

The Root of Behavioral Issues in Dogs

An Informational Guide for Pet Owners and People Who Want to be a Pet Owner

Author: Samantha Biggs, owner of Biggs and Littles Pet Spa

Unfortunately there is a lot of lack of knowledge about the basic needs for our pets. A lot of breeds were bred for a purpose originally, and they were selectively bred to have a drive to want and do something useful and meaningful. In today's age there is a common misconception that minimal training is needed for our household pets, and a lot of dogs are left being cheated out of a valuable, fulfilling life.

In a herding breed dog's head, they hold no value to laying on the couch and cuddling. They want to run and herd and bite ankles, it is a part of their natural instinct that was encouraged and bred into them. If you give a cattle dog a job, like a dog sport they enjoy, they get to use the drive that is being left bored and dormant in their minds so at the end of the day they can rest on the couch because their brain has been stimulated.

Most terriers were bred to be efficient pest control. They have a prey drive for small animals, because they were bred to run into dark holes in the ground and pull out rats or other rodents and eliminate them. If this prey drive is not stimulated the brain becomes idle and bored and they will bark at everything. There are numerous online resources about what different breeds were bred for, and what activities you can do to best stimulate their brain so they don't get bored. A bored dog, especially a bored puppy, is a trouble maker.

It's important to understand what breeds were bred for so you can best pick out the breed that works for your lifestyle, and how best to care for your dog. This is a starting place to help get your dog to start to respect, trust and listen to you. The bond we have with our dogs only goes as far as the amount of time you put into their training and the amount you stimulate their brains. There are plenty of breeds out there that are stimulated by caring for their owner, in the category of dogs that make good service animals. But these dogs are trained to be on the lookout and trained for something. A couple examples would be they are trained to alert when there are changes in their owner's blood sugar, or direct their owner away from danger as a seeing eye dog.

If you have a dog already ask yourself, what is their purpose, do they feel like they have a job? What were they bred for and how can I give my dog a sense of purpose that aligns with their natural drive? It can be a lot of little jobs, if you have a child you can teach your pet (if it aligns with what they were bred for) to watch over your children, in the yard they can alert you when there are strangers nearby and to come get you when the child cries. If you have a herding breed you can go to a beginner/for fun agility training course, you can teach them scent work and play hide the bone around the house, you could give them puzzle toys or create puzzle toys. There's affordable versions to all of these options so you don't need to go out and

spend hundreds on training classes, instead watch some youtube videos and build or buy a cheap set of agility jumps out of pvc or something similar.

If you want a dog and are looking for a new puppy, do the research. You may want a German shepherd. Ask yourself how often will the dog be left alone? If they will be left alone for 8-10 hours everyday then how will you make sure to stimulate their brains when you are home? A 30 minute walk everyday can get boring, your dog will eventually ignore you and won't walk on the leash nicely because what is the purpose of this walk? The dog thinks "What is the point? Am I supposed to be sniffing out something? Am I supposed to chase that neighborhood cat or that squirrel? Am I supposed to listen to my owner, they're listening to music or on their phone, that must not be it... Okay lets see what this bush smells like over here! Why is my owner yelling at me to stop pulling? I thought the point of the walk was to sniff and see stuff!"

The dog needs structure, you can't just walk down the road on the leash, if all you do to stimulate your dog is to take them on a walk, then there should be a purpose to the walk. Shepherds, if conditioned and trained at a young age, are amazing at obedience. So you train them to stay in a heel and keep their eyes on you, and now their job is to focus on you and listen to you, now they sit, now they stay, now they come, heel, switch sides, touch your hand with their paw or nose. These should be things implemented into your walk to help actually stimulate your dog and to tire them out. You can't expect your dog not to be filled with anxiety while they are home alone all day and then not give them a task to do and complete.

If that seems like something you won't have the time to learn how to train and have the patience everyday to train, you should be looking at dogs that were bred to be low energy and lap dogs. Like a shih tzu, a king cavalier or a pekingese may be great options for you if you don't have the time to stimulate your dogs every day. These dogs were not bred to be highly loyal, high drive, love the chase type of dogs. There are plenty of breeds out there that may fit your lifestyle a lot better than that german shepherd you wanted.

