



Understanding the silent communication of dogs

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In association

with Marilyn Aspinall

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Foreword

(by professional dog trainer, behaviour counsellor and teacher of canine behaviour – Sheila Harper)



The age of awareness, true respect and empathy has arrived at last! Rosie clearly understands dogs, their behaviour and interactions and, as a result, knows how to promote the very best for families and professionals, dogs as individuals and also the general public.

Interacting with dogs on a daily basis and working through their issues, along with her own, has given Rosie a sound foundation and an insight into dogs that few are ever privileged to achieve. She has developed a common-sense yet critical approach. She has adopted a fundamental dog and owner – centred stance, evaluating each as an individual, and is unwavering in her effort to help owners meet their dogs' needs. It should become very apparent to every reader that she lives her philosophy!

Rosie guides the reader towards knowledge that will help to unlock the door to better observation and an understanding into the real canine world, rather than the one that tends to come from interpretation as opposed to observation. Helping the reader to develop such a special perception can, for those who are ready, open the way to a whole new world.

One of Rosie's greatest strengths is the fact that she has made and acknowledged her own mistakes, has come to terms with them, learnt from them and then applied this learning to help prevent others from a similar fate. Another strength is that she has the knowledge to draw parallels between species, particularly canine and human. From communication to emotion, stress to life values, she shows the reader how to gain a greater empathy with others.

Few ever consider how to build a relationship. Frequently we read or hear about how to be the dog's leader or how to gain respect (often a euphemism for the words fear or control), but rarely are we given accurate information about how specifically to develop a good relationship with our dogs. Trust and understanding are key, replacing the more common ideas of commands and control. This book shows that finding the right balance and being in a stable, mutually beneficial relationship with the dog promotes appropriate, sensible behaviour. Such behaviour is based on encouraging choice along with allowing the dog space to grow and mature. Surely this is much more preferable than the tendency towards dogs becoming owner-reliant as is the case with a large number of over-trained dogs today?

Why do I feel that this book is so important? At its core it contains valuable information for each one of us, including the dog, and even increases our understanding of other species.

For the individual, family or professional, it provides an opportunity to begin to see the dog as a being in its own right, with emotions and an ability to communicate far beyond the vocalisation that most consider to be their main means of interaction. It shows how problems can be prevented simply by altering the angle from which the dog is viewed and changing approaches. It helps us understand more about why the dog displays certain aspects of behaviour: that they are usually in response to human demands or our own limitations and lack of awareness. This book also encourages us not to look only at the symptoms but to start the journey towards a more holistic approach, where identifying and dealing with the underlying cause will have far reaching implications: improvement and balance for life rather than a quick fix that can result in the dog developing health issues or even more deep-seated behavioural problems.

In addition we need to consider the demands we place upon the dog in daily life; to understand that putting them into situations we haven't yet given them the skills to deal with is likely to lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

This of course, is bound to be of benefit for the dog. Canine instincts may not always be compatible with human ideals. Therefore to be understood, valued as an individual, and acknowledged and accepted for the species it is, complete with those instincts, has to be a big step forward. Such acceptance brings about security and promotes calmness and balance. The boundaries Rosie suggests are not about heavy-handed "leadership", but, if employed correctly, will encourage self-esteem and life-skills, promoting mature, sensible behaviour.

So how does this affect the general public? Where a dog has the skills and ability to recognise his own limits, to exercise self-control and to be able to take himself out of situations he knows are too much for him, ensures that he is less likely to have to respond to conflict or confrontation. The outcome of responsible dog ownership is society's acceptance. In an age where the anti-dog lobby is having an ever-stronger voice, the consequences on the general public arising from applying Rosie's suggestions could lead to important changes in attitude, reflecting greater tolerance and potentially even approval.

Rosie has studied widely, reading literature, attending courses and learning from humans, and more importantly, learning from the animals themselves. By putting theories into practice and testing her beliefs, she has gained a deeper appreciation of which are of value and which can be discarded. Her down-to-earth approach is an asset that she brings to every aspect of her daily life. She gives the reader ideas of how to make changes, how to work and how to help dogs along with reasons behind those suggestions. She provides motivation for us all, encouraging a better understanding rather than a simple recipe. Passionate yet sophisticated, the simplicity of her words belies her understanding. The benefits of this approach are verified by outright success.

Enjoy, learn, and appreciate the universal value of applying this philosophy.

— *Sheila Harper B. Ed., BA*

Sheila is the well known and highly respected principal of the International

Dog Behaviour and Training School. She has lectured in the USA and New Zealand and currently teaches students on a broad range of aspects relating to canine behaviour and communication, throughout Europe, while continuing to work with problematic dogs in rescue kennels and homes.

Introduction



Every scenario, dog and owner is unique. This book had been written to encourage owners and people working with dogs to think about what they are doing and why they are doing it. It was composed for the dog's sake, but also to offer help to the owner who is struggling with their dog's behaviour and health. We very often accept advice concerning our dogs from too many sources and act without taking much else into consideration. I used to be like that until I realised I was creating more problems for my dogs than solving them.

Although they weren't happy, they, like many other dogs, tolerated it until it became an issue for me. It never occurred to me that there might be a problem for my dogs before it affected me directly. Then I had a Mastiff and that brought things to my attention in a BIG way. Believe me, you have to do something when you are the owner of a Mastiff with a problem! How many dogs struggle to get their message across, especially the smaller breeds?

It is not possible to look at all aspects of behaviour from every angle and suggest training to suit each dog's situation. This is why it is important to take the information in this book and use it as a basis for improvement. For

further help, see the contacts at the end of the book.

We are all influenced by what we experience and I would like every dog owner to have knowledge of this way of being with dogs before deciding what they do with them. I hope the information I am offering will help all dogs to be better understood by owners and encourage owners to want to understand even more about dogs.

Because this is an holistic approach and considers all elements of the dog's life, not just the visible problems, it is inevitable that there will be some cross-over within the book as many aspects have a knock-on effect and are components to be considered when trying to alter different behaviour issues. Therefore, some information will appear in more than one chapter as it will be relevant to several areas of concern.

I think that knowledge of the key elements influencing canine behaviour is highly important and I would like as many people to be aware of and understand them as possible.

I no longer teach dogs tricks, such as sitting, lying down, weaving, walking to heel etc, as I feel that is imposing my wants or needs onto the dog and anyway, what's the point? Nowadays, I always ask myself "Why do I want to do this; is it necessary; who is it for, me or the dog?"

However, I do believe in teaching dogs social etiquette, an important factor in any society and imperative for their survival in the surroundings they occupy, enabling all to get along harmoniously. It is essential for our dogs to learn where the boundaries are, and what is and what is not acceptable. I also feel it is important for us to learn the dog's boundaries and respect them equally.

By building up a practical, balanced relationship with your dog, you will construct a basis for training such techniques as recall. Encouraging the dog to want to be with you, rather than demanding that they come to you will be much easier. I employ boundaries, but give the dog choices within them, making sure that I do not take a negative line when I am interacting with them. No nagging, bad temper or using aversive methods, which may create insecurity, but just setting things up so that the dog gets it right by himself. I do not punish unwanted behaviour, I simply ignore it. If you always show

positivity to your dog, he will learn to trust you.

N.B. In the text, when the gender of a dog is unknown it will be referred to as “he”, to keep things simple.

Vocal communication



Communication is a huge topic and, in this book, I have focussed on the non-vocal side of the subject. Although I have only scratched the surface, hopefully it will get you started on thinking about what your dog is saying.

Vocalisation is a further area to consider (perhaps requiring a book of its own). However any vocal communication your dog offers should be acknowledged and, as it contributes to the whole situation, it needs to be taken into account when assessing matters.

Using the information in this book, developing your observational skills and becoming more familiar with dogs will provide a good basis for studying vocal communication too.

When dogs have to resort to vocalising such as whining, howling, yelping, barking, growling or snarling, they are far more likely to get a reaction from people, than if they stay quiet. Making a noise can be very effective, as people generally take notice, but the outcome may work against the dog at times, possibly resulting in their euthanasia if their communication is taken as aggression.

That is why I have prioritised informing people about the non verbal language so that dogs have a chance of being understood without having to make their point too loudly.

The basis of shared relationships



Understanding the dog by putting ourselves into their position is the best thing we can do for them in the early stages of making changes.

Communication is a two way thing. Communication forms the basis of any relationship and a firm basis is the foundation of a healthy relationship. Without sound footings, your relationship is unlikely to succeed to the desired degree. This criterion applies to any partnership whether it is human-to-human, animal-to-animal or human-to-animal.

Body language, and this includes facial expression, is very important for survival as well as for success in life. Although some of our body language seems to be innate, we learn more, and how to use it, from our parents, siblings and other people without ever realising we are picking it up – smiling, frowning, pointing, nodding the head, turning the head away, ignoring, waving to people from across the road, staring aggressively and so forth. We still retain this natural form of communication, both using it ourselves and reading it in others, perhaps thinking intuitively, apparently having a sixth sense even if we seldom act upon it.

However, if something doesn't feel right to you then it probably isn't.

Because our dogs lack speech as we know it, they are more in tune with our human body language than we are. In most cases, they have the time to observe us all day every day and are able to pick up on cues we are simply not aware of, so they appear to be far more intuitive than we are. On the other hand, we fill our days with so many tasks and commitments that we lack the opportunity to monitor them in the same way. Dogs operate differently to us, and, because they rely on us for their survival, it makes sense for them to take notice of our ways of communicating. We are important to them in many instances, so it pays for them to be highly tuned in to what we are doing and be able to respond accordingly.

When your dog looks guilty after he has eaten the Sunday roast, it's not that he feels remorseful for his opportunist action, he is simply reacting to the stiff posture and stern expression he is looking at and relating it to the way you behaved the last time he saw that body language.



Henry looking "guilty", with closed body language.

Humans

Humans use body language to communicate all the time, often without realising it.

As good parents, long before speech arrives, we seem to understand what our baby / young child is trying to communicate, because they are so important to us. Some parents come to recognise the different cries, knowing what their children want or need before they are able to speak. How is it that many women tend to be better at knowing, when their children, husband or partner are not telling the truth? They may not be able to say why they know, they just do. I feel sure that it is the subtleties of body language such as eye contact and hand gestures they are picking up on without consciously recognising all the signals they are seeing.



