

The Southern Newfoundland Club



BEHAVIOUR

www.southernnewfoundlandclub.co.uk

Please note that these reference booklets are not intended to substitute the advice of your own veterinary surgeon or specialist and The Southern Newfoundland Club always recommends you visit your vet with any symptoms presented by your dog that may require medical attention. The content of this booklet does not represent the opinions or views of officials, committee or members of The Southern Newfoundland Club. However, we hope that the information provided in this booklet may assist in alerting you to any potential signs of health problems.

UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOUR

Epitaph to a dog

*Near this spot are deposited the remains of one who
possessed beauty without
vanity, strength without insolence, courage without
ferocity, and all
the virtues of man without his vices.*

Much has been written over the years about the wonderful breed that is the Newfoundland. Tales of heroism and companionship, of the dog's special affinity with children, of its willingness and eagerness to please and of course its extremely sweet gentle disposition. It has been said that no other canine breed is a more loyal, trustworthy, gentle and innately intelligent than the Newfoundland.

TEMPERAMENT

Breed standard

UK KC - Exceptionally gentle, docile nature

AKC - Sweetness of temperament is the hallmark of the Newfoundland; this is the most important single characteristic of the breed.

Whilst we would consider the Newfoundland to be a temperamentally sound breed, an ever watchful eye needs to be kept to ensure our wonderful natured dog does not lose its reputation as “The Gentle Giant” of the dog world.

UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOUR

Over the last few hundred years' different breeds of dog were developed to perform specific tasks, whether that be guarding, hunting or herding which have given rise to the difference in appearance and variations in temperament.



BODY LANGUAGE

Posture

Dogs as highly social animals had to develop a system of body positions that allowed them to communicate with other dogs. They use various postures to show among other things:

- Scare off a perceived threat
- Placate other dogs and thereby avoid confrontation
- Initiate play

Belly up - when a dog interacts with others including humans he may roll over on his back and expose his belly. It is the most vulnerable position a dog can put himself in and therefore shows other dogs that they are no threat and do not want any trouble.

Playtime - alongside sleeping and eating, playing is what a young dog likes to do best. It is an important part of their development and social conditioning, improves their fine motor skills, sharpens their senses and is one of the first ways in which they learn what behaviour is socially acceptable. If a puppy plays too roughly with a littermate the playmate will no longer want to play and it will stop or the dam will intervene.

Bowing - the most enthusiastic play signal is the play bow, in which they lower their front end and raise their back end, tail up and wagging. Although dogs who have done something wrong by being overly rambunctious will sometimes give a play bow to let you know they did not mean any harm and only wanted to play. Bowing can also be used in a greeting and usually is a slow lowering into the position which is held for a few seconds.

Calming signals - these signals are used by dogs to show other dogs that they are not comfortable with a situation and are therefore used to stop confrontations escalating. They include lip licking (a quick flick of the tongue up to the nose), yawning, head turning, paw lifting and laying down. They vary in degrees of 'strength' and individual dogs tend to favour certain signals. They are often used when dogs are not comfortable with behaviours their humans are doing and are asking them to calm down and be more polite! Our dogs



TAILS AND VOCALISATION

are incredibly tolerant of human behavior that can be quite rude in dog terms such as hugging, leaning over, direct face or eye contact. Watch how many times your dog yawns, lip licks or turns their head away when you do these things... and they know and trust you!

TAILS

Dogs use their tails as much and probably more than their voices to communicate with each other. As we do not have tails of our own we are basically illiterate when it comes to 'tail speak'. Therefore we make a lot of mistakes when it comes to interpretation. We assume that a dog wagging its tail is friendly, unfortunately this can be as unpredictable as telling the weather by how your dog is sleeping! To understand the tale tails tell and why dogs have these expressive appendages we need to understand what they are really used for and how tail movements and positions tell us what our dog is really thinking; it could be anything from "let's play" to "stand back" or "I'll bite". Dogs use their tails for balance when running and especially whilst cornering; it is used as a rudder while swimming and to provide a means of communication. Since they typically fly high above the body dogs use their tails like flags to send messages at a distance.

