor as a chew toy), etc.

First, it is not unusual to have a different experience at home than the experience on neutral territory. The established animal may become territorial or possessive of his/her space or things while the new animal may be excited to explore. In such cases, send an experienced handler/trainer/behaviorist to the new home with the new dog while both dogs are held on relaxed leashes. Prior to this, all toys, food bowls, etc. should be picked up as not to create conflict. The dogs should be permitted to meet each other while on the loose leash. If the dogs appear playful (play bowing, pawing at each other, playful "yipping"), it is likely that they will become fast friends. If the dogs stiffen, hackles go up, and/or growling/snarling, then they may not become such fast friends but it shouldn't be ruled out either. However, future introductions should be done with experienced dog handlers. You may wish to read the following for more information about dog introductions:

<http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/dogs/introducingdogs.pdf>.

To introduce a dog to a cat, it would be safest to place the cat in a carrier so the dog can sniff the carrier and the cat safely. The carrier test is the first in a series of introductions or it can be the last, depending upon the initial reaction. If the dog acts like he wants to tear into the carrier and is barking, snarling, or

acting ferocious, it is likely that this dog has a high prey drive and should not live with cats. If the dog appears curious by sniffing, licking the carrier, wagging his tail, barking playfully, further cat tests are warranted. The next test would involve the dog being held on a loose leash while the cat is permitted to walk around the room. Handlers should watch the body language of both the cat and the dog. If the cat seems calm (no hissing, stiffening), he/she should be permitted to continue to walk around the room. If the dog seems relatively calm then ask him to sit or lay down so the cat can move around freely and sniff the dog if he/she wishes. The dog should be praised for his/her calmness and kind demeanor towards the cat.

If the on-leash introduction does not go so smoothly, then a different method will need to be employed. Some suggest putting the cat in a spare room with a baby gate securing the doorway. Such a barrier protects the cat from the dog but also allows the dog to sniff the cat and become familiar with its actions and presence. In some cases, the dog will become desensitized to the cat's presence so that they can eventually live together. In other cases, the dog will continue to exhibit a strong prey drive and simply should not live with cats. Some breeds of dogs have a natural high prey drive so it's helpful to be aware of breed characteristics prior to introductions. Although, there are exceptions to the rule, too. For more details about cat introductions, you may want to read:

<http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/dogs/introducingcatanddog.pdf>

Again, establishing a working relationship with the adopter may be the key to adoptees staying in the home. The relationship needs to start from the beginning so that the adoption is not just a business transaction. Most organizations like to get feed-back (photos, letters, e-mails about the adoptee) and the adopters are usually eager to share if they feel welcomed from the beginning. If the adopter knows that they will receive support from the adopting group and they know from the beginning that it may take time for the household to adjust, they are usually more willing to deal with problems as they arise. However, in some cases adopters have very high expectations and very little patience so it may not be an appropriate time for such folks to add an animal to their home.

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

You are correct, a meet and greet at the shelter certainly is not a guarantee that the pets will get along at home.

However, the meet and greet is an excellent opportunity to educate your client on the problems they are likely to encounter in the home. For example:

Mrs. Smith comes in with the love of her life, Buffy, to meet with Pansy, a dog she plans to adopt from your facility. When the two dogs meet, you observe that Pansy is really not much of a Pansy and is

behaving in a fairly dominant manner toward Buffy. It appears that Pansy will likely be in control of many of the resources in the home. It is a great opportunity to discuss with Mrs. Smith what she is likely to see in her home. Discuss the strong possibility that Buffy's favorite sleeping spot will no longer be hers – explaining the body posture and canine communication you see in the two dogs. Educate her on canine communication and give her some realistic expectations based on that.

Take the time to ask her how she feels about it – she may decide to find a better match, or she will go home with realistic expectations, making it less likely that she will return Pansy.

Litterbox issues!

Question from Bruce:

We have nine kitties. Noel is our "first born", we adopted her from a rescue on 1/5/02. She is a wonderful, alpha kitty who is apparently overwhelmed by us having 8 other feline companions. For the past several months she has been spraying various walls/baseboards and urinating inappropriately in many unusual places in our home.

We have tried Elivil to no avail and are currently weaning her from that so she will hopefully have her former spirit back. We have not consulted a behaviorist because we doubt that such a person will tell us anything we don't already know. We have had Noel tested for all forms of Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) and all are negative. Letting Noel go to a shelter or anywhere else except her home is NOT an option. Any suggestions?

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

While psychotropic (behavior medication) intervention is often very helpful, it should only be used when consulting with a behaviorist—either a DVM behaviorist or a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist. We would develop a behavior program to use in conjunction with the psychotropic, making your chances of success much higher. Behavior does not occur in a vacuum, and we need to assess the full situation and develop a plan.

For example, in this situation, I am not sure I would have chosen Elivil—or any psychotropic up front.

First, I would be sure you had at least 9 litter boxes in your home, and many upright surfaces for scenting (for the cats to rub their cheeks).

Next, I would start Noel on a consistent schedule of enrichment, with 3 activities a day: two food device opportunities for enrichment, and one positive reinforcement training session.

I would like to know about the schedule in the home, the ratio of males to females in the home, as well as type of food, placement of food, and a variety of other details to develop a good solid behavior program for you.

So, while you may not feel that a behaviorist would have any information that you do not already know, they are trained to be keen investigators and can certainly develop a plan that would involve things that you may have overlooked, simply because you are too close to the situation...

Response from Best Friends Network:

Inappropriate elimination is an exhausting and all-too-common problem that results in the deaths of countless cats when people abandon or give up their pets because they can't cope with it.

The first order of business is to set up a thorough physical exam with your veterinarian which it sounds as if you have already done. Several physical problems may result in a cat not using the litter box, so they must be ruled out before you can move on to working on the behavioral aspect of the problem. The good news is that the physical problems that cause lapses in litter box use can often be easily and inexpensively remedied.