Just look at the frustration and anger of my teenage son as he is unable to escape me taking the photo.

Perhaps women are more practised at reading body language than men, as they have had to do so when their children were young. They may even be predisposed to having the skill as, historically, women would have had the role of nurturing children.

From my observations, many men (though not all of them) often seem to need to use “control” more than women do, possibly because they are not so good at picking up subtleties of body language and make less use of their intuition than women do. Perhaps not being able to understand the “silent” communication results in a sense of insecurity for some, and control is a way of dealing with it. That doesn’t mean it is right, though.

No controlled relationship is fair. Isn’t it less stressful for the controlled and the controller to have a trusting shared relationship?

Isn’t that what most people seek anyway?

Think about how you deal with a child. If the adult is honest and fair with them, keeping communication channels open (rather than blocking or suppressing them), they will hear far more of the child’s feelings and thoughts, as well as gaining their respect, confidence and a good balanced relationship. The child will be more likely to grow in self esteem, secure in the shared relationship. If lines of communication are broken, the child will

often seek other outlets which, in effect, could encourage them to be dishonest and go behind the parent's back.

Dogs

Methods of controlling dogs can be seen on television dog behaviour programmes and the restricting actions recommended can produce a similarly negative result.

On the face of it, the methods usually appear to work, but if an owner takes the same approach as the dominant parent does with his child and suppresses the dog (ignoring communication signals, whilst forcing him to be in situations he has previously been unable to cope with), there may well be repercussions such as displays of unacceptable behaviour. Alternatively, the dog may become so worried by the regime, he “shuts down”, unable to react at all and lives in fear.

The dog will only be trying to find ways to cope with the situation (which he can't avoid), but what you often end up with is a behaviour which may be harder to handle than the original one which the owner was trying to control.

Worse still for the dog's long term health, he may internalise his distress and risk becoming ill or developing obsessive habits such as licking and chewing himself.

This is why we shouldn't control other beings. Somewhere down the line it will have an adverse effect. Dogs with a more robust personality will cope better than others who are more sensitive, but it doesn't mean they are enjoying a good quality of life.

Dogs use their body language all the time. Comprehending it doesn't come naturally to us – we have to make an effort to learn and understand their communication system.

Our use of speech often gets in the way of communicating with them. As I have already mentioned, dogs are far more skilled at reading our body language than we are at reading theirs. They have more experience of doing

so, generally spending much of their time observing us, but we do not return the favour. Does this suggest dogs are more committed to us than we are to them? They certainly seem to detect a deterioration in our mood even before we ourselves have realised something has irritated us. Perhaps dogs notice more than modern day humans because we are distracted by having too many things going on in our lives.



Living with children is quite a strain for the majority of dogs. A dog has to be aware of what the child (especially a young one) might do next. Children and dogs need to be taught to respect each other's space as well as their needs.



Dogs watch us when we have food but are very conscious of our movements all the time: they have to be, in order to feel safe and secure in their environment. We may seem as unpredictable to dogs as children can be to us.

Dogs / Humans

Recently a good friend and colleague of mine left something important in my van. I had noticed it, but as I was seeing her the following day, decided to take it home with me. My friend phoned whilst I was out, leaving a message on the answer phone, to tell me she'd left the item behind. She hadn't asked me to call her back and, as I was busy with family commitments, I just sent a quick email to say I would bring it with me the next day. However she didn't pick up the email. In the morning, I was surprised to find my friend on my doorstep. She lived 45 mins away from me, travelling by car, but obviously the item was important to her and being without it created considerable worry.

The point here is that even though we are of the same species, living in the age of communication, we still fail to get our message across at times, which can result in distress. My friend and I chose different forms of communication for perfectly valid reasons and we ended up with miscommunication.

Dogs face this crisis of potential misunderstanding on a daily basis, also using several forms of communication to try to get their message through.

They start with mild types of body language, progressing to the more obvious; vocalising by barking, whining and growling before finally resorting to using their teeth. Usually biting gets the dog noticed! The consequence for many a dog is being put to sleep, simply because it hasn't been understood. The dog's death in these cases is down to our ignorance.

How frustrating and distressing for them is our failure to get the message, day in, day out? These ongoing pressures have the potential to cause some serious health issues if not dealt with. Can you think how you might feel and the behaviours you might adopt if you were constantly ignored? How desperate might you become? Well, how easily do we become angry? If I were a dog, I think I might resort to biting or certainly have some kind of behavioural problem if I had to endure being misunderstood and disregarded day after day.



So many forms of contact, yet we can still miscommunicate with one another even when we speak the same language.



In this wedding photo there are several forms of communication taking place: body language (from everyone), speech, eye contact and touch.

One area that constantly gets wires crossed is damage caused when a dog is left unsupervised.

Chewing is a natural behaviour for a dog. Many dogs need to chew to help relieve stress.

If owners understand this basic fact, they can provide their dog with appropriate opportunities for them to chew. The chewing action releases endorphins which will help the dog feel more relaxed, but the items provided must be suitable for them. Some dogs prefer softer textures; such as safe soft toys and cardboard, whereas others might prefer wooden or harder resources.

These chewing items need to be checked for safety and renewed every now and then. Dogs can become too familiar with the same things left lying around.

Chewing options should be freely available, as we cannot know exactly when the dog may need to chew.

This is such a simple provision to make, but many dogs have trouble communicating it to people and frequently cause their owners anger because of damage to inappropriate items. Any superfluous, dangerous or precious

items should be removed until the dog's anxiety levels are better balanced by a stress reduction programme. Something as simple as the need to chew often gets punished when just a bit of thought and tidiness from us can avoid discord.

Monitor your dog with all chewing items, making sure they continue to be safe for the dog.



Jaffa has a chewing choice, variety is the spice of life.



Dogs enjoy different textures. This may vary during the day and from day to day and dog to dog.

Dogs

When we have dogs we have a great opportunity to spend time observing them, how they communicate with each other and us, using their non verbal language.

For instance, if your dog sees another dog but chooses not to interact with it, he may turn his head away. Should the newcomer ignore this communication

and persist in approaching, your dog may then turn his back on the other dog (looking right away) and moving very slowly. Your dog may sit down, then turn around and lie down. Finally, if the previous strategy hasn't worked, he may get up and walk slowly away.

All this happens very quickly, so it is easy to miss, indeed most of us do miss it until we become experienced and practised in observing dogs. If a dog is over-excited he has the potential to become dangerous. Fur may fly.

Situations can rapidly get out of hand when excitement becomes too much, as can be seen when children are left to play unsupervised, it often "all ends in tears". A dog experiencing another dog in an over excited state may try communication to begin with. He will probably begin to yawn, making the yawns more exaggerated before moving away very slowly in an attempt to calm down the other dog, but if the communication doesn't work, the first dog may also start to get "silly" and show displacement behaviour (explained later) because he doesn't know what else to do.

We can emulate some of the dog's body language with simple movements such as turning our head away from unwanted behaviour (ignoring), then backing off, walking away slowly (remembering that staring is a strong form of communication with a dog, so keep your eyes averted) and staying quiet and calm at all times. What a dog certainly wouldn't do at a time of tension is to point its paw, look directly at another dog saying "now go away, I've told you once". Many owners do this and, although it may appear to work temporarily, the dog certainly doesn't grasp what it means. Yes, he knows the owner is angry, but it is far more effective if body language is used because this is what the dog understands.

Of course being persistent and consistent in all your dealings with the dog must still come into the equation, however using body language will diffuse matters and help take the stress out of the situation.

For a human, it is more difficult to convey anger when turning away, whereas it will show up easily in our speech.

For a dog, most verbal communication is incomprehensible and teaches him very little.

I guess we have all experienced “the silent treatment” from someone who is angry with us. This is what you are trying to achieve with your dog. If he is displaying unwanted behaviour, speech always gets in the way. Harsh, angry words may well be seen through a dog’s eyes as the reward of attention, whereas turning away from him makes it clear you do not approve of his behaviour.

Many dogs will be quite comfortable with us mimicking their simplest body language and respond very well.

In my experience, it has amazing results with most breeds, indeed with other species too.

However, I have also seen some dogs become worried by our attempts at copying certain forms of their body language. As with everything else, it depends on the individual, the situation, and also the way in which it is done. If the person trying to copy the dog’s body language is highly stressed themselves, then it is not likely to work.

Some dogs need to get used to the idea of humans acting out their language and they may need a few repetitions before they realise their owner is actually “speaking” to them. The more people practise using body language, the better they get at it.



A dog attracts another when one shows interest in a particular

smell or item. We can use their curiosity to our advantage if we need to distract them, by pretending to have discovered something, most dogs will come to investigate. Care should be taken not to over use this as dogs are clever and will come to recognise that it is a ploy. The border collie (Bobby) is blind yet is still able to use good body language and communication skills. (Thanks to Carol Ilic for permission to use this photo of Bobby).



Dogs, like people, are inquisitive so be careful if you don't want to draw their attention to what you are doing. On the other hand if you want to reinforce a behaviour, giving your attention may well achieve it.

Communication in practice

These two photos show how easy and effective it can be when using the dog's own communication system. It works without us becoming angry or having to constantly repeat commands.



In the first photo, Hagrid invades my granddaughter's space. Calmly, slowly, without using words, she turns her back on him. He instantly understands and also turns and walks away. My granddaughter was scared of dogs but has learnt how to understand them and communicate with them by using body language.

I think this is a wonderful interaction as neither makes a fuss. There simply isn't any need for commands (which the dogs don't always understand). Usually they are reacting to the pitch of our voice and tense body language. All dogs use the same communication system to understand each other. If we are prepared to learn their language, as above, we will be better able to "speak" with and respond to dogs.

Humans

If we would like a calm and balanced dog, we must first learn to be calm and balanced ourselves. In addition, a relaxed dog is in a better position to understand us. The same principle applies as with children, both learn from our example.

Have you noticed people who wish to avoid attention from dogs stay quiet, making no effort to interact? A well balanced dog very often goes over to those who are largely ignoring him, seeming to prefer being with them rather than the people trying to “pet, fuss or love” him, often in an excited manner. The dog is in effect communicating to us his preferred human demeanour.

