



Wolf pups nudge the throat of an adult wolf, hoping for a regurgitated meal.
Photo by Monty Sloan

Section 18: Puppy Behavior – Regurgitate

Puppy Behavior/Socialization

The primary socialization period of puppies is between 3 and 13 weeks. This period is critical for development of primary social relationships with humans and other animals. Puppies that are confined during this period are significantly more likely to develop behavioral problems (primarily *fear* and *aggression*) than puppies that are provided a socialization program. Puppies isolated from *conspecifics* (other puppies) until 16 weeks of age, were significantly more likely to display fearful behavior and be aggressed upon by other pups. They were unable to develop a positive relationship with other dogs. Puppies raised in isolation until 16 weeks lose the capacity to exhibit playful behavior toward strangers. Previous research demonstrates that socialization is a critical step in the development of behaviorally healthy dogs.

Puppies with parvovirus die within a few weeks of contacting the virus; puppies with behavior problems die within a few years. Because of the temporal disconnect between acquiring the disease (behavior or parvovirus) and mortality, the need to develop comprehensive socialization programs in puppies is often underestimated. Dogs surrendered to a shelter are most likely to have been initially acquired from a shelter. This data does not reveal whether the relinquishers valued the dog less because they obtained it from a shelter, whether they returned it because of behavior problems which started before they obtained the dog (in the shelter or before entry to the shelter), or some other factor. A recent study demonstrated that puppies who attended socialization classes were more likely to be retained in their homes than those that did not.

Behavioral problems are the primary cause of relinquishment of dogs to shelters. Thus, they are also the leading primary cause of mortality of dogs in animal shelters. Because the signs of behavior problems are not as blatant as parvovirus, behavior problem prevention in puppies is not a primary focus of many animal shelters. Shelters can and should develop socialization programs for puppies which maximize socialization AND protect them from infectious diseases (Segurson, 2007, p. 3-4).

Puppy License:

Dogs also have a timetable in their heads – puppies under 16 weeks of age can usually take appalling liberties with an adult dog. As Dunbar notes, there appears to be a “puppy license” of sorts, possession of which entitles you to be an utter pest without much repercussion. Past the age of 4 1/2 months, the “puppy license” expires as hormone levels shift and psychological changes occur. At this point, adult dogs begin to gradually insist on more controlled, respectful interactions from youngsters (Clothier, 2000, p.6).



Brad Crayne

A puppy muzzle punches the adult Great Pyrenees. This pup is still enjoying puppy license, a period when young canids are allowed to practice rude behaviors toward adult canines, including stealing food or bones.



Barbara Handelman

Pan is reaping the benefits of his puppy license when he places his head and neck over Luca's shoulders. The chin over behavior usually signifies sexual interest, as a prelude to riding up or is a sign of one canid wanting to take control of a situation (perhaps he wants Luca's bone). In either case, if Pan were not still at an age when puppy license prevails, Luca would most likely have growled and pinned him to make the point that Pan is being rude. In this instance, Luca simply ignored him.



Barbara Handelman

Pan does a rude foreleg stab while showing an agonistic pucker, and flared whiskers. Luca is the portrait of forbearance. He continues to chew his toy, and ignores the pup. Notice his slight head turn and ears turned in opposite directions, suggesting some emotional conflict.



Barbara Handelman

Pan barks rudely in Luca's face. Pan is doing an agonistic pucker with lips wide open in the shape of a “C” suggesting he intends to be making a serious threat. Luca is doing a lying down, paw lift, and has slightly lowered his head. Such deference is granted only because Pan's puppy license is still in effect. Luca is chewing on the ball in his mouth. Chewing acts as a self-soothing pacifier, increasing Luca's tolerance.



Barbara Handelman

Pan is really pushing the puppy license boundary with the ultimate in rude behavior – he is humping Luca's head!