Once a health problem has been ruled out, there are several sources of help for working on the problem behavior. You will need to determine which is appropriate for you, your cat, and your situation. Here are your options:

Ask your veterinarian. Some vets have experience with behavioral issues, so check with yours to see if he/she may be able to offer some assistance in that area. You could also ask your vet to consult with a Board-Certified Veterinary Behaviorist at one of the university behavior clinics, such as Tufts University (see the behavior helplines below).

Consult a holistic veterinarian. A holistic vet uses alternative means for diagnosing and treating health and sometimes behavioral problems. As with traditional vets, experience will vary, so you will need to talk to them openly about what they may be able to offer.

Consult an animal behaviorist. An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the cat's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help you understand the way animals learn and how you can work specifically on this

problem to control and/or correct it. You can ask your vet for a local referral or visit the Animal Behavior Society website at: http://www.animalbehavior.org/Applied/directory_cert9_97.html

Call a behavior help line. Here are some examples:

- ASPCA Companion Animal Services Behavior Helpline (New York), 212-876-7700, ext. 4357.
- San Francisco SPCA Behavior Help Line (California), 415-554-3075. You may leave a voice mail message 24 hours a day. Within 48 hours, a behaviorist will return your call (collect) or they will send you written information.
- University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Clinic, 215-898-3347. If the clinic is not open at the time of your call, their recorded message will give you their call-in hours for the week.
- Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Clinic (Massachusetts), 508-839-7934. Offers consultations for a fee.
- Feline Health Center, Cornell University, Dr. Louis J. Camuti Feline Consultation and Diagnostic Service, 1-800-KITTYDR, open 9 am to 4 pm, EST, Monday-Friday, except holidays. You will be charged a \$35 fee on a major credit card.

Visit the Members and Pets forum. The Pet Health and Behavior bulletin board on the Best Friends website may be able to help you.

Dr. Margaret Muns is available to answer questions. Click on the following and scroll down to the Pet Health and Behavior link: <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/forums/>

Consult an animal communicator. An animal communicator takes a holistic approach to understanding and modifying behavior. He/she tries to tune in to your pet's state of mind, and helps you to do the same. Generally, if you work with an animal communicator on a serious behavior issue like aggression, you will also need to work with a behaviorist or trainer. You will find a list of communicators at Penelope Smith's online directory. They're listed regionally and the website also includes some information on what to expect from an animal communicator. Here's the URL:

<http://www.animaltalk.net/consultlist.htm#DIRECTORY%20OF%20INTERSPECIES%20TELEPATHIC%20COMMUNICATORS>

You may also find it helpful to read one of the following books on cat behavior:

- "The Cat Who Cried for Help" by Nicholas Dodman
- "Think Like a Cat" by Pam Johnson-Bennett

- "If Only They Could Speak" by Nicholas Dodman

If none of these options work, or if trying them is not feasible, you might consider changing your cat's current living situation so that the inconsistent litter-box use is not a problem. A possible solution is a cattery; an outdoor enclosure, roofed and protected, that you can place near a door or window, to allow the cat some inside access. Or, it can stand independently (similar to the idea of a dog run, but built for a cat). If you are interested, we have information on cat fencing and catteries that we would be happy to send along (bfnetwork@bestfriends.org).

Also, here are some great tips on reducing kitty stress in the home. [Some of the research sources for this article include Twisted Whiskers, Psycho Kitty, Hiss and Tell, and Cat Love, all by Pam Johnson-Bennett, a feline behavior consultant.]

A kitty feels stress. They react much like we react to stress. Kitties become bad tempered, shaky and nervous.

Kitties are creatures of habit and love familiar faces, voices and places. Even changing the type of litter can trigger an anxious state.

Playing with your kitty builds self-confidence in the kitty. It creates a bond between guardian and kitty and may help in reducing the kitty's anxiety.

Kitties respond to classical music, (the soothing variety, that is). If you don't care for classical music New Age music is suggested. Play the music at a low volume.

Provide peaceful retreats and a hiding place or two. Kitties really do need to sleep a lot and need a quiet spot to do that! Preferably, a hiding place that is higher up like what a cat tree offers is best.

There are A-Frame beds, (they look like miniature tee-pees), that are suggested for nervous kitties. It creates a hiding place for kitties. These beds are available at most pet supply stores.

Ionizers are good at calming kitties. An ionic air filter sends out negative ions as it filters the air. I had an ionic air filter in my closet to keep my clothes fresh and my kitties adored sleeping in there! There is an abundant supply of negative ions in sunshine and in ocean spray. Ever wondered why you felt so good during those times? These air filters are great for kitties with respiratory difficulties. If you have allergies or other difficulties with breathing ionizers are supposed to also be great for you!

Vitamin Support for Stress:

Vitamin C:

This is available in a paste form, (like tooth paste), at most pet supply stores. Most kitties like the taste. Vitamin C is not stored in the body and must be supplied as a part of the kitty's diet. It is very useful during a time of great stress. Vitamin C may also help keep the urine acidic to dissolve the crystals which cause lower urinary tract disease.

Vitamin B Complex:

Vitamin B is also water soluble and is not stored by the body. It should also be supplied in the kitties' diet. Brewer's Yeast is a great treat for most kitties and is chock full of B vitamins and needed amino acids. These are needed when the kitty is going through a period of stress, i.e., the veterinarian's office, moving etc.

Check out a new web site devoted to kitty behavioral problems and ways to modify that behavior
www.io.com/~mvp/cats

I wish you the best of luck with Noel and the rest of your furry family. Please don't hesitate to write back (bfnetwork@bestfriends.org) if you would like to discuss this further.

The pets don't have to leave when baby arrives!