Dogs / Humans

Just like us, dogs want a peaceful life. They are not naturally aggressive. Aggression is usually displayed because other, more subtle signs have gone by without being noticed. In most cases, it is the act of a fearful or frustrated dog who has learned to use this behaviour because his normal communication signals (body language) have been missed or even punished. When dogs growl, bare their teeth, lunge, bark, or use ignoring signals, they are far too often viewed as defiant or (using that outdated term) “dominant”, and are then punished for their “bad” behaviour.

If we choose to back off, this should not be viewed as conceding some sort of “defeat”, it is simply listening to and respecting their signals.


Continuing the analogy of parents and children, if we keep telling a child not to misbehave and we are constantly ignored, how often will our own behaviour escalate to aggression; shouting at them, or even smacking them? In such circumstances, isn’t it understandable, if not acceptable, for us to lose our temper? Isn’t it also understandable for a dog to become frustrated and lose control? Both species can become aggressive if not listened to.


I have learned this: when my dogs growl or curl their lip, it is a good sign, because even though they are really struggling, they know it is safe to tell me


and are confident that they will be acknowledged appropriately. I will back off, doing whatever is necessary to defuse the situation, helping them out so they have no need to escalate to further aggressive behaviour.


None of the strong (high arousal) communication signals should be copied by humans, as the outcome is potentially dangerous.

Key points | The basis of shared relationships

 No controlled relationship is fair. Isn't it less stressful for the controlled and the controller to have a trusting shared relationship?

 Dogs use their body language all the time. Comprehending it doesn't come naturally to us – we have to make an effort to learn and understand their communication system.

 If we would like a calm and balanced dog, we must first learn to be calm and balanced ourselves. In addition, a relaxed dog is in a better position to understand us. The same principle applies as with children, both learn from our example.

 For a dog, most verbal communication is incomprehensible and teaches him very little.



Bullying



Improving observational skills enables us to pick up subtle body language signals dogs use when bullying, giving us the opportunity to intervene appropriately.

Dogs

My 13-stone (83 Kg) rescued male English Mastiff employed bullying behaviour on the humans in my house when I first had him, but use of these non-confrontational methods (as well as other techniques described in this book) has enabled us to have a mutually respectful relationship.

He growled at me in the early days but I respected his communication. I set boundaries in place and, because my family and I are consistent in applying them, he understands what he can do and what isn't allowed.

Much of this is done through the use of body language with little verbal language involved. I never tell him (or Jaffa, my Cavalier) off, as this teaches the dogs nothing about the message behind our words; they just know you're angry with them and this has a negative influence on our relationship with them as it does with any relationship.

I have learned to ignore behaviour I don't want or like, and reward the behaviour I do. Hagrid has learned that nothing bad is going to happen to him and, indeed, nothing bad has happened to him since he's been with us. We respect each other.

By working in this way, Hagrid has stopped trying to control my family and myself.



I am using this picture of Hagrid with my granddaughter as it shows what his bullying behaviour used to look like when he approached my son from behind and nipped him. Coming from behind is a common tactic for a bully. In this instance shown here, however, he was simply showing interest.

It's important, when observing behaviour not to jump to conclusions based on just one aspect of what the dog is doing, but to watch for a period of time and reach a measured conclusion based on all the evidence.

Dominance reduction methods (control) had already been used on Hagrid and I am sure this is why he exhibited bullying behaviour particularly with my adolescent son.

Hagrid used to stalk my son, trying to bite him from behind when he moved, or even if he moved his hands.

The actions I took based on the contents of this book are the complete opposite of what many “behaviour experts” might recommend, but the result is the best relationship I have ever had with any dog I have cared for, with no further bullying to anyone else. In fact, I now truly “care for my dogs”. I realise that a few years back I was dominating Jaffa through my ignorance of

her needs. She was a dog who didn't dare react to anything and became ill due to this repression. She suffered from various ailments, among them colitis, which was quite severe.

However, she no longer experiences this unpleasant complaint, largely due to my having learned to understand her signals. At first, Jaffa had given up trying to use her communication (shut down) as, from her point of view, it wasn't working.



Allowing Jaffa to explore (previously I would have told her off for this). I now remove items I don't want her to have and give her some freedom to make decisions and build confidence. As well as this, her health improved drastically.

I took no notice of what she was saying to me, simply forcing my regime on her. It is possible to teach a dog to communicate again by respecting his wishes, giving him choices, stopping all the controlling commands such as sit, down, heel, as well as forcing him to be around dogs in an attempt to "socialise" him and so on. We learnt to enjoy each other's company, having a good time together.

Jaffa developed a brilliant recall as she wanted to be with me. In addition, her health improved, with her colitis disappearing for many years.


Prior to this, she would run away regularly. I worked on developing a good relationship with her whilst using the prevention and management skills I had learned. It has probably been harder to work with my Cavalier as I was the one who had employed the dominance rules on her in the first place, so it took some time before she felt she could trust me.





Bullying can often be very subtle; people rarely notice the communication that goes on between dogs living together. The Mastiff (Kaos) manipulated Jaffa regularly. She controlled space by giving Jaffa “one of those looks”. Kaos also restricted Jaffa’s access to the water bowl and other resources. Some dogs find it uncomfortable to eat in close proximity to a controlling dog. Well I would feel uneasy too if it were me.


Kaos became a bully due to my over use of commands as well as bad training experiences and excessive play as a puppy with no boundaries in place.

Key points | Bullying

 It is important to observe your dog’s behaviour in several situations before reaching a conclusion based on all the evidence.

 Bullying can be very subtle; people rarely notice the communication that goes on between dogs.

 Use of non-confrontational methods enables us to have a mutually respectful relationship.

 Dominance based training can cause a dog to exhibit bullying behaviour; it's what he's been trained to understand.

The need for body language



Body language is vital for communication and survival. We may not always be aware when using it, but dogs certainly are. Our body language creates the need for the dog to respond.



Dogs have a variety of signals they use to indicate to others how they are feeling and their intentions.

We also have signals we use to indicate to others how we are feeling, regardless of what we may be saying. We smile to show we are a happy and pleasant person, reassuring others we mean no harm. We can also smile nervously when faced with someone we are not too sure of, perhaps persuading them to do the same or as appeasement. Maybe we fold our arms and cross our legs to indicate we are not happy with what someone has said, as a form of protecting ourselves, as a block. We may feel vulnerable. The situation or context in which this happens must be taken into consideration though. Crossing their legs could simply mean the person is cold and wants to go to the toilet!

All dogs will have certain signals they use most readily. One of my dogs often sneezes again and again as she becomes excited. Another yawns quite a lot. When he doesn't know what to do or is uncomfortable, he scratches himself, often accompanied by a yawn. Adult humans will sometimes tease children; the youngster might try to avoid being the focus of everyone's attention by hiding their face, wriggling around or burying their head in a cushion, not knowing what to do to avoid the adults' gazes and laughter.

Some dogs also become "silly", wriggling around in a similar way. Many Golden Retrievers tend to scratch when they feel a little uneasy or overwhelmed. I am not saying they feel embarrassed as such, but it is a sign of discomfort with what is happening to them at the time.

Dogs of the same breed often favour the same signals. I have also seen a number of dogs who will copy another dog, responding with a matching signal. Black dogs seem to use the tongue or mouth to communicate, such as lip licks and yawns. Perhaps these show up better against the background of black fur which tends to make other signals less easy to read.

As different breeds tend to depend on similar signs so do people from different cultures. Family members share similar mannerisms even if they've been separated at birth. We have ways of coping with uncomfortable situations. For instance some may stroke their necks, put their fingers in their mouth, twist their hair, whilst others may mirror body language or pretend they are looking at something else. Well, dogs do it too. Simply put, dogs make extensive use of body language to "talk" to each other.

People have the option to walk away from situations they don't like; dogs rarely do, so they use body language instead to maintain a calm atmosphere.

Once educated to the subtleties of dogs' body language, it becomes obvious when two well adjusted adult dogs meet, a conversation is actually taking place. Often you see them mirroring one another's body shape and stance to ensure a peaceful encounter.



These dogs know and like each other. They meet calmly in a polite way, curving their bodies, their tails wagging at the same height, ears relaxed, in a similar stance, mirroring one another. A head-on approach would be impolite between dogs who are

strangers. This is less of a problem for dogs who are familiar with each other.

An ideal meeting between two dogs

1. Dog A is strolling along sniffing here and there when he catches sight of an approaching dog in the distance.
2. Immediately, dog A averts his eyes, pretending to look in another direction. Polite, well adjusted dogs know it is wrong to stare.
3. At this point, if he chooses, dog A may be far enough away from dog B to exit the situation by heading in a different direction and that is the end of the matter.
4. Let's say the dogs continue towards one another; now dog B has spotted dog A, and he performs the same "look away" gesture.
5. They are off to a good start. This is polite body language, indicating neither dog is confrontational at the moment.
6. As the two move closer, both slow down a little, still glancing briefly at each other then looking away. Dog A may pretend he's seen something in the distance and appears to be concentrating on this.
7. As they draw closer still, dog B may sniff at the ground whilst checking to make sure the approaching dog is still not a danger to him.
8. They may exchange some facial gestures such as a lip-lick or narrowing of the eyes, before progressing to a head dip, turning away, tails held in a fairly relaxed manner.
9. Towards the end of the meeting both dogs may curve around one another, avoiding the head-on approach which is rude and could be seen as threatening, as well as enabling them not to exchange full eye contact. This can end with the two dogs sniffing each other at both ends.
10. After passing, one or both dogs may look back and give a shake, which they often do, perhaps to relieve the tension of an encounter.

A typical meeting between two calm and well-adjusted adult dogs

Whilst out on a walk, Jaffa and I came across a dog without an owner. It was a fairly polite meeting although Jaffa did think the sniffing of her bottom was a little too intrusive.



The white dog approaches whilst Jaffa's body is in a curve.



They skirt around each other; the white dog curves then sniffs Jaffa.



Jaffa becomes uncomfortable and appears to have seen something in the distance.



She turns to look intently at him. He responds by turning his head and body away from her.



She curves again as he walks off.

Lovely body language from both dogs. Note that Jaffa's long lead is kept slack throughout to avoid any tension between the dogs. Many dogs resort to aggressive behaviour when they meet on taut leads. Tight restraint creates a tense situation, taking away any escape route.