Push Off:

Canids use their feet and legs both offensively (see *Paw Thwacks* and *Foreleg Stabs*) and defensively while engaged in *Ritualized Aggression*, *play* and all out attacks. One canid can push an “opponent” away, or lift the opponent off his body with force applied upwards with his feet and front or hind legs.



Barbara Handelman

Eight-month-old Great Pyrenees littermates play during a puppy reunion. They are wrestling and the pup on the bottom does a playful push off.



Seberika

These two playful dogs look like they are performing an acrobatic act. The dog on top has a rounded back which suggests he may be sexually aroused and wanting to mount or ride up on his playmate, who is lying on his back doing a push off to fend off the ride up, while perhaps keeping the game going.



Monty Sloan

Two wolves engage in intense ritualized aggression. The wolf on top has taken control of the interaction. He does many threat behaviors, including an agonistic pucker, and piloerection evident from the arch of his neck all the way down his tail. He is partially standing on and partially standing over his opponent. Although the wolf on the bottom has taken the submissive position of lying on his back – he is demonstrating submissive-aggression, using all four feet to do a push off, a wide gape, hard eyes, and ears pinned back.

Rally:

(Also see *Affiliative Behavior, Greeting Behaviors, Submissive Behaviors*)

A rally occurs when three or more canids gather to enthusiastically greet another animal or human. The greetings may be boisterous, include much licking, *tail wagging, pawing*, and some *active submissive behavior* and/or *appeasement behaviors*. “Occasionally aggressive bouts break out when two wolves with a history of *aggression* come together in the rally, or when an *alpha* wolf appears ‘fed up’ with being the focus of attention” (Klinghammer, 2002, p. 25).

Most people who live in a multi-dog household are familiar with the rally phenomenon. Dogs may rush to the person entering and vie for her attention, by jumping up, whining, *muzzle nudging*, *hip nudging*, and offering some object carried in the canid’s mouth.



Monty Sloan

Wolves gather for a rally.



Barbara Handelman

Dogs rally to a familiar person.

Rebuff:

(Also see *Distance Increasing Behavior*)

During mating season canids choose their sexual partners. Both males and females may rebuff or reject the overtures of another canid if they are not ready to mate or do not choose to mate with the canid making the overture.



Monty Sloan

A female wolf tells her male suitor to back off. An agonistic gape accompanies her lunge toward the male. He is showing avoidance by shifting his weight backwards and to the side.

Redirected Activity:

“Behaviours that are redirected originate with a specific target but transfer to another target” (Sue Alexander, letter to author, August, 2007).

Direction of an activity away from the principal target and toward another, less appropriate target. This is usually best identified when the recognized activity is interrupted by less appropriate target or by a third party, and in contrast to displacement activity, redirected activity appears to be a substitution “in kind” of the interrupted behavior (Overall, 2001, p. 3).

Example: A male dog is aroused by a teaser bitch, and redirects his sexual interest to the handler during semen collection.

Redirected Behavior:

(Also called Remnant Behavior and *Ritualized Behavior*):

“A behaviour can be said to be redirected when it has lost its original function but has kept a common element of it. The *muzzle nudge* is an example of a *redirected behavior* originating from the act of eliciting regurgitation” (Abrantes, 1997, p. 208).

Examples: *muzzle nudge*, *appeasement behaviors*, *pawing*, carrying objects as a *greeting behavior*.



Barbara Handelman

Great Pyrenees puppy does muzzle nudge to Pan, the one-year-old Collie. The muzzle nudge is a remnant of soliciting regurgitation.

Regurgitate:

(Also see *Et-epimeletic Behavior*)

Wolves and other wild canids carry food from a kill back to their young. A wolf can consume up to twenty percent of his own body weight. It is easier for canids to carry quantities of food in their bellies, over significant distances, than it is to carry a similar quantity of food in their jaws. Stimulated by the pups' nudging his mouth or throat (food begging), a wolf will regurgitate food for the pups to eat (Goodman, Wolf Park Behavior Seminar, 2007).



Monty Sloan

Puppies gather around an adult wolf begging for food by nudging and pawing at her.