Question from Crystal:

Cats are all too often surrendered because "owner is pregnant" or "new baby." People are paranoid about toxoplasmosis (never mind that raw meat is a greater hazard than cat litter) and there are STILL superstitions attached to cats and babies.

I definitely think humane education is a must for the medical profession (who are often in a position to allay fears) but in the meantime how do we keep cats from losing their homes once a baby arrives?

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

What a wonderful question! And what a wonderful way for us to help our communities view shelters as resources.

I suggest that you work on developing a workshop--to be held in a public facility such as a library, University or other area--focusing on introducing a pet to a new baby.

We know that clients often relinquish due to clashes, or perceived clashes, between a new child and the family pet. By capturing the clients before the birth of their child, we can help decrease the chances of relinquishment.

Response from Best Friends Network:

This is an issue that we deal with on a regular basis. We completely agree that education is the key, especially in the medical field. Many times it's the doctor that tells the expectant mother that the cat must go! There is some great information on Cornell University's website on toxoplasmosis that we hope you will find helpful in dispelling rumors and educational on how to prevent the spread of toxoplasmosis to adults, children and babies: <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/resources/brochure/toxo.html>

On the other end, dogs are also given the boot when the baby arrives for many of the same fears. The information below can be applied to both cats and dogs.

The suggestions given below are from the books *Cat Love* and *Twisted Whiskers*, written by Pam Johnson-Bennet, a feline behavior consultant.

BEFORE THE BABY ARRIVES

It may seem that your pets are jealous of your new baby, but really they're just anxious. Pets hate change, and so any change leads to anxiety. Bringing in a new baby is an enormous change - not just for the parents, but also for their pets! Here are some helpful suggestions:

- Have your cats/dogs spayed or neutered beforehand (spaying/neutering will make your pets calmer).
- Put a little of whatever creams or powder you will use on your baby on yourself, so that your pet will become used to that scent.
- Play audio tapes of baby sounds (especially crying) before the baby is born. Start on a low volume, then increase the volume slowly (not deafening, though). Play with and stroke your pet while you play the tapes, so he/she will associate baby crying with good feelings).
- Let your pet investigate the new baby furniture. (It can always be wiped off later.) Play with and caress your pet during these times as well.
- Don't paint the nursery, install new carpet and bring in new furniture all at once. Remember, pets, especially cats, hate change! But, they will adjust if you go slowly.
- To dissuade your cats from sleeping in the baby's crib, set up empty soda cans in the crib with a few pennies in each. When your kitties jump in and knock over the cans, they'll be startled by the noise.
- If you have a friend with a baby, invite them over so that your pet can get adjusted to the sight and sound of a baby. Caress and play with your pet while your visitors are present.

- The closer the due date, the more important it is to maintain your regular routines with your pets.
- Do not run out and de-claw your kitty! Cats only scratch when they feel they are in danger, so de-clawing is unnecessary. De-clawing is also traumatic and painful for cats (for more info, please visit www.pawproject.org). Cats with claws do fine around babies and children. They are curious animals, so they'll often come close to investigate, but that's all.

WHEN THE BABY COMES HOME

- Feed your pet his favorite meal.
- Try to give your cats and dogs a little extra attention after the baby arrives.
- When your pet is calm, let her sniff your baby and the baby's things. She will not harm the baby - she's just curious. Try to remain calm yourself, because if you are nervous, both the pets and your baby will pick up on it. Also, if your pet is reluctant, don't force her to sniff the baby. She'll come around when she feels that it is safe.
- Say your pet's name often when tending to the baby. That makes the pet feel like a part of the family and thus makes him or her more secure.
- If your pet runs away from the crying child, let him go. He'll come around eventually. Always talk to the pet in reassuring tones.
- If you play with your pets, do it as often as possible now to let them know that everything is the same as before, and they are still loved.
- When you're nursing, your cat or dog may sleep nearby because he may pick up on the feeling of contentment in the room.
- If you're worried about the cat trying to snuggle with the baby, get a net that covers the crib or cradle. These nets, available at baby supply stores, are called Crib Tents.
- If the kitties start spraying, be patient. A little extra attention may cure this behavior.
- If the problem persists, contact your veterinarian. Your kitty may be severely stressed out over the new addition and perhaps your vet can suggest something to help.
- B vitamins (found in brewer's yeast tablets), and vitamin C (you can add a liquid or paste to their food) can be beneficial for cats in stressful situations. These vitamins are available at most pet supply stores.

AS THE CHILDREN GROW UP

- Children learn how to treat pets by following your example. Treat the family pets with love and respect, and your children will, too!
- Show your children how to hold and pick up kitties. If and when they hold or grab a kitty improperly, get the child to let go very gently and demonstrate the right way.

- Show your children how to softly stroke your pets. Caressing the cat or dog will calm both your child and the pet! Show how to pet the cat or dog with an open hand. Use only one hand to pet because two hands might make the cat or dog feel trapped.
- Loud or noisy toys can be terrifying for cats and dogs. Explain to your child why these toys must not be played with next to the family pet.
- Keep the litter box away from the child. You might consider buying those gates available at baby supply stores. A litter box with a hood might give the kitty a little privacy from the child.
- Keep the child out of the pet's food and water. Don't let the baby bother the cat or dog when they are eating. It may cause your pet to start eating a lot less!

Think twice before giving up your furry feline or canine baby for your human baby. They are all helpless in this world!

A fact sheet with additional suggestions is available on the Best Friends website, at <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/allpets/petsandbabies.pdf>

What booklets or handbooks are available?

Question from Kerry and Peggy:

Our shelter does more than half of our 2000 adoptions out of area PETsMARTs. Naturally, the staff relies on us to provide as much advice and assistance to customers as possible (and we rely on their dog trainers to help dog people, so it's a nice arrangement). With a different volunteer answering the calls and in-person questions every day, I have tossed around the idea of a quick reference guide book designed initially for animal care. With one volunteer on site answering calls and questions, cleaning cages, tending to the cats, and processing adoptions, its difficult for anyone to remember all the things to tell or discuss with someone seeking help (whether its a good Samaritan "surrender" or an owner-possible-relinquishment).