Humans meeting

Compare the dogs' actions to what happens when two people meet whilst out on a walk in the countryside:

1. You are on your own, appreciating the beautiful countryside, deep in your thoughts, when you look up and see a person heading in your direction. If you are a woman and it is a male approaching, this could be interpreted as a potentially dangerous situation.
2. No-one else is around. You are immediately brought out of your tranquil state and may well pretend that you've not seen the other person yet by taking great interest in your surroundings as a cover up. This may offer you a little confidence and avoid the slight embarrassment of staring at a stranger.
3. If the opportunity is there, you may take an escape route and go another

way. However, let's say you carry on.

4. Okay, you've seen each other, there's no avoiding it now.
5. You put your hands in your pockets as you come closer. You both avert your eyes and whilst still looking away you check your watch (not registering the time though).
6. He looks the other way too, avoiding a confrontational stare. Safe so far!
7. He may start to play with his (wait for it!) – mobile phone.
8. You may adjust your clothing, fiddle with keys and other items in your pocket, scratch your neck, just nervously fidgeting around.
9. The other person can see you are no threat, you mean no harm. Hopefully, they reciprocate and you can continue on your path.
10. People often mirror each other's body language too, you curve around him to make more space as you pass, or vice versa, or perhaps you both step a little to the side.
11. You both have fairly relaxed faces, maybe exchanging a false smile (not using eyes) or mutter a greeting, whilst briefly glancing at each other.
12. When you have passed, perhaps you look round from a safe distance.
13. He may do likewise, which is embarrassing if you do it at the same time!



The adult and child mirror each others' body language. This is how children learn about life and how to do things. Children are great at mimicking adults whether the adult uses good or not so

good behaviour.

Not so different are we?


Humans and dogs are not so different, are they, but how aware are we of what we are actually doing? Frequently we carry out actions without consciously noticing or thinking about them. What we ought to do is recognise that our dogs experience similar emotions to us and need to give off the appropriate body signals for their situation. They cannot do so unless we make the necessary adjustments to accommodate them. Often the dogs can't behave as they instinctively would because we have them restricted on a tight lead (usually way too tight) and are force-marching them towards a situation they'd rather avoid. A person may occasionally have problems making their way past a gang of people on the pavement but many dogs seem to find it difficult passing both other dogs and people on a narrow pathway.


It's not natural for dogs to approach head-on; they prefer to give each other space by curving around but there just isn't the room for this on most pavements and footpaths. This is what we so often make them do.


Now let's have a look at what humans do when they meet a dog coming toward them, with or without an owner:


Very often we will walk head on towards dog and owner, having full eye contact (with the dog) whilst saying "hello" to the owner then put our hand out towards their dog, staring at him as we reach to make contact. Stop and think how rude and threatening this is for a dog. Humans rarely greet strangers in so informal a way. How would you feel if a stranger did this to you?

Key points | The need for body language

 Dogs have a variety of signals they use to indicate to others how they are feeling and their intentions.

 Every dog is different and will use their own combination of preferred body language signals.

 People have the option to walk away from situations they don't like; dogs rarely have the option to do this, so they use body language to maintain calm. They need to be given the space and freedom to do so. Using a long line can give the dog the opportunity to be able to do this more easily.

 It is not natural for dogs to approach head-on; they prefer to give each other space by curving around but there isn't room for this on most pavements and footpaths.

Simple changes, big impact



I had been warned that the young reindeers would not approach any people, but simple changes to my body language made all the difference. The onlooking zoo staff were amazed when the reindeer chose to come close.

By learning and understanding what dogs are trying to communicate in various situations we are able to recognise the impact we have on them. Once we accept this, we are in a position to change things, making life easier for our own dogs as well as others we meet. We are less threatening to most animals if we change our body language appropriately in response to theirs.

Understanding the dog by putting ourselves in their position is the best thing we can do for them in the early stages of making changes.

I am proposing that we use some good “dog friendly” manners such as resisting the temptation to reach our hands out and touch them the moment we get close, avoiding eye contact and not talking to them as this invariably involves eye contact.

If they feel comfortable they will come and sniff you, so, just allow them to do this in their own time and then move away politely. Some dogs, providing they are not especially sound sensitive, may tolerate you talking quietly and gently to them (but not at them). We don't have to stroke all dogs at the first opportunity. It is hard to deny ourselves this pleasure but we can do it if we try. When someone reaches their hand out to a dog you often see him back away, lowering his head to avoid the outstretched hand and turning away, yawning or giving another low level communication signal perhaps making some attempt to leave the vicinity.

On the other hand, the dog may respond by becoming wriggly and over excited, and may possibly jump up. Some people may tell him off whilst others encourage it. How confusing must that be for the dog?

The bouncy response doesn't mean he enjoys human touch, it is usually a coping strategy where the dog is indicating that, actually, he is worried by the human.

Dogs rarely touch one another unless they know each other very well. In their terms, touch can be a form of confrontation, conflict, or a sexual approach. When they sniff another dog, it is a different form of making contact, usually achieved by nose to rear end, in a non invasive, “fact finding” manner and providing it doesn't go on too long, is generally regarded as an acceptable form of address between dogs.

We need to recognise that humans are more tactile than dogs and should keep our behaviour for our own kind.

Many children like to be cuddled by familiar adults, but strangers are a totally different matter, for children and adults as well.

What would the parents' responses be if strangers were to walk up to their children daring to touch them?

Have you tried ruffling up someone's hair when they are concentrating on something? How do they react? This often happens to dogs. Can you see how tolerant dogs really are? I am sorry to say we humans invade dogs' space far too often. Once this is realised though, we can be aware of our impact on all the dogs we encounter and treat them more respectfully.



Boys enjoying time at a country fete. Somehow I don't think the boys or their parents would take kindly to strangers approaching, patting them on the head, stroking them or staring. (In fact, don't we tell our children not to stare?) If people they don't know come up and touch them, children may start to react, perhaps running away or protesting. They may develop a fear of strangers, as many dogs do, for the same reasons.

Most dogs, depending on previous experiences, may become accustomed to their owners touching or holding them (not that they necessarily like it), but it

is not fair to expect any dog to endure this behaviour from anyone else, so perhaps try to protect your dog and educate other people. Some dogs may like being stroked, but the majority of people are unable to detect the differences between a dog showing signs of enjoyment, tolerance (feeling he has no option other than to endure being stroked) or insecurity.

This is why it is of paramount importance that everyone who comes into contact with dogs should be aware of how they communicate and what they are telling us.



Being with your dog, having a shared relationship and using relaxed, open body language reduces the need for commands and demands. Working reasonably close and side on to the dog, at the same time respecting their personal space, encourages the dog to want to be with you. The dog is comfortable and responsive to the positive moves of your subtle body language.



Here Hagrid turns in my direction, without the need for me to tell him. Put simply, a long line applied correctly as a boundary, time, patience, mutual respect, a good relationship and inviting body language and you have the tools needed for this natural way of working with dogs.



By staying close to Hagrid, with a loose lead, slightly turning in the direction we are going, gives Hagrid the time to digest the information before coming with me. As he sniffs I wait for him. A long line gives you a connection with your dog and is a valuable tool that helps to build trust and confidence.



Hagrid and I move along together, choosing to be with one another. When Hagrid came to me 2 years ago he didn't trust people. He pulled, always at the end of an 8 metre line, never looking round to connect with the person at the other end. A long line offers reassurance to the dog and is a positive, necessary tool, which helps the dog to feel secure in knowing the owner is close by. It also plays a part in developing the relationship between dog and owner, providing the owner respects communication signals given by the dog. Off lead dogs are susceptible to unwanted approaches from other dogs, can chase wildlife, have opportunities to learn how to bully or are vulnerable to being bullied themselves, which undermines confidence. If a long line is used, you remove potential negative pressure from the dog / owner relationship which an unreliable recall can cause. At appropriate times and places, being off lead is good for a dog but, even if the handler is fluent at identifying canine communication, being at a distance makes it difficult to spot what is going on with dog-to-dog meetings and to respond effectively to potential problems.

First impressions

This sequence of pictures indicates how our actions affect dogs:



My hand is on Hagrid's chest. He is fairly comfortable with this and his body leaning into me. His mouth is relaxed.



As I move my hand to touch his ear he becomes uncomfortable and leans his body slightly away from me whilst turning his head away. His mouth closes.




I continue to reach towards his ear. He transfers his weight to his other side, moving further away from me, lifting a paw slightly, ears drawn back and jaw tense as he keeps an eye on me, indicating how unhappy he is with what my hands are doing.





As I return my hand to his chest his weight begins to turn into my body again, his head comes closer to mine, although his mouth remains closed. He looks right into my face so I respond by giving him a soft expression, close my eyes a little (careful not to intently look at him, which is threatening for dogs) and tilt my head slightly away therefore making the situation easier.

This was the first time I had met Hagrid, so examining his ear was quite intrusive for him. He was responsive to where my hands were and what they were doing.

Key points | Simple changes, big impact

 Understanding the dog by putting ourselves into their position is the best thing we can do for them in the early stages of making changes.

 We need to recognise that humans are more tactile than dogs and should keep our behaviour for our own kind. Dogs are especially reluctant to receive advances from strangers, so we must speak for them, educating people in how to act politely towards them by avoiding direct eye contact, touch and verbal communication if they don't know the dog.

 A bouncy response doesn't mean the dog enjoys human touch, it is usually a coping strategy where the dog is indicating that, actually, he is worried by the human.

Canine communication signals



Dogs communicate their intentions to one another. The adult dog curves, tail high, head down and turned away (so no direct eye contact). The youngster offers a play bow, his tail raised and at an angle, to the older dog.

Low level / mild signals

Dogs also use these signals to communicate with other species and, on a number of occasions, I have witnessed other animals using the same kind of signals:

- Lip licking
- Paw lift
- Head turn
- Ignoring
- Lowered tail
- Narrowing of eyes
- Whining (a vocal signal which can accompany body language)
- Looking away
- Blinking
- Sniffing the ground
- Head dip
- Yawning
- Sneezing
- Shake off (when he shakes but is not wet, as we might stretch or breathe out after a close encounter or slightly scary moment)

Stronger signals

A dog who is becoming anxious, making his feelings known more clearly:

- Turning body away
- Lying down
- Sitting down
- Freezing
- Tail between legs

- Growling*
- Baring teeth
- Lunging
- Lunging and barking*
- Lowered body
- Body tension
- Sweaty paws
- Corners of mouth pulled back or rapid breathing
- Barking*
- Sudden burst of energy
- Animated movements
- Unable to settle – restless
- Panting
- Depression – “shut down” – not reacting to anything. A dog always seen as being good, but “unnaturally so”. This is not to be confused with being relaxed.