When you stick a high drive dog in a low drive environment you will almost always have behavioral issues. They may ignore you when you ask them to do something or to stop doing something. They may tear up anything they can in your home. They may bark at everything they hear or see. They are bored, there is little value to their life and the only value they can find is typically going to be things we as owners find frustrating, or view as misbehaving. Maybe they guard their food, that could be because they don't have any other value other than the food. Maybe they get snippy at your husband when he wants to sit next to you, your attention is the only thing that they have to value. Try to bring more enrichment in their lives so that they can find value in more than a few basic things.

Something that can't be ignored when speaking about this is mixed breeds. Not only can breeding certain different breeds together increase the chance of breed specific health issues, but also behavioral concerns may come up when you breed together dogs on opposite spectrums of purpose and drive. You can't breed a Great Pyrenees that is bred to be a good livestock protector (watch over livestock and fight any threats to said livestock) to a dog that has a high prey drive for birds like a labrador retriever that is bred to retrieve birds and expect the offspring to not kill a chicken if they get put into a pen with them. If you mix a chow chow who is bred to be a guard/hunting dog (hunting as in find and kill the animal being hunted) with a golden retriever who can make a great dog to be around kids(which comes from their ability to

carry birds gently back during bird hunting). The offspring would be unpredictable and you can't expect their offspring to not randomly bite your kid in the face one day.

You also can't talk about behavioral issues that are breed related without talking about the actual breeders. Responsible breeders only breed purebred dogs for a reason. Because high drive dogs should not be mixed with other high drive dogs. Or a high drive dog should not be mixed with a low drive dog because the puppies will not be predictable, so placing them into their forever homes is a gamble, there's no promise that this dog will have a good temperament to fit in your lifestyle. Unfortunately with the normalization in our society to not give our dogs structure and training. This is a recipe for dogs being surrendered to shelters, because "this dog was not what I thought I was buying." But they didn't come from a reputable breeder, they aren't meeting the expectations that were set for their personality and drive to expect. The puppy comes home and is only taught to sit and lay down, they have no self control and no respect for their owners. They are scared of strangers and bite the neighbors kids so they get surrendered to a shelter because they "weren't a good fit" for that family.

Irresponsible breeders are not worried about the two breeds who have predispositions to cancer, or are prone to hip issues. They want to breed dogs to make cute puppies to pull at people's heart strings. That golden retriever and poodle should not be bred together. They don't care that the puppies may grow up to have actual neurological issues or high anxiety or any health issues because their bred-for purpose and genetics are crossed and unpredictable. On top of that they are sold to pet owners with the idea that this breed is naturally good with kids, they are hypoallergenic and they don't need a lot of grooming because the unkempt/shaggy look is what is trending. All of a sudden your dog is 5 years old and your veterinarian is recommending trazodone to mildly sedate your dog so they aren't living in constant anxiety.

This is not to say that you should not adopt from shelters, or ignore mixed dogs that have no home and are having a hard time being adopted. Please adopt and shop responsibly and know what you are signing yourself up for. The dog you choose can be up to a 20 year long commitment and it is your job to keep them healthy, comfortable and well behaved. If you have the time and the dedication it takes to keep a dog stimulated and work with their issues and not against them, the pitbull lab mix in the shelter can make an amazing dog for you if you put in the patience and love it will take to get them to work through their behavioral issues.

The root of behavioral issues in our household pets today come from a thought process that dogs are easy loving pets. With forgetting all of the time, commitment, money and energy it takes to get them to be able to live in harmony with us and our lifestyles. Beyond breeders breeding irresponsibly and not fulfilling the genetic purposes of the breeds we choose, there can be plenty of other factors that weigh into a dog being "bad." But when you can take a step back it all leads back to us as pet owners failing to educate ourselves before bringing home the puppy. And failing to feel the weight of the commitment we choose. We fail to say no to the "back yard breeders" and puppy mills that don't care about the wellbeing of their offspring or that aren't educated enough to be breeding dogs all together. We say yes to keeping up with the trends and get the popular overbred dogs. And we say yes to being selfish and letting our dogs sit on the backburner and only giving them time and energy when it's convenient for us. We need to do better and continue to educate ourselves and others around us so that the shelters stop being full. We need to strive for better so the pets we love can have a fulfilling life while they are here for their too-short time on earth.