I would like to model it after a flipbook with tabs (litterbox problem tab, having a baby tab, moving tab (with moving tomorrow vs. moving next month) with a kind of chart to roadmap the dialogue for each area.

I hate to reinvent the wheel. I was wondering if you know anyone who has one that they would be willing to share. Or perhaps you have some ideas on how to tackle this idea.

Also, has anyone developed a handout or booklet that can be given to new adopters on the best way to introduce a new shelter pet into a home with existing dog(s), cat(s) and/or small children?

Response from Best Friends Network:

A quick reference guide is an excellent tool to help ensure each volunteer has easy-to-access information when responding to the public. Here in the Best Friends Network office, we have a handbook we use as a starting point for addressing the most common types of requests we receive. In addition, we've compiled a large resource library with information about everything from how to report animal abuse to how to find homes for special needs animals. We would be happy to share our handbook and resources with you. If you would like copies of these resources, please send your request to <mailto:bfnetwork@bestfriends.org>.

I would also suggest that you visit the **You and Your Pets** section of the Best Friends website, <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/petcare/>. There you will find printable fact sheets on a variety of health, behavior and general pet care topics including introducing a new pet to your existing pets.

We're honored to share our resources with anyone who might benefit from the information. Thanks for helping the animals in your community!

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

First, Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org) sponsors a great program at the Denver Dumb Friends League (www.ddfl.org) that might just fit your needs.

Also, the ASPCA also has a fabulous set of behavior tips – www.asPCA.org.

However, we have been working on the issue of behavior hotlines for a while now in the Shelter Smart Program at Wisconsin Humane Society (www.wihumane.org).

What we have found is that compliance is incredibly low with the information imparted to callers over the phone. The clients focus on one or two small “fixes” and try them once or twice, and then relinquish feeling as if they have now tried ‘everything’ and failed. They are not lazy, and they DO LOVE THEIR ANIMALS. They just truly feel they have tried it all. I can not tell you the number of calls I get from pet owners across the country who call me desperate because they have ‘tried everything.’

What we found to be more effective is a tier process. When the client calls for help, they are asked for a general description of the issue. If it is aggression, they are immediately sent to the Behavior team for a one-on-one appointment with a behavior specialist. In your case you would immediately send them to a Certified Pet Dog Trainer (CPDT) or ideally a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB) in your area. If it is not aggression, they are sent via fax, e-mail or snail mail, a set of information on dealing with that

particular problem. A follow-up call a day or so after the information is received helps to cut off the “I tried it all.”

Sounds like a bit more work, and it is; but compliance increases, which means fewer animals entering your facility and more staying in loving homes!

When indoor animals become outdoor animals

Question from Pam:

My adult daughter Jackie has just been diagnosed with Lyme disease. She's now on antibiotics for 3 weeks. She & her husband & two little girls (ages 1 and 4) live surrounded by cornfields and much long brush and prairie grasses.

Big problem though: They have two wonderful cats. For years indoors only, but for the past year indoor/outdoor. The kitties are de-clawed. My daughter is panicked for the girls and is so afraid that they will get Lyme, too, that she has said she is going to make both cats outdoors only. This would be a death warrant. There are raccoons, possums, coyotes, plus traffic. The two cats would have no way to defend themselves and I fear it would be only a matter of time before the worst happened.

I have told Jackie that the solution is to make the cats indoors again. She says she is tired of litter, cat hair, etc, etc. I know she is very tired, scared and not thinking right. So I have to have my facts straight here in order to be an advocate for the cats.

What I need to know is how likely is it that the cats are bringing deer ticks into the house? If they are treated with Frontline/Revolution, is it possible that they still are? I have told Jackie that it is highly unlikely that the cats are bringing ticks into the house and that her bites were probably obtained outside when she was clearing brush from the garden areas.

I need help in being sure that these cats are not turned out. They would not have a chance. The little calico especially, who absolutely loves the girls & is shy. This breaks my heart.

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

I am going to leave the specifics regarding Lyme disease to the experts, and focus instead on the bond.

I am so sorry that you and your family are dealing with these issues. I can imagine that your daughter just feels overwhelmed and is unsure of how to deal with these issues. We often get upset with folks who

just, “can’t take it anymore.” We think to ourselves, “I would never give up an animal…” but it is important that we help develop interventions for them that will work for their lifestyles--and not necessarily ours.

It sounds like Jackie has a lot going on in her life right now. And obviously there is something lacking in the bonds she has with her cats as well. Relinquishment often occurs when outside stressors break an already weak bond. There was a recent study that found that many people that relinquish a pet to a shelter because they are moving actually take other pets with them – leading one to believe that moving was not the issue for relinquishment, but instead a poor bond.

Can you find ways to help Jackie improve the bond? You might begin by finding out a little more about her relationship with the cats – what does she enjoy about them? What would she miss if they were gone? I would include the four year old on the conversation as well.

Jackie might just feel she must do **something**. If this is the case, instead of becoming the adversary, why not help her come up with a solution that would be at least tolerable for all?

Let us first begin with the worst scenario – that she insists that the cats become “outdoor” cats. There are a few very good cat fences – and maybe she would be interested in having them have access to one or two rooms in the home, and then the fenced cat area. It would be important that the fence be predator proof, and that they did have access to some sort of indoor area (depending upon the weather where you live), ideally with access into a portion of the home.

I am not sure of the budget in the family, but what about having a cat sitter come by 3 times a week to brush the cats and do a good whole box change on the litter?

By developing strategies that will work for the individual, we can help keep pets in loving homes.