* A vocal signal which can accompany body language.

Appeasing signals

Used to indicate his intentions are peaceful and no threat:

- Wiggling all over, as if happy, displaying puppy behaviour by an adult dog. Usually the dog has a rounded body with the back end lowering then the front end doing the same
- Rolling on back to reveal belly
- Jumping up
- Urinating through excitement or fear

Displacement signals

Coping strategies born out of frustration and anxiety:

- Rolling on back to reveal belly
- Digging
- Chewing on something, often the lead
- Tail chasing
- Tugging on clothes
- Biting feet / chewing self
- Scratching
- Jumping up – seeking attention
- Fly catching
- Shadow chasing
- Mounting behaviour
- Strong pulling on lead
- Shivering

Some of these signals would overlap depending on the situation and on the dog.

These lists are examples of what you may see, but they are by no means the full canine repertoire.



Turning away as shown by Poppadom (the goat) and Flitwick (the cat) who accompany us on walks. When a camera is pointed at them they turn away to avoid it, both pretending they've seen something they are interested in. We use the same kind of communication when we want to avoid someone or something; we look the other way, appearing to have a different focus.



Digging; a displacement activity for this dog, but it may not be for another. All situations should be assessed and the action viewed in its proper context.



Street dogs living in Thassos, a Greek island. Note the signals – paw lift, head dip, turn away (human as well as dogs). My hand is on the white dog's back, which may be the reason why she has dipped her head. If a dog were to put a paw on another's back, it would be seen as a threatening action. Head dipping is a

regularly used communication signal. The white dog's mouth is partially relaxed and her tail is semi relaxed, so, although she came to me, she may not be happy with the situation. In the time I knew her, she always used appeasing body language. This is what drew me to her.

Humans




If we are unable to recognise the dog's communication, it is as though the dog is not being heard. A dog will have exhibited a range of signals to indicate he is not happy with what is going on, and probably shown a number of other behaviours too, before reaching the point of biting (which usually catches our attention!).


While we may ignore the mild signs, lacking the education to identify or understand them as being a form of communication, we often punish the dog when they give more overt signals such as – jumping up, growling, baring teeth, lunging, barking, nipping or biting. Have you ever been in the position where no one listens to you and your needs are not catered for? Have you been punished for trying to put your point across? Well imagine this happening daily in all aspects of your life, at work, at home and socially. Ignoring people to this degree can be a form of bullying. What a life! Would you become depressed or possibly turn the opposite way – snap and lose control from time to time? When a dog does this he may very well be put to sleep as a result of his actions. Yet, most dogs DO put up with this deprivation throughout their lives.



Human, goats and cat all communicating, turning away from the camera as if they didn't know I was standing in front of them taking a photo. Every time I pointed the camera at the cat and goats they turned either their heads or their whole bodies away as if interested in something else, when in fact, there was nothing there. Using this behaviour as a distraction, they were avoiding trouble and the intrusion of a strange object being pointed at them.

Key points | Canine communication signals

-  Some signals overlap depending on the situation and the dog.
-  The dog's communication signals will escalate if he feels he is not being understood.
-  We often punish the dog when they give more overt signals such as jumping up, growling, barking, nipping or biting.

 Overt signals are a “last resort” in a dog’s repertoire of behaviours. It is perfectly possible to avoid letting things get this far.

Is my dog worried?



Sometimes anxiety is quite obvious, but not always. Once we learn to observe our dogs and recognise their signals, we can identify their worried state early on, giving us a great opportunity to avoid forcing them into situations which they find difficult.

How can we tell if a dog is coping with life?

If the dog has adequate time to recover from each episode of excitement or anxiety, then he is more able to cope with events as they occur.

The time for recovery will vary from dog to dog but remember, in general, they will take longer to do so than us. They should naturally be leading a slower paced life than people. Recovering from a trip to the vet, from experiencing a thunderstorm, or from lots of visitors coming to their home may take up to a week.

It is a good idea to do little with the dog for a while after worrying or exciting events, allowing the dog to rest and sleep quietly. Calm walks for no longer than 30 minutes, depending on the type and character of the dog, how he views the world and his state of health. Some dogs can find daily walks an ordeal. Indeed the dog may need even more time to recover from stressful events if he is in poor health – mentally, emotionally or physically. More extreme episodes, like a spell in kennels, being lost, or being the victim of an attack, will require a much longer recovery period.

The low level signals described are in most cases quite normal actions that simply acknowledge what is going on around them, just as we may twiddle our hair, stroke our face and so forth when we are thinking, waiting for something to happen or chatting to someone. Low-level signals often take place when two dogs meet, particularly if both are friendly and sensible.

However, when clusters of signals occur or are made in rapid succession then become stronger and exaggerated, it is likely that the dog is finding things difficult.

Let's go back to the example of the dog being greeted by a person. Some dogs tolerate people's advances less well than others, and such a dog may freeze momentarily at the sight of an approaching stranger. If the person continues, which often they will, due to not seeing a dog standing still as a problem for either of them, the dog may turn away whilst still keeping an eye

on the human. If his request for politeness is ignored, the dog may dodge the oncoming person and lower his body as they reach forward in an attempt to stroke him. The dog may make an attempt to escape, which will, of course, be impossible if he is on a lead.

This situation is likely to be repeated many times and the dog may try different tactics such as avoiding people by walking on a curving route or he may try to use barking and if he is continually put in this same uncomfortable position, his behaviour may escalate to lunging, growling or worse. Not every dog will resort to such displays. There are those who don't like certain triggers on their walks but they learn to put up with them, not that this is fair, but they do.

Let me emphasise that when signals occur in clusters and / or erratically or in quick succession, the dog is almost certainly feeling uncomfortable and is likely to develop stress related issues if something isn't done to address his problems.

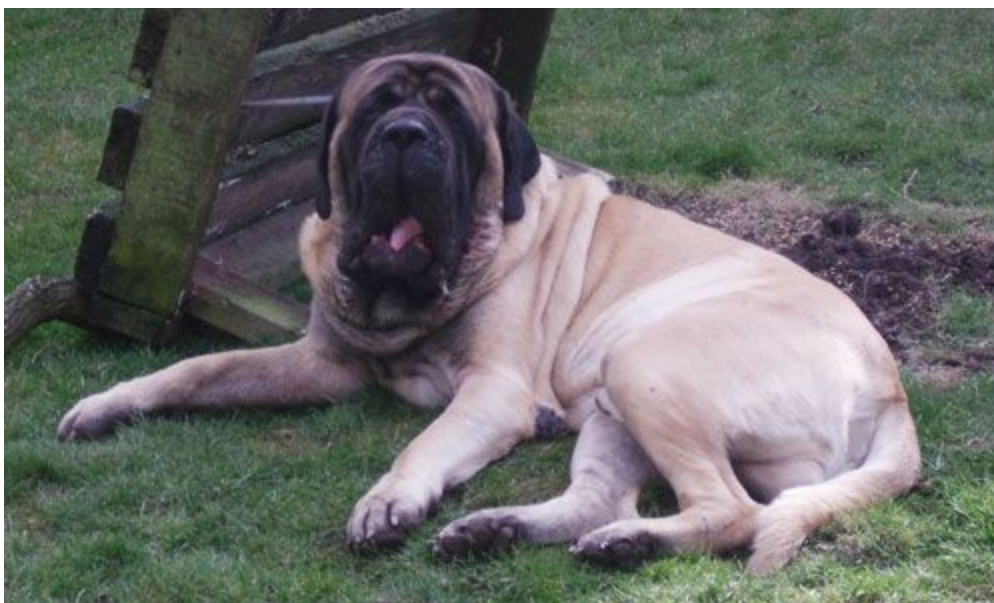
If stressful episodes happen occasionally, say once every few months and the dog has recovery time with nothing much going on in between, then he may be able to tolerate this without too much impact on his health and well being, though sadly many owners unknowingly put their dogs under pressure all too often.

Humans

We should trust our intuition more. When we take on any pet, their welfare is our responsibility and we make judgements on what is in their best interest. If we sense our dog is not comfortable with a person or situation, even if we cannot identify exactly what is prompting our concern, we can take action to protect him. Better to take him away from a potentially stressful experience than to stick it out and hope for the best. Dogs are usually unable to make the necessary changes when difficulties arise in the home or whilst they are at the other end of a lead. We've denied them the option to escape from what is troubling them, so it is our role to help them.



This dog is in a worrying situation, trying to cope by sniffing the floor. Many dogs use sniffing as a distraction, pretending they've not seen something. This dog has to cope in a very difficult environment; with people all around him, nowhere to go and restricted by a tight lead and collar. How must this dog feel? Reverse the situation: how would you cope tied up in a place full of unfamiliar dogs and people who do not understand what you are saying to them? I would be extremely worried about my safety.



Hagrid's favourite communication signals, when things are too much for him, start with a yawn...



... followed by scratching. He scratches often having a skin problem so has learned to use this as a first resort when communicating. He's also had much stress in his early life due to bullying, human commands and shouting, so his stress levels are fairly high anyway as far as people are concerned. When he scratches, I know he is struggling to cope, so I change the situation for him either by altering what is bothering him (usually a human doing something) or moving him away from the problem by use of a distraction.

What can we do?

- First and foremost, the best thing is to take the dog away from the situation (not by dragging him, which just steps up the anxiety level!) or, we can change the situation as soon as possible, keeping the dog (and ourselves) as calm as possible.
- Distracting the dog may work, although if the dog is already “fixed” it is probably too late by then. If you are unable to move him, blocking the dog’s view or splitting up may be a better option. Splitting up is a natural behaviour dogs use to help each other in difficult situations and, once you have the skills to read the situation safely, you can carry out the equivalent by walking calmly (without touching or saying anything)

in between your dog and the source of his anxiety. It may take several attempts, but it does help many dogs to cope better and to move away. Unless you have the required knowledge and experience to fully assess the scene, do not risk placing yourself, or the dogs, in danger.