Between the legs - When someone feels bad because they have done something wrong, we say he has his "tail between his legs", an expression we defiantly took from our dogs! Dogs who are feeling afraid crouch low and tuck their stationary tails between their legs which says "don't hurt me".

Down and even - happy and relaxed dogs let their tails droop down and just hang even with the body.

Straight up - whether they are happy or not, a high set tail means they are on full alert. It can just be interest in novel stimulus and it is only possible to interpret in conjunction with looking at the dog's whole body posture. For example, if the tail is bolt upright and stationary with the tip of the tail being flicked and the dog's muscles particularly in the front torso, shoulders and face are tense then the dog is most likely giving a threatening posture to the other dog to "stay away".

Wagging - most people interpret tail movement as a positive friendly sign, but some

BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

dogs swish their tails back and forth when they are agitated or aggressive. If you are not paying attention to what the rest of the body is saying you could be in trouble. So you cannot presume a wagging tail is a sign of friendship or a plea for fun. A wagging bottom on the other hand is an unmistakable sign. A dog who wants to befriend and play will stand before you with his tail dropped and his ears and face relaxed and his whole back end, not just the tail, will be wagging fairly quickly or quite vigorously.

VOCALISATION

In addition, vocalisation is another means of canine communication, which can vary between the different breeds. Apart from warning growls and snarls of aggression, dogs will also bark, howl, whimper, whine and yelp. Barking may occur in any situation where the animal gets excited and wants to draw attention; e.g. being fed, greeting owners, playing and generally responding to various noises and sights.

BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

Inappropriate and antisocial behaviour in dogs is an ever increasing problem. When does normal behaviour become problem behaviour?

- Out of context - e.g. collies chasing cars rather than herding sheep
- When the behaviour adversely affects us or other people - e.g. excessive barking
- When the behaviour adversely affects human belongings
- When the behaviour adversely affects the dog - e.g. stereotypic behaviour such as obsessive licking, circling or digging.

There are many possible causes for problem behaviours developing.

• **Health problems** - if there are any significant changes in behaviour, always get the dog checked by your vet to rule out any underlying health problems being the cause. There has been a significant increase in dogs suffering from hypothyroidism which can cause dogs to be depressed, irritable and have muscle soreness.

• **Genetic traits** - stressed, irritable, anxious or fearful dams tend to give birth to puppies with similar characters. Some of this may be the effect of hormones released when a dam is stressed and passed on to the puppies in the womb and some may be the influence of maternal care.



AGGRESSION

- **Lack of socialisation** - puppies reared on puppy farms with little opportunity to socialise with people, and removed too early from their dam and litter mates
- **Instinct** - we all know that, as a breed, Newfs have a strong 'carrying' instinct. Rather than trying to eliminate this instinct, if it is considered to be a problem, try to redirect it into an acceptable behaviour such as carrying a toy.
- **Hormonally triggered behaviour** - both testosterone in dogs and fluctuation of hormones during seasons in bitches can influence behaviour.
- **Emotional triggers such as fear, anxiety, frustration or pleasure** - to effectively change these behaviours you have to identify the root cause and remove the emotion (e.g. reduce the fear) so the dog is in a position to learn and then teach an alternative acceptable behaviour.
- **Poor training**

Aggression

Fear-induced aggression - shown by a dog who is afraid of something in their environment which is a perceived threat. Fear-biting can occur when a dog has no escape (e.g. is tethered or backed into a corner) and is approached by a stranger in a direct manner which is considered rude in dog behaviour. Consequently, the extended hand or face is most often bitten. In particular, a dog raised in an environment without children may be afraid of them because their behaviour (sudden movements and noise) is unlike that of adult humans. Often this behaviour develops because the dogs 'quieter' signals such as the calming signals mentioned earlier are ignored and the dog learns that using these signals does not remove the threat or makes the situation even more threatening (such as an owner punishing the dog). Dogs then begin to show only 'louder' signals and if these continue to be ignored continue to move up the 'staircase to aggression' - this is not always in the same order for every dog but it tends to be barking; lunging; growling; bite; multi-bite/bite and grab. The best way to deal with fear-induced aggression is to work with a qualified dog behaviourist to change your dog's association to whatever is causing the fear and to teach them a more appropriate behaviour.