Response from Best Friends Network:

Let's start with your question about the likelihood of the cats bringing the ticks into the house. We posed your question to Dr. Mike, one of our staff vets, and this is what he had to say:

"It is very unlikely that the cats are bringing in the deer ticks, especially if they are on Frontline. It is possible, just unlikely. The best thing to do is to examine the cats nightly to make sure there are no ticks, and to examine the children. Unless the children do not go outside, they are a thousand times more likely to get ticks from outside than from their cats."

We agree with you that the best solution to the problem would be to continue to treat the cats with Frontline/Revolution and keep them indoors.

This brings us to the next issue, which is outdoor cats that have been de-clawed. De-clawing leaves cats without one of their primary defense mechanisms and impairs their balance and ability to climb. This is aside from the fact that in certain cats, it may leave psychological scars that translate into behavioral problems.

If you would like more information about de-clawing and alternatives to it, these two web pages are very helpful: The Paw Project at: www.pawproject.com/html/faqs.asp and the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights at: www.avar.org (search for de-clawing)

If your daughter is determined to make these outdoor cats, then she may want to consider a cattery. An outdoor enclosure can be a wonderful haven for a cat. Cats love to enjoy fresh air and watch birds, bugs, and other animals. A cattery provides a way for a cat to do so without danger of being attacked by another animal, struck by a car, lost or stolen. Catteries can be made with a variety of materials and constructed in a range of shapes and sizes. They can be freestanding or attached to a house or garage, inexpensive or higher end, plain or fancy, bought or built.

There are a few things to consider when building or buying a cattery:

- Although you can build a short cattery, cleaning and spending time in the cattery will be much easier if the cattery is a standard 6 feet tall.
- The cattery will need to have a door to the outside so you can access it for cleaning, maintenance, emergency care, etc.
- The cattery will need a top on it - not necessarily a roof, but something to keep the cats in and everything else out. Chain link, hardware cloth, or even strong shade cloth, securely attached to the sides, should suffice.
- The cattery will need a firm base (hardware cloth at least) on the floor, to keep the right animals in and the wrong animals out.
- Use the vertical space. A cattery does not have to be large, but it will make a huge difference if you provide logs, shelves, etc., for your cat to climb and perch on. Not only does it make better use of the space, but most cats LOVE being up high!
- Provide a litter box. This isn't always necessary if the cat has access to a box in the house, but even so, many cats prefer to use the great outdoors. Even if your cat doesn't consistently use the litter box, make sure one is available. The box will need to be sheltered, either with a hood, or with some boards or shelves.

- Provide enough food and water. Again, you'll need to shelter the food and water area. If you have ant or bug problems, look into bug-proof food dishes. An outdoor cat needs more food to keep warm, especially during the winter.
- Provide a shady area so your kitty doesn't get too hot in the summer.
- If you live in a cold climate, provide a cat house, or access to a heated room or garage.
- Enrich your cat's environment. Provide logs or posts for scratching, hang bird feeders nearby (but not in) the cattery, plant a tray of cat grass.

Anything you can do to make the environment more interesting will improve your cat's quality of life.

Be creative! You can make the cattery a nice place for your cat to hang out, and a pleasant place for you to visit.

Instructions for Building an Inside/Outside Cattery

(Prepared by Faith Maloney, Director of Animal Care here at Best Friends):

For the inside room(s) of the cattery you can use one or more utility sheds. Many lumberyards or home improvement stores have these. They come in several standard sizes 8' X 8', 10' X 8', 10' X 12', or some places will custom make any size you like. If they are putting the shed together for you, make sure that they insulate under the floor during construction and that the insulation is covered by strong plywood before it is erected on your site. This is to stop rodents or other critters from using it as nesting material.

You will most probably want to insulate the inside of the shed(s) as well, and this can be done on site. Also, if you want to have water and power in the cattery, you will need to have those installed before you insulate the structure.

Cover the insulation with wallboard or paneling and put a good quality vinyl on the floor. Then add shelves and play areas for the cats and cupboards for food and cleaning supplies. If you are using water inside, you will need a sink, plumbing, a water heater, and the necessary drainage.

For the outside, you can go back to the lumberyard or home improvement store and purchase ready-made chain link panels designed for dog runs. They come in standard sizes. 6' X 12', 6' X 6' and 6' X 6' with a gate.

Put together as many as you like. Start by securely attaching the panels to the outside of the shed building. Add each section until you have the desired length. The width will be determined by the width of the shed.

Most people want to secure the bottom of the panel to a strip of either strong fencing material or hardware cloth to stop the cats from getting out or predators from getting in.

Dig a trench around the bottom of the panels on the outside about 18 inches deep. Cut your wire to around 2 feet in length. Place one part of the fence in the ground and then attach the other part to the panel with strong galvanized wire. Re-fill the trench with dirt. This will create a strong seal along the bottom outside edge of the panels. Rocks or bricks alone can become dislodged, so a buried wire seal is highly recommended.

Use chicken wire or hardware cloth to create a roof for the outside cattery. Use strips of 2' X 4' lumber to support the wire as necessary. If you live in a severe climate you may want to use a solid plywood roof.

Put shelving, plastic furniture, cat trees or whatever you want in the outside play area. Sit back and enjoy your cats.

Building plans are also available from Just4Cats at: <http://www.just4cats.com/>.

You can get more ideas for enclosures from the following sites, which have photos of what others have done: <http://www.geocities.com/holmescahy/outdoorenclosure.html>
<http://www.animalnetwork.com/cats/enclosure.asp>

You can order a kit for a cattery from C&D Pet Products at: <http://www.cd pets.com/enclosure.html>

If you have a fenced yard, you might also consider "cat fencing" - attachments for standard fences that prevent escapes and intrusions. Check out this website: <http://www.catfencein.com/>

A free-standing option is at <http://www.purrfectfence.com>

Regardless if Jackie decides to make them outdoor cats or to try the option of the cattery, the cats do need love and affection.

