

Canine Behaviour Assessments. Rob Wright.

Identifying the root cause of behavioural issues in dogs is crucial for effective intervention and rehabilitation. Like humans, dogs exhibit behavioural problems for a variety of reasons, ranging from environmental factors to genetic predispositions. Understanding these underlying causes is essential for implementing appropriate training and management strategies.

- Start by noting the dog's behaviour in various situations. Note down specific triggers, contexts, and patterns associated with the problematic behaviour. Understanding when and where the behaviour occurs can provide valuable clues about its cause.
- Rule out any potential medical issues that could be contributing to the behaviour. Pain, illness, or discomfort can manifest as behavioural problems in dogs. A thorough veterinary examination can help identify and address any underlying health concerns.
- Gather information about the dog's past experiences, including its upbringing, socialisation, and previous training. Traumatic events, neglect, or lack of socialisation during critical developmental stages can have lasting effects on a dog's behaviour.
- Consider the breed and genetic predispositions of the dog. Certain breeds are more prone to specific behavioural traits or problems, Like a Greyhound chasing a hare. Understanding breed characteristics can help tailor training approaches and anticipate potential challenges.
- Evaluate the dog's living environment, including its daily routine, exercise, interactions with family members and other pets, and exposure to stimuli such as noise, changes in routine, or unfamiliar surroundings. Environmental stressors can trigger or exacerbate behavioural issues in dogs.
- Assess the dog's socialisation history and any previous training methods. Inadequate socialisation or inconsistent training can lead to behavioural problems such as fearfulness, aggression, or separation anxiety. Identifying gaps in socialisation and training can guide targeted interventions.
- Evaluate the owner-dog relationship and interactions. Inconsistent discipline, inadvertent reinforcement of undesirable behaviours, or lack of understanding about canine communication signals can inadvertently contribute to behavioural issues. Educating owners about effective communication and positive teaching methods is essential for addressing behavioural problems.
- Recognise signs of stress, anxiety, or fear in the dog's behaviour. Chronic stressors or unresolved anxieties can manifest as a range of behavioural problems, including aggression, destructive behaviour, or compulsive disorders. Identifying triggers and implementing stress-reduction techniques can help alleviate these behavioural issues.

- Some behavioural assessments may include tasks to evaluate the dog's cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, learning aptitude, and memory. These assessments help tailor training approaches and determine the dog's cognitive strengths and weaknesses.
- Behavioural assessments often involve educating owners about canine behaviour, communication signals, and effective training techniques.
- Behaviourists provide guidance on implementing behaviour modification strategies, management techniques, and environmental modifications to address the dog's behavioural concerns.

Understand that behavioural issues in dogs often have multifactorial causes, with interactions between genetic, environmental, and social factors. A holistic approach that addresses all relevant factors is essential for long-term behaviour modification and management.

By carefully assessing these various factors, a personalised training plan is developed to address the dog's specific behavioural issues. This plan may include behaviour modification protocols, training exercises, environmental enrichment strategies, and recommendations for ongoing support and follow-up.

Overall, a comprehensive behavioural assessment provides a holistic understanding of the dog's behaviour and underlying factors contributing to these behavioural issues.

By addressing these factors through targeted interventions and owner education, I aim to improve the dog's behaviour and quality of life while fostering a harmonious relationship between the dog and its caregivers.

Rob Wright. Dog Aggression Specialist.

Sample Report.

Behaviour Report for Max

Client: Amy Steele **Date:** 26th June 2019 **Assessor:** Rob Wright

1. Introduction

This report outlines the behavioural assessment of Max, a 2-year-old Border Collie, presented by his owner, Amy Steele. The primary concerns are excessive chasing of moving objects (cars, bikes, scooters) and the display of potential herding behaviours towards family members.

2. Client History

- **Owner Description:** Amy Steele, 32-year-old single professional, works from home two days a week. Spends approximately 2-3 hours per day with Max, including walks, playtime, and training sessions.
- **Acquisition:** Max was acquired as a puppy from a reputable breeder at 8 weeks old.
- **Living Environment:**
 - Type of dwelling: Three-bedroom house with a fenced garden.
 - Number of occupants: Amy Steele and her 10-year-old son, Tom.
 - Daily routine:
 - 7:00 AM: Wake-up, feeding, short walk
 - 9:00 AM: Playtime in the garden
 - 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM: Work from home, occasional short breaks for playtime and training but mostly resting on a bed nearby
 - 5:00 PM: Evening walk, playtime
 - 7:00 PM: Dinner, evening playtime/cuddles
 - 10:00 PM: Bedtime
- **Veterinary History:**
 - Up-to-date on vaccinations and parasite prevention.
 - No known medical conditions.
 - Last comprehensive veterinary check-up: 1 month ago.

3. Behavioural Observations

- **Problem Behaviours:**
 - **Chasing:** Vigorous barking and lunging at moving vehicles, bicycles, and scooters. Intense staring and fixating on moving objects. Difficulty maintaining focus on the owner in the presence of moving stimuli.
 - **Herding:** Nipping of family members, particularly Tom. Excessive staring and "herding" behaviours towards family members, including attempts to "round up" family members by nudging them with his nose or circling them, tripping them up.
- **Triggers:**
 - Sight and sound of cars, bikes, scooters, and other moving vehicles.
 - Sudden movements of objects or people.
 - Children running or playing.
 - People entering or leaving the house.
- **Consequences:**
 - Increased arousal and excitement.
 - Potential for escape attempts.
 - Risk of injury due to chasing into traffic.
 - Family members feeling startled or uncomfortable.

- Tom sometimes feeling annoyed by Max's behaviour.

4. Behavioural Assessment

- **Prey Drive:** Strong prey drive evident, consistent with breed characteristics.
- **Arousal and Excitability:** High levels of arousal observed in response to triggers, leading to difficulty in maintaining self-control.
- **Focus and Attention:** Difficulty maintaining focus on the owner, particularly in the presence of distracting stimuli.
- **Impulse Control:** Lack of impulse control evident, demonstrated by difficulty inhibiting the chase response.
- **Herding Instincts:** Natural herding behaviours are observed, potentially exacerbated by lack of appropriate outlets.
- **Environmental Enrichment:** Current environment may not be providing sufficient mental and physical stimulation. Max may benefit from increased opportunities for mental enrichment activities.
- **Owner-Dog Relationship:** Strong bond observed, however, unintentional reinforcement of chasing behaviour may be occurring.

5. Differential Diagnoses

- **Separation Anxiety:** While not the primary concern, it is important to rule out separation anxiety as a potential contributing factor, especially given Amy's work-from-home schedule.
- **Fear-Related Behaviours:** Although less likely in this case, we will be looking for any underlying fears or anxieties that may be contributing to Max's reactivity.

6. Recommendations

- **Environmental Modifications:**
 - Completely avoid high-traffic areas during peak hours.
 - Utilise quieter routes for walks as discussed for the next four weeks.
 - Create a stimulating environment at home with puzzle toys, scent work, and interactive games.

The Reasons behind the issues

Border Collies have a strong herding instinct, a behaviour deeply ingrained in their genetic makeup. Bred for generations to work with livestock, they are naturally drawn to movement, which triggers their instinct to chase and control.

This behaviour, while invaluable on farms, can manifest in modern settings as chasing cars, bicycles, or even joggers. Without appropriate outlets and training, this instinct can lead to problematic or dangerous behaviours, as the dog seeks to fulfil its herding drive in inappropriate ways. Understanding & providing an outlet for this instinct is key to managing and redirecting it effectively.

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