PREDICTING PERSONALITY

Pain-induced aggression - any dog receiving a sufficiently painful stimulus will respond aggressively. Therefore, attempting to break up a dog fight by hitting and grabbing the dogs may increase the aggression and intensify the fighting. Likewise a dog with painful injuries may respond with aggression when the damaged part is inspected. A dog can also associate pain to a situation it has experienced.

Learned aggression - this type of aggression the dog is taught to show, usually on command. Owners should avoid encouragement of aggressive behaviour in case they are subsequently unable to control the animal. This kind of learned aggression is best left to the qualified experts, i.e. the police.

PREDICTING PERSONALITY

Dogs of the same breed tend to have certain traits in common but you cannot predict with certainty what kind of adult a puppy will grow into. What is possible is to get a sense of a puppy's personality and disposition. Pups that are affectionate and good natured will usually tend to be the same as adults. As mentioned above this can often be influenced heavily by the pup's dam. By the time puppies are 6 weeks old, they will have picked up an incredible amount of knowledge from their mothers about how to behave. The things they learn during this period tend to stick with them. Around 8 weeks is a particularly impressionable age when fear responses develop and any unpleasant event at this time can have a psychologically damaging effect on the puppy. When visiting a breeder, see how the dam (and possibly the sire) interacts with you. Do they make friendly eye contact or stare? Do they show friendly interest in you without being over the top and jumping all over you? Do they enjoy being touched and handled? Check the pup's enthusiasm with a squeaky toy. They should be enthusiastic and eager to play with you and the toy. Most pups will show interest and chase after a thrown toy and will not shy away or be startled by the noise omitted. A pup that is too frightened or nervous to interact may not have the desired personality as an adult.

Dogs are masters at nonverbal communication. They watch our body language and give off plenty of their own. They invariably give off clues when they are feeling threatened, possessive or scared. When we fail to see the subtle signs they are forced to use loud dramatic ones like growling or biting. They learn very quickly if dramatic signs get our attention and this may set a pattern of unwanted behaviour.

PREDICTING PERSONALITY

There is no mistaking the signs of a dog on the point of aggression: a long stare accompanied by a growl and a stiff swish of the tail backwards and forwards. They will usually point their ears forward and raise the hair at the back of the neck; they will also lean towards you. Due to the influence of testosterone, males can be more likely to show signs of aggression as the testosterone increases during adolescence.

Although some breeds have a reputation for being more aggressive, a dog of any breed given the right (or wrong) circumstances can show a flash of temper. The domesticated dog relies on us for just about everything.

It was common a few decades ago for traditional dog trainers to think that dogs lived in hierarchical packs with one alpha who therefore had access to resources (such as food, places to sleep and sex) before the other subordinate dogs in the pack. This thinking was developed from studies of captive wolves in the 1940s and the researcher who originally coined the term “alpha”, David L. Mech, has now, through his subsequent research, dismissed this theory from applying to wolves let alone domesticated dogs (wolf packs incidentally are now considered to consist of a breeding pair, most recent litter of pups and yearling pups).

Recent research conducted at Bristol University (looking incidentally at domestic dogs) has indicated that ‘dominance’ is a relationship between two individual dogs, not a personality trait. Dogs learn through experience with other dogs (and people) which resources are more important to that individual and usually one dog will back down and relinquish access to the resource (unless both dogs are equally uninterested in the resource). Conflict can arise if both dogs are equally interested in resource and not willing to back down or there is no option to escape. Therefore, it will come as no surprise that in different situations the same two dogs could take different roles as ‘dominant’ and ‘submissive’ dependent on the resource involved. Furthermore, this can change over time and be subject to many other factors such as stress and anxiety in the dog.