Seperation anxiety destroying home--and marriage!

Question from Linda:

A little over a year and half ago, I adopted a sweet (previously abused) lab mix. He had been moved from one shelter or home after another.

When inside the house alone, Chance suffers from extreme, destructive separation anxiety (destroys the house trying to get out to be with us).

When outside the house when we're not home, he goes into panic mode at the first sign of thunder, even though he is on pricey medication prescribed by an animal therapist. The meds have calmed him but have no affect on his panic attacks due to thunder. He goes into a kind of psychotic state (very glassy eyed, doesn't see or hear us.) He'll jump our 6 foot, wooden fence, then return to chew the front door and window trim trying to get in.

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

Linda – first let me give you a huge pat on the back, and a shoulder to lean on. The problem that you are working through with your dog (never mind the husband issue!) can be very stressful and trying. Your bond with your dog is tremendous.

In an earlier post I discussed how I would not jump to psychotropic meds. Now I am going to strongly recommend them. You state that you have the dog on some sort of medication, but I am not sure what has been prescribed. There has been some positive research on the combination of some particular psychotropics to decrease separation anxiety.

We do know that crating can be detrimental to the issue you are dealing with – and that leaving a pet outside will only cause damage to the outside of the home (and the horrible potential of losing your pet) as opposed to the inside.

We need to address the anxiety at its cause. We do this through a combination of drug therapy and behavior modification. It is a long process, and one that involves a lot of work from the guardians, but it can produce great results – most of the time.

There is no blanket answer that will work for everybody. I truly wish that behavioral care was that easy for both our pets and our relatives, but it is not. It is important to develop a plan that works for the individual, based on their needs and the animal's psychology and physiology.

Until you can meet with a behaviorist, I suggest you keep the dog in daycare, hire a pet sitter, work on rewarding him for remaining calm, and ignore any anxiety at all. This is certainly compounded by the obvious tension in the home. It is vital that you work together as a team. What if you and your husband choose a goal date? Maybe by September there will be a significant decrease in the dog's behavior.

Thank you for your question. I am truly sorry to hear about your situation. I realize this must be a very stressful and difficult time for you and your family. But how wonderful of you to open your heart and home to a homeless shelter dog!

Response from Best Friends Network:

While many shelter pets may turn out to be the perfect lady or gentleman from day one, it is more likely that they will take a little while to adjust to new surroundings and routines. Behaviors like chewing, digging and separation anxiety are just as common in dogs who come with a fine pedigree from a pet store or breeder as they are with mutts who have been rescued. Most behavior problems can be straightened out with patient and CONSISTENT application of a few simple training techniques.

"Separation Anxiety" is the term used to refer to a serious condition in which dogs go into an absolute panic when left alone. Separation anxiety, which can occur in any breed and at any age, is one of the most common reasons why dogs are euthanized or given up by their owners. Dogs with separation anxiety may bark incessantly, chew or dig (particularly at doorways and windows), and urinate or defecate in the home (even when housebroken). In some cases, these dogs even injure themselves in their attempts to escape the home. It is important to distinguish between a dog who truly suffers from separation anxiety and one who is just bored, not housetrained, or destructive.

Dogs with separation anxiety are not just being "bad" or trying to "punish" you for leaving them. They have what amounts to an anxiety attack when left alone, and they cannot control their own behavior. Punishing a dog for panicking in your absence only makes the problem worse, because it increases the dog's anxiety. It is important to remember that dogs are social animals. Any dog who is alone 8-10 hours a day, nearly every day, may begin to exhibit obsessive behaviors that may or may not develop into separation anxiety.

Generally, the only real option is to work out the problem within your household. Given this behavior, it is unlikely that you will be able to find a new home for Chance.

In most cases, separation anxiety is preventable and responds well when treated. And although separation anxiety is very disturbing for both you and your dog, there are several steps you can take to correct or at least **MINIMIZE** the behavior. A big part of working through separation anxiety with your dog

will be adjusting the way you and your family relate to Chance, particularly when leaving and returning to your home.

There are several simple techniques available to desensitize Chance to the triggers that cause his separation anxiety and to break the cycle of Chance's escalating anxieties, specifically during thunderstorms and fireworks. However, none of them provide an "overnight" solution to this problem and it is going to take some time and commitment on your as well as your husband's part!

Many dogs have a fear of loud noises, such as thunder, firecrackers, and cap guns. Often, a dog will try to run from a frightening sound or, if unable to run, will become destructive trying to escape.

If you know that a storm is coming, turn on some music or your TV to muffle the sound of the thunder. Create a safe place in your home for the dog. Let your dog show you where: If he goes to a favorite spot, make a nice bed there. Encourage him to rest there with you and, if he does relax, offer him a food-filled Kong or bone. Allow him to leave that spot and return to it if he wants.

As the thunder gets louder, he may not be able to stay relaxed with his treat. You can try to play a favorite game with him or hand-feed him a really special treat. If he does not calm down, just be with him, but don't reassure him. When dogs are frightened, you may reinforce fearful behavior by providing reassurance.

For more information and tips on desensitizing your dog to loud noises please read our fact sheet at: <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/dogs/fearofthunder.pdf>

"Doggie day care" a few days per week is a very good idea while working on the problem. If that gets too expensive, perhaps you could arrange to have a pet sitter or a neighbor spend time with Chance any time you are away during the week or at nights.