- Give the dog the space he needs to cope with whatever is stimulating his anxiety. The distance required will vary from dog to dog, as will the situations causing the tension. What one dog finds terrifying may be of little concern to another.
- Sometimes simply waiting until whatever is worrying the dog has gone may be sufficient for him to cope, as long as the dog has adequate space and is not too freaked out (but again, it all depends on the relevant factors and the situation).
- Give the dog the time he needs to recover from events and activities and a tranquil environment in which to do so.
- Identify and reduce the stressors and exciting areas in the dog's life.
- Take care not to put the dog under the same pressure again, as behaviour could rapidly deteriorate, potentially leading to biting.
- If the dog has reached the biting stage then seek advice from myself or a member of the Sheila Harper team A.S.A.P. Contact details can be found at the back of the book.
- Sometimes the solution may be a combination of several of the above suggestions. As your understanding of canine language continues to grow, the more effective you will be in working out what is best for your dog.

In the following pictures, Hagrid has the security of a long line. It provides a boundary, preventing him running after farm animals, wildlife, or anything else. If he becomes scared, his reaction may cause him to be viewed as a dangerous dog, but a long line enables me to manage the situation. Many dogs feel safer knowing there are boundaries.



Hagrid has the choice to meet the cows or not. He decided to have a look at them then turned away in his own time. It helped that the cows were calm and approached the gate slowly.



Hagrid had not met cows before, but keeping a slack lead prevented tension developing. If I had tightened the lead, it may have created a charged atmosphere. Hagrid's stress levels were low enough for him not to react but to make a sensible choice. He sniffed the ground and turned away.








Both the cow and Hagrid mirror one another's body language.



Because I didn't appreciate Kaos' anxiety at a dog show, she had to tell me by running away from the situation. Being the size she was, I had no choice but to listen to her! At this point I still had much more to learn. How many dogs are forced to stay in situations they are unhappy with? She was wearing a choke chain which must have dug into her neck. Dogs often cough and have breathing difficulties as a result of the restriction on their throats and around their necks. Also observe how the man and

his mastiff mirror each others' body language. He looked just as surprised as his dog.

Key points | Is my dog worried?

-  All mammals exhibit a response to stress; it is not necessarily a bad thing. If a dog is given adequate time to recover from an episode of excitement or anxiety (and each dog will have different requirements depending on his character, experiences and other factors) then he is more likely to cope better with events as they occur.
-  For most dogs these days, quality rest is probably more important than exercise. Slow things down, reducing the stress and excitement levels.
-  We should trust our intuition, if something doesn't feel right then it probably isn't.
-  Give your dog space, and plenty of time to recover from stressful events, as well as avoiding difficult situations.
-  Using a long line helps to manage a dog in situations, whilst helping him to feel secure by knowing there are clear boundaries.

Stress



When communication signals are not effective, dogs begin to show signs of stress. Once we learn how to spot them we can make changes so that the dog has less to worry him. Would you recognise that the adult dog here is not happy with this situation? The adult dog could easily take control of the stick if he chose to but, instead, continues the interaction rather than using his strength against such a youngster. However, he is displaying some unease indicated by his head being angled away from the pup, ears flat to the head, widened eyes and tension in both face and body.

Dogs / Humans

A good number of behavioural problems and some health problems associated with dogs are actually caused by living under constant stress – too many demands overwhelming the dog.

Stress is an integral part of any living creature's existence on a daily basis whatever they may do.

We need stress to survive (so don't be panicked by the word "stress"). Any occurrence either good or bad can be a stressor. Simply living causes stress on mind and body, but it only creates problems from the resulting chemical changes, when the stressor is sufficiently severe or when incidents are happening frequently with insufficient time to recover in between. We may have a brand new car and look after it incredibly well, but it will deteriorate with use and age. Wear and tear = stress.

The following describes "stress" in short:

Stress triggers the body to produce adrenaline in the presence of short term stressors. Stress that persists needs more adrenal help in the form of cortisol and DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone). These hormones are your body's main defence mechanisms for dealing with stress and should be used sparingly.

Cortisol levels should be high in the morning, easing off towards the end of the day. However, when there's a long-term overload of stress, the body requires more cortisol and DHEA but is unable to continue producing enough DHEA, so adverse effects are felt such as an inability to sleep, a weakened immune system, energy slumps during the day or a lack of body temperature control. Stress symptoms create further stress and so begins a vicious cycle. The body needs sufficient time in between each stressful episode to repair itself. How long a period is required varies from human to human and dog to dog depending on many factors, but is roughly 3-5 days for each event. Dogs have a similar physiological make up to us, in this respect, so the same sort of rules apply to both species.

Stress comes not only from what you do, but also from what you eat. If you, or your dog, frequently eat junk food, low quality food or any foods the body finds difficult to digest, this will also prompt a stress reaction.

Food is a constant factor in dogs' and people's lives and we need to recognise the impact it can have on stress levels.

Even with inert objects stress is a component. Let's say that when carrying a number of heavy boxes they toppled over, spilling onto the ground with one breaking. On further inspection, the broken box had previously been damaged on the opposite side and taped together. Because this box had experienced more stress than the others, it had a greater inherent risk of breakage. We can apply this to life forms too. By keeping stressful events to a minimum and giving adequate time between for the opportunity to recover, we may not "break" as easily, coping better with life in general.



Stress can and does crop up in all sorts of situations – emotional, social, physical and intellectual. Stress also comes from exercise – it is taxing on the body. Now imagine what may happen if you have health problems developing and you are forced to take inappropriate exercise. A great number of dogs are put under this particular stress. It may not be done knowingly, as dogs and other animals don't often exhibit the signs of illness until it has reached a serious stage. Under the rules of "Survival of the Fittest", they are conditioned to know it's unwise to show disabilities or weaknesses.

Dogs as well as people react to the state of mind and moods of those they live with. If we are racing around pushing up our adrenaline levels, we will have an effect on our dogs and other members of the family who may find their stress levels will also rise. Both human and canine species can pick up on the anxiety and the emotional state of the mother whilst still inside the womb. This can and does have an impact on the developing foetus if stress is severe and / or long term.

The litter of pups produced by a bitch experiencing a stressful life will have been affected whilst in the womb and if the bitch remains fearful and anxious will continue to influence the pups as she rears them. In humans physical effects, such as a greater incidence of children developing asthma, have been noted if the mother experiences high stress during her pregnancy. Experiments have already been carried out on animals, showing similar results.

Stress can also be aggravated by fumes, toxins, allergens and many other factors within the environment. Long term stress will affect the way a body copes with these influences.

If high stress is allowed to continue over months or years it can lead to serious health problems, one of which is "adrenal fatigue". It is well worth looking up this topic.

"Adrenal fatigue can affect anyone who experiences frequent, persistent or severe mental, emotional or physical stress. It can also be an important contributing factor in health conditions ranging from allergies to obesity. Despite its prevalence in our modern world, adrenal fatigue has generally been ignored and

misunderstood by the medical community”

— Dr James Wilson. *Adrenal Fatigue: The 21st Century Stress Syndrome*

Dogs

Nowadays, dogs are exposed to an overload of stressful situations on a frequent and regular basis. They experience the demands and high expectations for behaviour and performance from the humans who own them, which ensures that, like us, a great many dogs are subject to stress. From personal experience, I know of a number of dogs who are suffering from this condition.


Domesticated dogs are far removed from their natural world and this impacts on them greatly. Whilst a degree of evolution has allowed dogs to learn to tolerate small changes, I do believe we have put far too many humanised activities into their lives. We haven't looked at how we can move into the dogs' world.


So, what was this natural canine world like? A dog would have lived surrounded by its family, spending much of the time lying around their base, not going far. Activity for older members of the group would be confined to hunting when necessary or scavenging, the rest of the time being devoted to sleeping, resting, sniffing and keeping watch. Apart from feeding and toileting, the puppies would play for brief bursts then SLEEP. Dogs would rush to escape from danger or to hunt food but they rarely ran for the sake of it. We have taught them to chase unnatural things such as balls, Frisbees and the like. This is an area where we have influenced them in a harmful way by doing it to excess and it has caused, and is causing, all kinds of problems for them as well as for us, because the dogs become fuelled with adrenaline, suffer withdrawal effects (when it ceases) or develop obsessive behaviour traits.





Sniffing – what dogs do naturally to give them information about the world. Reducing stress levels enables a dog to be able to concentrate and sniff long enough to learn about the environment he is in.

Key points | Stress

 A good number of behavioural problems and some health problems associated with dogs are actually caused by living under constant stress – too many demands overwhelming the dog.

 Dogs, like us, react to the state of mind and moods of those they live with.

 Long term stress can and does lead to serious health problems.

 Consider how we can move into the dogs' world instead of humanising them and expecting them to move into our world. Share interests and life.

Dogs in a man-made world



Think about the places we take our dogs to. If we take the time to learn their language, we have a chance to know whether they really are comfortable in our world, doing the things we want or think they ought to do. We often do things simply because others do, but forget to question why.

Dogs / Humans

We often rush around in the presence of our dogs, who are placed at the hub of family life and all that goes with it: phones ringing, music playing, lots of noisy computer games, TVs and radios blaring, people at the door, family squabbles, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, dogs in adjoining gardens (lack of space is something we all suffer from), weird smells from cleaning products and air fresheners. You get the idea.

Our moods vary from day to day and so do the dog's, but do we realise when their emotions have changed? Not many of us are even aware of variations in our dog's mood, let alone able to do anything about it. Have we the time to care, anyway? We're often too busy with our own agenda to recognise what is going on and are not in the position to take action. Sometimes we can become so caught up in all of our own demands it's hard to know how other members of the family are feeling.

To meet their needs, our dogs have to try to sleep amidst this hubbub. Maybe we think they are sleeping, but are they really? Have a close look; the dog is usually aware of every movement going on around him and has not "switched off". Some dogs are too stressed to be able to switch off anyway, often because they are given far too much exercise, as promoted by so many experts these days. Believe it or not, living in this kind of environment is very wearing for a dog. He is constantly alert, waiting for something to happen (which it invariably does).

Because we have so much going on in our lives, we may then feel guilty, thinking we must do more with our dogs. So, what do we do to make it up to them? Perhaps we take them to dog training where they must weave in and out of other dogs and people they are not familiar with, invading another dog's body space or vice versa, (which is a very rude thing to do in the dog's eyes). We leave them in a room with a whole host of two and four-legged strangers, whilst we go out, then come back in, expecting them to stay put until WE permit them to move.

