

Behaviour Report & Rehabilitation Training Plan

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:**
 - Avoid high-traffic areas during peak hours.
 - Utilise quieter routes for walks as discussed.

- 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.

Rehabilitation Training Plan.

Step 1: Management and Safety

Until Max has developed reliable impulse control, his environment must be managed to prevent him from chasing cars.

- **Lead Management:**

- Keep Max on a long-line leash during walks near roads or in areas with vehicle traffic.
- Use a secure harness to prevent any potential escape.

- **Prevent Exposure:**

- Avoid walking near high-traffic areas during peak hours.
- Use barriers (e.g., fences) to prevent Max from accessing areas where cars are present off-lead.

Step 2: Desensitisation and Counter-Conditioning

Help Max stay calm and neutral around moving vehicles by gradually increasing his exposure in a controlled way.

1. **Distance Work:**

- Start at a distance where Max notices cars but remains calm.
- Reward Max with high-value treats (e.g., cheese or chicken) for calm behaviour when cars pass.

2. **Gradual Decrease of Distance:**

- Over time, move closer to traffic as Max becomes more comfortable and maintains calm behaviour.
- Always reward calmness and focus on you.

3. **Engage-Disengage Game:**

- Mark and reward whenever Max looks at a car calmly, then redirects his attention to you.

Step 3: Teaching Alternate Behaviours

Train Max to perform alternative behaviours that are incompatible with chasing cars.

1. **Focus Command:**

- Teach Max to make eye contact with you on cue (e.g., using the command "look at me").
- Practise in low-distraction environments, gradually increasing the difficulty with controlled car exposure.

2. **Emergency Recall:**

- Continue building on Max's already excellent recall by practising in a variety of settings.
- Use a whistle recall for emergencies, reinforcing heavily with high-value rewards.

3. **Leave It Command:**

- Strengthen Max's "leave it" command with high-value distractions, including a moving object like a rolling ball, before progressing to real-life scenarios.

Step 4: Impulse Control Games

Incorporate games and exercises that enhance impulse control and focus:

1. **It's Your Choice Game:**

- Place treats in your hand and let Max sniff.
- Close your hand if he tries to grab them. Reward him only when he waits patiently or looks at you.

2. **Stay with Release Cue:**

- Practise a "stay" command with increasing distractions, including moving objects such as toys or other dogs. Gradually progress to walking near parked cars and eventually moving cars (at a safe distance).

3. **Impulse Control Game: Traffic Cone Weave**

- Use traffic cones or other markers to create a weaving course.

- Practice heeling through the cones with rewards for staying focused on you. This reinforces self-control while navigating obstacles, mirroring real-life distractions.

Step 5: The Flirt Pole

The flirt pole is a fantastic tool for redirecting Max's energy and providing an outlet for his prey drive in a controlled manner.

... also prevents issues arising from other herding behaviours, improves communication and strengthens your bond.

A toy, that you use to wave around and get your dog to re-focus on you can be a great way to redirect behaviours while training.

The flirt pole, you use one for a little while each morning and you can teach the herding commands to stimulate your dog's mind, it's 'Come by' to follow the pole right, or with the clock. It's 'Away' to go left or away from the clock. 'Lay down', basically means to stop & 'eee-asy' means to slow down.

This is the command you really need though, 'That'll do' which is when the game ends. When you no longer need him to chase or herd, say that'll do and pack up to do something else. It will take around 2 months to get somewhere with 'that'll do' to end his antics elsewhere.

How do I use a flirt pole?

A flirt pole is a dog toy that consists of a long pole with a rope or string attached to one end, and a lure or toy attached to the other end. It's a great tool for engaging your dog in interactive play and providing both mental and physical exercise.

Materials Needed:

Flirt pole

A safe, open space

Your dog's favourite toy or a lure designed for the flirt pole

Choose a Suitable Location: Use the flirt pole in a safe, open area with enough space for your dog to move around without obstacles. A fenced yard or an enclosed space is ideal. Introduce the Flirt Pole: Allow your dog to investigate the flirt pole before starting the play. Let them sniff it and become familiar with the toy at the end of the pole.