Traditional thinking can often cause conflicts between dogs and their families. Belief that toys or food should be taken off the dog or relinquished at will often cause dogs to learn that they have to defend these valued resources. A longitudinal study of a multi-dog household showed that dogs have different rules of possession than humans do. Possession only lasts while the resource is in the immediate vicinity of that dog. Therefore, if a dog gets up and walks off leaving a bone it is ‘fair game’ and it is the

IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR PUPPIES

same with a particular sleeping spot. Well socialised dogs who have been raised well will obey these dog rules and there will be no conflict between the dogs. If a dog has learnt that these rules are not obeyed, either by other dogs or humans, then they may start to defend those resources, depending on how important they are to that particular dog.

Puppies get taught these rules as they grow up and adult dogs rarely are aggressive in doing so (at least initially), but will choose to body block or move the resource out of reach of the puppy. If a puppy is persistent they may growl, snarl or air snap to show they mean business. Where puppies are not taught these rules, they can grow into rude adult dogs who try to take things off other dogs and do not learn the boundaries of polite dog behaviour.

Important lessons for a puppy to learn to function as a well behaved adult dog

1. Dog rules of possession - if you have an adult dog and they are unwilling or unable to teach this, then you need to take this role, otherwise allow your adult dog(s) to teach this lesson to the puppy. If you do not have any other dogs in the household, then you can teach this by not allowing your puppy to take any resources off you (you can of course give them to the puppy) and, most importantly, not taking resources off your puppy but instead teaching them a “drop” command, so it is out of their immediate possession and then removing the item (while still obeying dog rules).

2. Interacting politely with other dogs and people - socialisation as a puppy with lots of different breeds, ages and both male and female dogs will help them to learn the rules of polite dog behaviour and make them less likely to make fear associations to other dogs which can lead to problem behaviour. This also applies to all sorts of situations, inanimate objects and people! It is also advisable to teach your dog not to charge up to other dogs head on which enthusiastic (and strong!) dogs are liable to do and which is incredibly rude and threatening in dog body language. “He just wants to say hello” is not a reasonable excuse for rude behaviour from your dog and may well cause an aggressive retaliation from the other dog.

IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR PUPPIES

3. Bite inhibition - this is an incredibly important lesson for any puppy and starts when the puppy is with its dam and littermates. If the puppy bites too hard the other puppy/dam will yelp and interaction will stop. We should ensure that we continue this lesson with our puppies and they will also learn it from continued socialisation with other dogs.

4. Leave and drop commands - essential to ensure the safety of your dog and we all know how Newfs love their food.

5. Walking on a loose lead - no-one likes to be pulled about by a 10–12 stone dog and the easiest way to do this is when your dog is a puppy and by teaching that they only move forward if the lead is loose.

6. To come when called - this is another command which is important for your dog's safety.

7. To cope with frustration - puppies need to learn to respond appropriately to being frustrated and learn to give up and accept situations.

8. Not to jump up or to jump up only on command - you may like your dog to jump up in greeting but as Newfs are big and heavy dogs this is an essential command for the safety of all people who come into contact with them. The best approach to stop jumping up is to get the people to immediately turn their back and step away. No talking and no touching of the dog as this is all attention and rewarding even if you are telling the dog off. This is not always easier with strangers (who especially cannot resist a cute fluffy Newf puppy face) and therefore it can be useful to also teach a dog a “paws down” command where you pre-empt a dog jumping up (often there is a tell-tale dip of the shoulders) and prevent (by looping your fingers into the collar) the dog lifting its paws off the ground at the same time as saying “paws down” and give a reward. It is essential this command is taught as a preventative behaviour rather than asking them to remove their paws after they have jumped up, as they will already have flattened Granny by that point!



ESSENTIAL EARLY LESSONS

9. To limit excessive barking - barking is a self-rewarding behaviour as it releases endorphins which makes the dog feel good and is the dog's way of communicating with other dogs and people. As with people, some dogs are more vocal than others as are some breeds. There are many types of barks and therefore reasons for barking and it is important to always consider why your dog is barking. Excessive barking is often learned but can develop from other types of barking such as guarding barking. There is no one effective way to deal with barking as it is dependent on the type of barking and therefore if you are having problems in this area you will need the assistance of a qualified dog behaviourist to help you resolve it.