Maybe we take them to agility classes, where they can become so wound up they can't stand still and / or they get things wrong, or end up in a fight with another dog because they can't think straight. How about taking them to dog shows so that they can socialise? The more socialisation the better, or so we are led to believe!

Socialisation as it is usually promoted is something I have found actually creates problems.

Nowadays there appears to be too much emphasis on socialisation, training and having to do things with our dogs. Maybe this is where things have become out of balance and we are too aware of what media "experts" say and their "advice" has taken us in the wrong direction.

Are we, in effect, trying too hard? Perhaps if we concentrated more on being with our dogs, spending quality time with them, simply sitting down and observing them and noticing what they want and like, rather than doing what we want and like, or think we should do, in order to fulfil our expectations of them, then we might have more connected relationships.

Having had first hand experience of creating a problem dog through excessive, inappropriate play and overwhelming her with too much socialisation, I feel there is not enough good education and teaching about this area of a dog's development and many owners have only the vaguest idea of what socialisation should cover anyway.



Training: how I used to do it. I now train dogs in a different way by avoiding testing them and opting for an environment they are more comfortable in.

- We force them to meet every dog, human and animal, so that they will have encountered new experiences.
- We make them walk next to noisy, smelly traffic of all descriptions that heads straight at them.
- We take them on great long walks or runs using short leads which encourage the dog to pull as they are held too close to the owner for comfort; pulling is how they try to create greater space. Or we use flexi leads which need tension for them to operate.



The machine was cleaning pavements in a busy local park. Vehicles like this can scare some puppies for life and the rotating brushes can turn on the prey drive for some highly stressed dogs. Just one bad experience like this could prevent a dog from wanting to go for a walk. Children may also become scared by noisy machinery. We are able to explain the working of machines to them but not to dogs.

- We let them loose and make them chase after balls and sticks, over all kinds of terrain, in and out of water and so on for far too long. Dogs weren't born with balls in their mouths and their mothers don't encourage the high level excitement repeated ball chasing causes. We weren't born with cigarettes in our mouths either, but both things are addictive. For a dog that is already reactive to sight, sound and touch, ball play can further create problems. It is a reflex action for a dog to chase something that moves. Some dogs become so full of adrenaline that they begin to chase other moving objects and not just balls.
- Dogs having a better balance in life may be able to have a ball thrown every once in a while but it certainly suggests that there is a problem if a dog and / or owner are unable to cope with situations without having a ball with them.
- Then, because the dogs can't relax, we assume they aren't worn out yet! In reality they are probably exhausted, just running on adrenaline. What do we do when we get them home? We give them more to do, increasing the level of activity rather than reducing the amount of stress.

If a dog is hooked on having a ball thrown for him it can cause added problems when the activity suddenly stops. Where some dogs may cope with instant withdrawal many will not and a programme to wean them off their obsession, over a period of time, will have to be introduced. Every dog is different and it is impossible to cover all eventualities without seeing the dog.

Consider our own lives. We have a hectic day, then get home to be just as busy with family life, giving us no time to rest. Maybe we do an aerobics class, visit the gym during the evening to “relax”, (well it’s good for us isn’t it?) and then come back home and go to bed.

Most people would find it difficult to switch off and sleep at the end of this sort of day, so why should we expect our dogs to be any different? We rush them around the park on their tight, short leads, not allowing them chance to sniff or wee at their own pace, dragging them along because we have so little time before we head off to our next commitment.



Quick, quick, hurry, hurry.

Do you want to live in a world like this?

Wouldn't you prefer to take your time, looking at what takes your fancy, occasionally saying hello to a passing person and so on? Yet we expect dogs to take all this tearing around and these demanding schedules, day after day, then wonder how and why our dog became badly behaved or ill!

I must emphasise that there are some dogs who cope with high level activity better than others and may appear to like training, ball play, agility and other humanised activities we subject them to. However, they may show symptoms of ill health (skin, digestive, and / or joint problems to name a few) or behavioural issues far sooner than they may otherwise have done if they had not been exposed to this type of command dependent activity. Controlling them in this way and on a frequent basis, will inevitably have some sort of effect on them.

It is well worth becoming educated in canine communication before deciding whether your dog likes or dislikes any activities you may wish to share with him.

Being able to “read” a dog will help you in your attempt to understand your dog's needs. If he was a person you wished to have a good relationship with, you would ask him whether he wanted to take part and he would be able to give you an honest response. Understand that your dog can give you an answer in most cases, as well as letting you know when he has had enough of whatever he is doing and would appreciate a break.

Working dogs living outside may be better off than pets that live in the house. Although they may have to do high energy activity at times, they do have days off and can make their own choices of how to spend their time. Very often they opt for sleep and rest or just amble around. They aren't subjected to the comings and goings of a busy family life, with all the noise of machinery and entertainment sources that fill most homes. All in all, it may be a more peaceful, balanced life for working dogs but putting your average pet outside in a kennel isn't the way to go. Many working dogs have become used to their outdoor regime over generations, so to suddenly make changes which deprive a pet dog of the security and familiarity of home would be very harsh.

The lifestyle most of our dogs have is very far removed from living with a

few other family members, in the wilderness where for a short time each day they go hunting or scavenging. When on a hunt, dogs sniff intently to gather information about potential prey that has frequented the area recently. They track, moving slowly so as not to spook their quarry, before a short surge at speed to catch and bring down the prey.

The prize is then shared and eaten before sleeping for hours, allowing digestion to take place gradually. Occasionally they need to hunt for a long time but then they will rest for several days. Even when scavenging, a dog has to think about where food may be, how and when to find it and all with minimum risk to himself and using as little energy as possible. It is not a process which can be rushed.

Our dogs should sleep, ideally, between 16 – 18 hours in each day, though a puppy will need even more.

Obviously things can and do go wrong for dogs living naturally. They have stressors such as where is the next meal coming from. Possibly, there won't be one and there may be too many dogs in one area for the available resources. But then they do have choices they can make using brain power, a challenge which our domestic dogs lack. They are rarely given options, we decide for them; the decisions we make are what we think they require and not necessarily what is really needed.



Dog sleeping? Sometimes dogs appear to be sleeping but are they really? By giving Hagrid the right environment, and the opportunity to sleep, he can learn it is safe for him to do so when

he needs to. We should give dogs the option to sleep during the day as well as at night. Because Hagrid is calm the cat chooses to doze close to him, however he had to learn how to sleep and relax.

Our choices are based on what everyone else is doing with their dogs and how they do it. This is usually guided by media and fashion so we follow the herd and do it too. But, who has said this is the right way?

The theory of dominance hierarchy was put forward, a number of years ago, by [L David Mech](#), senior scientist and authority on wolves. However, since then, he has admitted that mistakes were made and is now trying to eradicate dominance theory from public awareness. So why don't we take time to look more to the dogs we have today for the answers rather than basing how we treat them on outdated and discredited ideas? Since I have backtracked with my dogs, I certainly have been better placed to see what they didn't like or understand and the effect it was having on them.

If we are asked to consider doing something in a different way, we may be fearful of trying it, but in order to help their dogs, I would like people to be open minded and take a fresh look at dog training.

When dogs are subjected to prolonged stress, is it surprising how often we start to see health issues developing in them. Often infections and digestive or skin problems are early signs. Body shape can also change and the dog's outline looks different. Behaviour problems are another common sign of stress.

Often dogs suffering prolonged stress develop physical issues such as a roached (rounded) back and / or their hind quarters tuck underneath them. Alternatively, the back legs become very stiff and straight.

If symptoms are showing on the outside then things are probably much worse on the inside. The dog's body is not coping with the amount of stress it is experiencing.



Acne, just one of the stress-related skin problems Hagrid brought with him.

A dog with too hectic a schedule may not have the opportunity to digest his food properly or may even lose interest in eating to a large extent. I know this from experience, but fortunately for my dog, once the stress had been dramatically reduced in her life, she could enjoy her meals as opposed to picking at the contents of her bowl before walking away. She moved on from being an underweight mastiff to a well proportioned one who felt relaxed in her home. On the other hand, some highly stressed dogs may feel the need to gobble down their food, which can be similarly damaging to the digestive process. If we take a look at ourselves: when we are anxious and going through a stressful patch, we may either have no appetite or we want to consume everything in sight, often not feeling fully satisfied, hence the need to eat and eat in an attempt to fill an emotional gap. What we are aiming for, in ourselves and our dogs, is a balance.


When we have eaten a lovely meal in a relaxing situation, without a care in the world, not having to rush off anywhere afterwards, it is all too easy to fall asleep, or at least feel like it. If we are lucky, maybe we can sit around for an hour or so, savouring the moment. Ideally this is how food should be digested; at a slow pace, not rushing to the next thing on the agenda straight after having eaten. If we don't allow food to be digested properly, we risk the start of possible long term digestive disorders.

A stressed dog cannot digest its food sufficiently and is equally liable to develop problems.

So, if you see dogs who are either very poor eaters or wolf down their food, consider their anxiety or stress levels and what you might be able to do to help. There are a number of dogs who even refuse treats in certain settings which could be an indication of how the dog is feeling in that particular place. On the other hand some dogs will go on to eat anything in sight, including bizarre and quite inappropriate items. As anxious people can have eating disorders, so can dogs.


Key points | Dogs in a man-made world


 Modern western society functions at an unnaturally fast and hectic pace.


 Our moods might vary from day to day but do we allow for this in our dogs?

 Because we are busy, we think it's right to keep our dogs busy, often with too much or the wrong type of exercise or training or socialisation.

 Spending time simply being with our dogs could be better for them.

 Long term adrenaline overload in dogs may well cause health problems, which can be indicated by their body language.

 Good relationships between people allow both to have a say on what they choose to do together. We can give our dogs the chance to tell us what they like to do with us by learning to read their body language.

 Dogs need more rest and sleep than most people realise; at least 16 hours a day.

Warning signs



When communications are not listened to or get no response, the language becomes louder. We can help our dogs before they reach more extreme warning signs.