Hold the Flirt Pole: Hold the pole firmly, keeping a comfortable grip. Most flirt poles have a handle at one end (to stop it from coming free and hurting your dog) and a string attached to a lure or toy at the other end.

Start Slowly: Begin by moving the lure or toy on the ground in a slow and controlled manner. Encourage your dog to chase it by dragging it along the ground.

Engage Your Dog: As your dog shows interest and starts chasing the lure, keep the movements unpredictable. Change directions, make sudden stops, and mimic the movements of prey to keep your dog engaged.

Capture behaviours: You can say basic commands such as "left," "right," "stop" and "release" (or the traditional herding commands) during the play. This adds an element of training to the activity & causes the dog to think and engage with you.

Allow Catching: Allow your dog to catch and "win" the lure. This provides a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction for your dog. Once caught, give them a moment and then encourage them using your chosen cue like 'drop' to release the lure to continue playing.

Control Intensity: Pay attention to your dog's energy level and adjust the intensity of play accordingly. Some dogs may have a lot of stamina, while others may tire more quickly.

End on a Positive Note: Finish the play session on a positive note. Allow your dog to catch the lure one last time and then put the flirt pole away. This helps create a positive association with the activity.

Safety Considerations: Always monitor your dog during flirt pole play to ensure they don't become overexcited or exhausted. Avoid abrupt movements that could cause injury, and be mindful of your dog's age and physical condition.

Flirt pole play is a fun and interactive way to provide physical exercise and mental stimulation for your dog. It's particularly beneficial for dogs with high energy levels or those who enjoy chasing and catching. As with any play activity, be attentive to your dog's cues and make adjustments based on their individual preferences and limitations.

By incorporating the flirt pole into Max's routine, you can satisfy his need for stimulation while simultaneously reinforcing self-control in exciting scenarios. Pair this with other impulse control games for a comprehensive behavioural improvement plan.

Further suggestions.

1. **Puzzle toys for Mental Stimulation:** Invest in puzzle toys or make DIY versions using household items to provide mental stimulation and prevent boredom. Puzzles challenge your dog to problem-solve in order to access treats or food hidden inside, addressing behavioural issues stemming from boredom or excess energy. Provides mental stimulation and enrichment, encourages problem-solving skills, prevents boredom and destructive behaviour. Alleviates boredom, stimulates cognitive abilities, redirects attention onto positive activities.
2. **Target Training for Focus and Impulse Control:** Teach your dog to touch a specific target with their nose or paw, such as your hand or a target stick. This game helps improve focus and impulse control as your dog learns to follow cues and resist distractions. You can gradually increase the difficulty by adding distractions or distance.
Improves focus and impulse control, strengthens the bond between you and your dog, provides mental stimulation. Addresses impulsivity, redirects attention onto positive behaviours, strengthens obedience skills.

3. **Scavenger Hunt for Mental Stimulation:** Hide treats or toys around your home or garden and encourage your dog to find them using their sense of smell. This game provides mental stimulation, encourages problem-solving, and can help alleviate boredom and anxiety.
Provides mental stimulation and enrichment, encourages natural foraging behaviours, prevents boredom and anxiety. Alleviates boredom, stimulates cognitive abilities, redirects attention onto positive activities.
4. **Balance Games for Body Awareness:** Set up a low balance beam or use a sturdy plank of wood and encourage your dog to walk across it. This game helps improve your dog's body awareness, coordination, and confidence. Start with a wide and stable surface and gradually increase the difficulty as your dog becomes more comfortable. Improves body awareness and coordination, builds confidence, provides mental stimulation. Addresses fearfulness, encourages physical activity, stimulates cognitive abilities.
5. **Toy Rotation for Preventing Boredom:** Rotate your dog's toys regularly to keep them engaged and prevent boredom. Introduce new toys periodically and put away toys that your dog has lost interest in. This game helps maintain your dog's enthusiasm for play and prevents destructive behaviour out of boredom.

Rob Wright. Dog Aggression Specialist.