However, there are ineffective ways and punishment is one of them. Therefore do not use shock collars or any other form of positive punishment. It may startle the dog and temporarily stop the barking but it does not resolve the cause of the barking and punishment can have long lasting negative effects on the dog.

10. Other commands - there will of course be personal preferences of other important commands. There is no list of "must have" commands but it is important that you are consistent and do not allow your dog to do something as a puppy that you will not allow as an adult. They will not understand why the rules and boundaries have suddenly been changed. Start as you mean to go on with puppies, you do not need to be forceful, just prevent/ignore those things you do not want them to do and teach them kindly those things you do want them to do.

ESSENTIAL EARLY LESSONS

Puppies learn fast and it is essential that you start positive early training that will benefit your puppy and you throughout its life as soon as you have your puppy home. It is better to start early than try and rectify problems or situations later in life. Every puppy needs to be taught good basic manners and have lessons in basic control including responding to its name, to come when called, walk nicely on a lead, sit, down, stay and leave commands, being groomed and allowing you or the vet to examine it. Your puppy needs sensible socialisation and exposure to different situations, these include interactions with adults, children, the vet, adult dogs, other animals, traffic, crowds, travelling in the car/van, music, vacuum cleaners, etc. Introducing these things gradually will avert your puppy from being overwhelmed.

A puppy has a short attention span, so train for short spells on a regular basis. Praise

HELP!

liberally, taking care not to praise it reassuringly for being scared. Interaction with other adult dogs will learn canine P's and Q's, by being put in its place. Be mindful that the adult(s) chosen are temperamentally sound. Most adult dogs are incredibly tolerant of puppies to a point but will tell the puppy off for unwanted antisocial behaviour. Limit play with other puppies and adolescents as they will overstimulate each other, leading to wild behaviour and looking to each other for leadership.

Ask anyone who has had two puppies at the same time (me, more than once!) House rules need to be clear to everyone concerned and be consistently adhered to. Discourage jumping up, mouthing, play biting, barking, chewing anything but toys, begging and mounting behaviour. Do not punish things which have happened due to your lack of supervision. Prevention *IS* better than cure. Dogs are more likely to repeat actions that are rewarded by praise, treats or toys, so use this to your advantage whilst training.

“HELP!”

With any behavioural problem some basic guidelines apply:

1. See the vet and have a physical examination performed to rule out any medical issues.
2. Be realistic and do not assume your puppy will “grow out of” nipping, biting you and being unruly. Problems are easier to control the earlier you deal with them, do not wait until you are afraid of the dog or it has bitten someone.
3. Increase exercise to two 45–60 minutes brisk (so the dog is panting) sessions per day. Dogs that get enough exercise are less likely to have behavioural problems. If your dog is a couch potato then increase exercise gradually. If your dog has any health problems which exercise could affect, speak to the vet. Likewise with a puppy, throwing a ball in the garden and swimming would be better than long walks.
4. Seek professional help from a trainer or qualified animal behaviourist with lots of experience in the area of concern.
5. Avoid any potentially dangerous situations and avoid things that cause an aggressive reaction. If the dog is possessive over toys, do not allow the dog to have free access to them, the same applies to bones and chews. If the problem is food and the food bowl, distract with going for a walk or fetching a ball, while the bowl is removed. If the dog is

FINAL NOTE

fearful of people/strangers, put the dog away in another room before opening the door. Be one step ahead, keep situations as calm as possible.

6. Consistency needs to be practiced by ALL the family. Be prepared to have to work on these problems for the rest of the dog's life.

FINAL NOTE

Achieving a good understanding partnership with your dog will provide one of the most rewarding relationships you will ever encounter. ENJOY!

Jan Groves
Health Coordinator



*Printed by Geerings of Ashford, Kent
on paper from sustainably managed forests*