

Educating owners to prevent canine behavioural problems



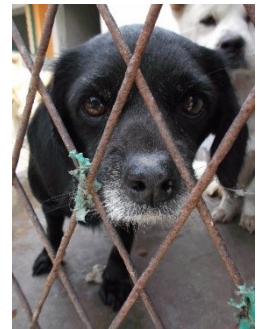
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Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of dogs all around the world are relinquished to rescue shelters by their owners every year. For some owners, a change in their personal circumstances, such as a new job, a divorce, financial difficulties or moving to a new house where pets are forbidden, mean that the dog can no longer live with them.

However, the number one reason for dogs being relinquished by their owners is as a result of behavioural problems. So much emphasis is placed on physical health when training vets and vet nurses but understanding dog behaviour and how to meet those behavioural needs could help enormously in keeping dogs mentally healthy so that behavioural problems do not develop.



Shelters are often frightening and highly stressful places for dogs and their behavioural problems may get worse when in there if they are not treated by a qualified behaviourist. If the dog's behavioural problem is left untreated, then the dog may be overlooked for rehoming. If no active rehoming is done in that shelter, then the dog may spend the rest of its life in there. The table below shows a list of the most common behavioural problem reasons for relinquishment.

Top 10 Behavioral Reasons for Behavioral and Mixed Categories of Relinquishments of 1,984 Dogs to 12 U.S. Animal Shelters^a

<i>Behavioral^b</i>	<i>%</i>
Bites	22.2
Aggressive toward people	17.4
Escapes	16.4
Destructive inside	15.3
Destructive outside	15.3
Disobedient	13.5
Problems between new pet and other pets	12.9
Aggressive toward animals	11.3
Soils house	9.5
Vocalizes too much	7.7

Salman, M. D., et al. (2000). "Behavioral Reasons for Relinquishment of Dogs and Cats to 12 Shelters." *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* **3**(2): 93-106.

How to prevent canine behaviour problems developing

With good socialisation and an understanding of dog behaviour, it is perfectly possible to prevent many of the behavioural problems listed in the above table. Owners must be educated in the most important areas of dog ownership when they bring their puppy in for its primary vaccinations.

The five most common areas due to lack of owner education are:

- Poor socialisation with children leading to aggression and bites.
- Failed recall during off lead exercise leading to never being allowed off lead which can result to frustration.
- Food guarding leading to aggression and bites.
- Separation anxiety leading to destructive behaviour, house soiling and vocalising.
- Poor socialisation with other dogs leading to aggression, bites and problems with other pets in the household.

Please see the resource titled 'Educating owners: CREAD' which is a useful tool that you can use to help educate owners about how they should be treating their puppy or dog in the home.