Many people find the best way to go is to consult with someone who specializes in behavioral issues, which it sounds like you may have already done. I am including some information here that you might find helpful. Here are the options we suggest:

Consult an animal behaviorist. An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior by considering the animal's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help you understand the way animals learn, and how you can work specifically on the behavior problem to control and/or correct it. You can ask your vet for a local referral or

visit the Animal Behavior Society website at:

http://www.animalbehavior.org/Applied/directory_cert9_97.html

Work with a trainer. A trainer works differently than an animal behaviorist. In most cases, a behaviorist is more appropriate for help with a serious behavior problem. If no animal behaviorist is available locally, and you want to work with someone in person, check out the programs of local trainers. Trainers vary in their experience, services, and training techniques. Make sure that you are comfortable with the person you'll be working with. Information on choosing a trainer, and a directory of trainers certified by the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) can be found at <http://www.apdt.com/trainers-and-owners/trainer-search/choosing-a-trainer.htm>

Call a behavior help line:

- ASPCA Companion Animal Services Behavior Help Line (New York), 212-876-7700, ext. 4357.
- San Francisco SPCA Behavior Help Line (California), 415-554-3075. You may leave a voice-mail message 24 hours a day. Within 48 hours, a behaviorist will return your call (collect) or they will send you written information.
- University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Clinic, 215-898-3347. If the clinic is not open at the time of your call, their recorded message will give you their call-in hours for the week.
- Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Clinic (Massachusetts), 508-839-7934. Offers consultations for a fee.

Consult your veterinarian. Your veterinarian may be a helpful resource for you, since some vets have experience with behavioral issues. If you use a holistic vet, he/she may be able to recommend some alternatives to drugs as possible treatment for the problem behavior. You could also ask your vet to consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist at one of the university behavior clinics, such as Tufts University.

Consult an animal communicator. Generally, if you work with an animal communicator on separation anxiety, you will also need to work with a behaviorist or trainer. You will find a list of communicators at Penelope Smith's online directory. They're listed regionally and the website also includes some information on what to expect from an animal communicator. Here's the URL:

<http://www.animaltalk.net/consultlist.htm#>

Visit our Best Friends Members and Pets Forum. The Pet Health and Behavior bulletin board on the Best Friends website may be able to help you. Dog trainer Mary Swinyer is available to answer questions. Click on the following link and scroll down to the Pet Health and Behavior link: at

<http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/forums>. There you can also exchange views and ideas with other members who may have been through a similar situation with their dog.

We also recommend the following books:

- "Second-Hand Dog: How to turn yours into a First-Rate Pet" by Carol Lea Benjamin
- "If Only They Could Speak" by Dr. Nicholas Dodman.

These books describe many of the drug and behavior modification therapies that are available to treat behavioral issues.

In addition, there are excellent chapters in each of the following books that deal specifically with separation anxiety:

- "Choosing a Shelter Dog" by Bob Christiansen
- "Dogs are from Neptune" by Jean Donaldson
- "The Dog Listener" by Jan Fennell

For more information on separation anxiety and fear of thunder, please go to our website at <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/petcare/dogs.cfm>.

We truly hope you'll be able to work through this problem with your dog and we wish you the best of luck!

Oops! I forgot I was housetrained!

Question from Sabrina:

We adopted two dogs, 2 and 5 years old, from the humane society and animal shelter. We moved to a new home and they both are going to the bathroom on the carpet, so we have them out side but we hate that. What do we do? We even take them out every hour or so. Thanks!

Response from Best Friends Network:

Thank you for your eagerness to help your dogs work through this problem so they can continue to be part of your family. I understand your frustration and will be glad to offer some suggestions. Since the specifics of the situation are vague (unknown: dogs' ages, gender, spayed/neutered, etc.), I'll provide you with some general information and options.

Since it sounds like both dogs were housebroken prior to the move, this is most likely a behavioral issue rather than a housebreaking or medical issue; although, a physical exam by your veterinarian is always a good place to start to rule out any medical conditions which could cause the inappropriate elimination.

Once a medical condition has been ruled out, it may be a good idea to do some troubleshooting. For example, after my most recent move, my elderly Golden Retriever started urinating inside. She would go to the dog door but wouldn't use it. The issue was two-fold. She not only had a urinary tract infection, causing frequent urination, but she was also arthritic; thus, hesitant to use the wooden steps on the other side of the dog door. The problem was quickly remedied with antibiotics and a dog ramp.

Since you moved into a home with carpeting, your dogs may smell the scent from a previous animal. If another animal soiled the floor, it is likely that your dogs think it is okay to do the same. Therefore, eliminating the scent is the first step in dealing with this issue and an enzymatic cleaner will help to neutralize and dissolve the odor. In some cases, this action alone is enough to eliminate the problem. If the problem persists, continue to eliminate the odors with an enzymatic cleaner and consider following the advice from Sherry Woodard of Best Friends' "Urine Marking in Dogs" article (<http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/pdfs/dogs/urinemarking.pdf>):

For additional information on this topic, you may want to review some of our online resources at: <http://www.bestfriends.org/theanimals/petcare/dogs.cfm>.

Also, Dr. Nicholas Dodman's book, "Dogs Behaving Badly" covers this topic in a chapter titled "Urination Problems".

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

This is one of those questions that we really need much more information – the breeds, gender, of the dogs is very important – as well as some other information. But without that, just some basics:

1. Carefully pull a corner of the carpet up to check for old urine stains on both the bottom side of the carpet, and on the floor below. It may be that you will need to replace one or both. Also – use a blue light (available from many carpet cleaning places and pet stores) to check for urine in other parts of the home.
2. Whether or not there is urine from another animal, your dogs might simply have learned the rule “urinating on the carpet in the new home is ok.” Below you will find some ways to teach them the rule they knew in your old house.
3. You say they are urinating on “the carpet” – if that is in one room, fence it off with baby gates so they can not have access while you are re-training them.

