Helping Client Manage the Aggressive Dog

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Julia Albright, "Helping Client Manage the Aggressive Dog' (July 12, 2014). Veterinary Partners Appreciation Conference (V-PAC).
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Motivations

- Lots: Fear, territorial, resource guarding, predatory, pain, play…
- Fear and anxiety about the target causes aggression in some dogs (usually defensive fight/flight)
- Calm, happy dog is a non-aggressive dog

Plan of action

What you can do in brief GP appointment

Physical and Mental Health
- Exercise needs met?
  - head halters and basket muzzles for safety
- Mental Enrichment?
  - Avoid animal based products
  - Stuffed Kongs, Twist n’ Treats, puzzle toys

For pullers and/or aggressive dogs – head halters

Pullers without aggression

- Head halters
- (Front clip) harness
- Pressure
- Freedom harness
Muzzles

Baskerville

Italian basket muzzle

Tuffie muzzle

What you can do in brief
GP appointment

Physical and Mental Health

- Anything that causes pain or discomfort can increase aggression
- Orthopedic pain
- Neuropathic pain
- Dermatologic discomfort
- Endocrine diseases

Relationship builders

- Understand how animals learn
  - I-C-E principle (immediate-consistent-effective consequences)
  - Poorly executed aversive correction = anxiety
- Discontinue aversive punishment
- See above
- Results in injury to humans
- Suppresses behavior without addressing emotional problem
- Leadership Protocol, Learn to Earn, “say please by sitting,” “nothing in life is free”

Avoidance

- Identify triggers and either avoid or countercondition the triggers
- Avoidances prevents emotion and behavior from getting worse
- Baby gates, muzzles
- Walking at low-traffic times and locations
- Putting dog in bedroom or crate BEFORE visitors arrive
- Not allowing dogs in underground fence to access front/driveway
- Proper approach: don’t space invade or lean over/out dog
Behavior Modification

- Simple can be very helpful
- Dog is acting aggressively to increase distance between itself and the target
- Encourage pleasant association between dog and its target
  - Treats
  - Toy/ball

Other types of behavior modification

- Desensitization
  - “baby-stepping”
  - Staying under threshold for aggression/fear
  - Gradual increasing intensity of stimulus (e.g. distance)
  - Never simple in practice - need lots of coaching for timing and body language to prevent stress

Don’t make it worse!

- Don’t flood animal – expose to stressor at high level and hope dog “gets over it.”
- Don’t assume owners are using common sense
- Dog aggressive to other dogs should not be going to public area (dog park, pet store) unless strictly supervised by professional (and even then very questionable due to safety issues)

Medications

- Maintenance antidepressants first line:
  - SSRIs (fluoxetine, paroxetine, clomipramine)
- Layer PRN medications with caution
  - Trazadone
  - Clonidine
  - Benzos?
- All medications that calm have potential to cause increased agitation in a few individuals
- Act by increasing animals ability to learn… have to teach dog how you DO want him to act

Adjunctive therapies

- Go for it if owner hesitant about “real” drugs
- Zylkene (alpha-casein)
- Anxitane (L-theanine green tea extract)
- Novafit (SAMe)
- Adaptil, Feliway, Nurturecalm pheromones