4. Let's get these guys some good enrichment. Moving can be very stressful for dogs as well as humans. I would be sure they eat their meals out of a buster cube or other feeding device, and would make sure they have something that they like to gnaw on – for at least an hour a day.
5. There is a great method called the umbilical cord method. It sounds like there is more than one of you in the home so you can each umbilical a dog. You will keep them on a buckle collar and leash – attached either to your belt loop or ankle (if you have good balance). That way you can keep an eye on them much easier.
6. You will need to retrain them – you can not do this if they are outside. They must be in – and must learn that going potty outside feels good – and inside does not. Keep a penny can to shake when they “assume the position” inside - and much more importantly – get a yummy special something (I go to the butcher and get the little fatty pieces that they cut off...) for when they relieve themselves outside.

It will be hard work for about 2-3 weeks, but assuming they were house-trained before the move, you should be able to retrain them quickly.

Turning a turn-in around

Question from Brian:

I work at the front counter in admissions, and we also receive phone calls from the public. When they call about relinquishing an animal, they often have a mentality that there's no going back, they've tried everything, they've had it, and that if we don't take it they're going to shoot/dump the animal. They're in a desperate state of mind. Is there any key phrases or things we can say to calm them, help them realize they do have options, and buy the animal a little time?

Response from Dr Emily Weiss:

I understand your frustration. When I conduct shelter consults I often take some extra time just to sit in the intake area to observe the folks relinquishing animals. What I see is two things: either a client that is absolutely in tears, or someone who as managed to emotionally detach before coming to relinquish.

There has been some fascinating research regarding relinquishment as of late. It appears that most relinquishers go through a long process before making the decision to relinquish. They have reached out for help (often in the wrong places), and battled their emotions. By the time they contact the shelter, they have already made their decision, and have shut down emotionally.

So does that mean all hope is lost? Not by any means. What it means is that we must be proactive in our communities. We need to be the ones they call not when they are ready to relinquish, but when they

first have a problem. We need to begin developing behavior departments, or relationships with certified trainers. Unfortunately there are lots of people out there that call themselves “experts” and will give some pretty horrific advice. Ask 10 people what to do if the dog urinates in the home, and you are likely to get 20 incorrect answers!

By developing programs that are available, accessible, and known in the community, we can help to break the cycle – not by trying to change their mind once they have hit that brick wall, but instead much earlier in the process.

Response from Best Friends Network:

Thanks for your excellent question. We know firsthand how frustrating it can be when you are really trying to help someone and they don't appear to be listening to your suggestions or are unwilling to try them.

We've found that often just listening to someone, agreeing with them (when appropriate), and when possible, personalizing the situation can help. By personalizing the situation, we mean to let the caller know that you really do understand what they are going through as your cat or dog did or does the same thing. Letting them know that they are not the only ones with a behaviorally challenged animal can go a long way. Of course also tell them how you were able to get your animal to overcome the undesirable behavior or how you cope with it.

Sympathy goes a long way. We begin many of our e-mail responses with the following phrases:

- I am sorry to hear about your situation.
- I sincerely empathize with your situation. This must be a very difficult time for your family.
- Behavior problems can be challenging, and there are many things you'll need to consider.
- Older animals can be difficult to place. It's too bad - many people don't realize the peace and pleasant company a mature pet provides.

When we are not able to take and accept an animal we try to explain why; because we do not euthanize to create space, we are limited in the number of animals we can accept. One of the ways in which we guarantee our residents a good quality of life is to take in animals who are likely to do well at the sanctuary, and to not take in more animals than we can care for.

We often have success in convincing people to board their animals for a short period while they consider their options by using language such as "you are your pet's best chance of finding a good new home" or "your pet is counting on you to help him resolve this problem."

In any case, try not to let threats to shoot or dump animals be the deciding factor as to whether you can accept them. It is unlikely that someone who has taken the time to call will carry out the threat. After all, they called you for help, which does show some commitment to the pet, and taking in more animals than you have the space or means to care for hinders your ability to care for the animals that are already in your shelter.

Member Comments

Comment from Laura about biting cat returned twice:

As stated, it's hard to know what's going on without more information. Was the cat fostered? Did he bite anyone in the foster home? Was it a bite out of irritation, or maybe just a nip?

If he's a young adult male, who was stray or didn't have much human interaction in his home, and was recently neutered, he may still be a little too boy-sterous, not ever being taught his manners (limits), when dealing with humans. An experienced foster home can teach him these things and give him time to settle down following the neuter, and you'll have more information about his personality when it's time to find an adoptive home.

Also, if they're bringing him back to PETSMART instead of calling you, it sounds as if they don't want an argument.

Comment from Mary about biting cat returned twice:

Unfortunately, not all the pets we try to save are agreeable to being saved. I agree with the liability issue raised by Dr. Weiss with the biting cat. Why pour resources into one cat with obvious issues when you can save several more that don't have issues? Euthanasia is appropriate occasionally.

Comment from Jenn about when indoor animals become outside animals:

I just can't help but to comment on this one. No one who has de-clawed their cats should ever let them go outside unprotected, PERIOD. De-clawed cats can not defend themselves at all, and are completely helpless outside, they can't even climb a tree to get away from dogs, much less defend themselves from wild animals!

Closing comments from forum moderator:

Thank you to the many members who sent in questions and comments for this week's forum! Please stay posted for future weeks on animal behavior and de-clawing.

Transcripts from this and all other forum weeks, including an entire section on Shelter Operations & Animal Care, are archived for easy reference, and are made available to all at <http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/forumarchives.cfm>. Meanwhile, those of you who joined the forum midweek can view the complete transcripts right away at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NMHP/>.

Frequently, members contact us asking for permission to share the information posted through this forum. **The answer is always yes.** We just ask that the source is acknowledged (No More Homeless Pets online forum, hosted by Best Friends Animal Society) and that the web page for the forum is provided (<http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/>). That way they know where to go to find out more!

As always, thank you for being part of the forum, and for everything you do for the animals!

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Kindness to animals builds a better world for all of us.