Signs of stress in dogs

Some of these indicators also overlap other lists. Signs of stress are shown through body language signals as, indeed, the dogs are communicating how they feel, to us:

- Shaking
- Freezing
- Growling
- Nipping
- Biting
- Shivering
- Weeing
- Not weeing
- Drinking obsessively
- Not drinking
- Eating hurriedly
- Not eating
- Lethargy
- Manic activity



Two dogs who live together communicate their good intentions. Jaffa's body is curved away as is Hagrid's head, both indicating they mean no harm to the other. This is not just a comfortable way of lying down, they are communicating. Be aware that a dog lying head-on to another one could be using bullying tactics. It's a subtle action and must be assessed in context. Dogs living together have to work hard on a daily basis to maintain amicable relations. They very often have little time away from the others. My dogs sleep in different areas of the house at night as well as having separate walks during the day. They have the choice of more than one room and various flooring options.

Causes of anxiety that may be overlooked

What is likely to worry a dog depends on many factors such as the situation, the dog's personality, health and previous experience, as well as the dog's current adrenaline and arousal levels.

The impact of an occurrence will also vary depending on the time of day and whether the dog is tired or not. It is exactly the same if we have had a day where events have irritated us and we have not had much sleep (having other worries on our mind) then things which previously wouldn't be of concern suddenly begin causing us to react. Feeling a little under the weather, having odd aches and pains or some illness brewing can make anyone feel more irritable and snappy. So if you have a reactive dog, chances are they are under too much pressure in some way at that time. People often complain about their dog being unpredictable – I can guarantee the dog's behaviour is almost always entirely predictable, providing we have the knowledge to understand what the animal is feeling.

Humans

Being a different species, to fully appreciate the dog's state of mind is probably beyond us, but, given the will to learn about canine body language, we can come so much closer to them. I am not blaming owners for not getting the picture. I am simply requesting that everyone who takes on the responsibility of a dog is educated in the canine communication system, studying it in as much depth as they can.

I believe this to be the greatest thing we can do to change dogs' lives today, to be able to then help them have a better future. Owners CAN do something to make improvements in the vast majority of cases.

If they don't want to, they don't deserve to have a dog; but I am sure most caring dog owners would welcome the chance to acquire knowledge which will benefit their pet and help them take the best possible care of their dog.

Causes of anxiety in dogs

Smells

A dog's sense of smell is top of its list of senses and is far more powerful than we can comprehend. Dogs rely heavily on their sense of smell for survival, their prime sensory organ being the nose. A few triggers are:

- Other animals (some breeds will be more susceptible)
- Bitches in season
- Cigarette smoke
- Pollution
- Smell of food (especially if hungry)
- Perfumed products (for humans and dogs)

Some people are physically affected by strong smells triggering things like nausea, migraine and asthma, so what about the much more sensitive canine olfactory system?

Dogs roll in nasty smelly things (Calvin Canine!) and we are repulsed by them. Maybe dogs are repulsed by the smells which delight us. Our noses aren't as efficient as theirs so I wonder what our perfumes smell like to a dog? Of course dogs are unable to bath us or escape from our smell.

Because dogs prefer different smells to us shouldn't we consider reviewing the highly perfumed products we use in our homes, making the place more comfortable for our dogs to live in?



Jaffa taking her time to delicately sniff out information from her environment.

Communication problems

- Not being understood
- Barking (for what reason?)
- Pulling on lead
- Devices used to “control” unwanted behaviour, e.g. spray collars, electric shock collars, pinch harnesses, muzzles, and so on. Before using such devices, I would try it out on myself then decide whether to put it on my dog. I don’t necessarily recommend this action to other people, but strongly advise that the possible impact of any equipment being used with / on a dog is given the greatest thought and care before a decision is reached.



Hagrid, presenting me with a paw lift; a clear indication in this situation for me to go away.

Touch

- Flooring – having to constantly walk on slippery surfaces. Have you tried walking in high heels on laminate flooring or polished ceramic tiles?
- Never knowing when someone will touch them, even when resting and sleeping. The majority of owners permit anyone who chooses to, to touch the dog. Would we be so keen to let anyone touch us or our children at will? What effect might that have on us or our children?
- Equipment we put on dogs – collars and harnesses, especially if badly fitting. Also head collars, pinch harnesses, shock collars or choke chains.
- Dressing them up in doggie clothes.
- Being groomed (also no choice, over smell, sight, or sound)



Jaffa intensely dislikes being groomed. Grooming takes place in stages: one day I will cut hair from her feet, another day trim her nails, a few days later the clippers will be used and so on until the job is done. Grooming in this way gives her short bursts of stress as well as time to get over each session. She no longer pants, salivates or becomes over excited as she used to when going to the groomers. She can be seen communicating by using a shake off as I groom her.

No choice

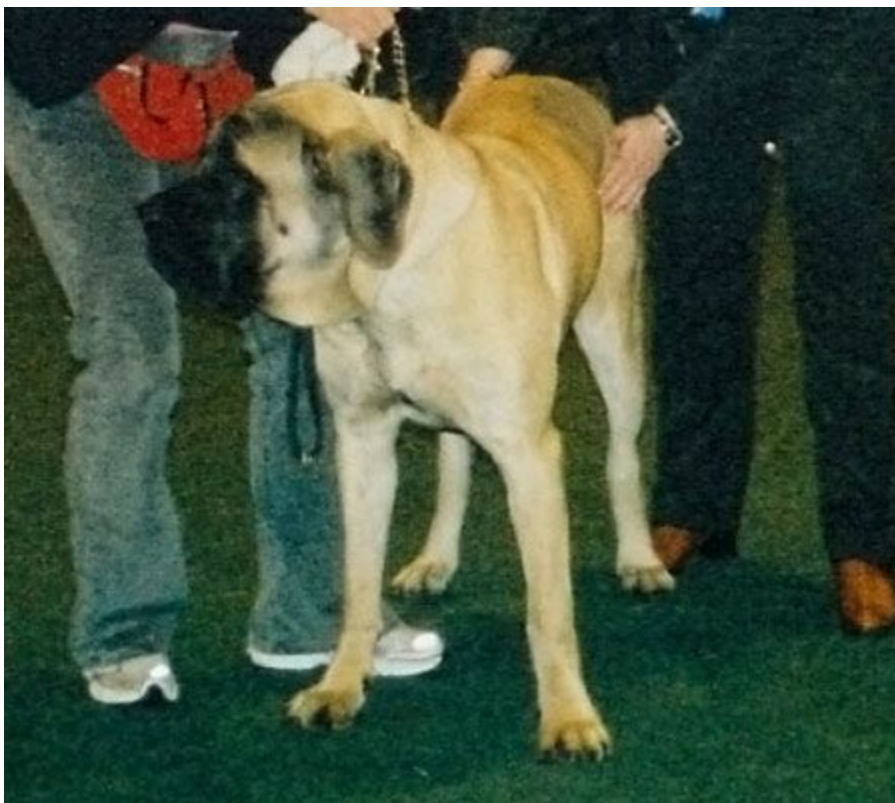
Much of what we put dogs through, expecting them to endure without complaint, gives them no choice.

When we can make choices for them we should make it better for dogs and when we are unable to we can still be aware that it will impact on our dogs. Here are a few to consider:

- Hunger, thirst, too hot, too cold
- Lack of opportunity to toilet (if restricted to one room all day this could

be reality for a dog)

- Socialisation / training classes
- Dancing with dogs – no choice (did the dog invite you to waltz?)
- Being shown, i.e. dog shows
- “Cani X” and similar activities where the dog is fixed to a person or object. Even when running with your dog loose, he may feel compelled to keep up rather than risk the vulnerability that goes with being left behind
- Being shut in a car
- Being left alone for hours
- Having to accompany owner everywhere
- Not being with owner enough
- Short lead, preventing use of their natural instinct to check out their environment
- Other restrictive equipment
- Other dogs – meeting when out and about
- Exercise – over, under or any inappropriate for the dog
- No resting place where they are left in peace
- Having to live or share with another dog and / or other animals
- Living with family members who don’t understand, or in some cases don’t even like the dog
- Being housed in the wrong environment; such as a Great Dane living in a top floor flat
- Too much freedom
- No boundaries
- Alterations to routine
- Not having a routine
- Too rigid a routine
- Illness or departure of any member of family, including other animals
- Holidays, whether the dog is with you or not; it’s a change
- Trauma for the family, e.g. death, redundancy or unemployment



Showing Kaos (my first Mastiff) using restrictive equipment, leaning over her, forcing her to stay whilst a stranger handled her, as well as having a camera pointed in her face. She was traumatised at Crufts by everything and was totally overwhelmed.



How few choices do these dogs have? They are unable to escape

from the situation, restrained by highly restrictive equipment, surrounded by people, they have no personal space or toileting options. They are vulnerable to strangers approaching. Owners and the equipment used exert complete control, imposing the wishes of the owner on the dogs.

Noises

- Fireworks
- Children
- Celebrations
- Arguments
- Alarms
- Radio / Televisions or computer games (which is also sight)
- Sirens
- Refuse / recycling collectors, postmen; anyone at the door
- Traffic (which is also sight)
- Road works, building work in the home and / or vicinity
- Being nagged, too many demands or being shouted at
- Power tools e.g. lawn mowers (which is also sight)
- Thunder or strong winds



Dogs living with children need time and space away from them to be able to rest and relax. For the safety of both children and dogs, good early education is vital. They should NEVER be left together unsupervised.

Sight

- Passers by – access to windows and doors
- People always being visible
- Cats, birds, squirrels in the garden or animals on television
- Postmen, window cleaners and so on (which is also noise)
- Overactive owner or household
- Cyclists, skateboarders and so on
- Wheelchairs, crutches or walking sticks
- Road sweepers (which is also noise)
- People in hats, hoods, motor cycle gear or unusual clothing
- People carrying items which obscure recognition of the normal human outline such as umbrellas, bags and rucksacks
- Statues
- Restricted or failing vision may cause more problems with objects being distorted; the dog doesn't see clearly which could give rise to them having insecurity and other behavioural issues that weren't noticeable before.

Dogs are subjected to these experiences and a great deal more without any advance knowledge of our communication system and we expect them to handle it without us having to learn their language. How fair is this?


It is so important that we give our dogs choices, just as we would for a human being, to help them cope with what must be, to them, an alien environment. If we aren't prepared to do this or to make the relationship with our dog a two way shared experience, then should we even be allowed to have a dog in our care?


I fully acknowledge that dogs and people belong to two different species, but the more science discovers about dogs, the more similarities and parallels are found in physiology, body chemistry and, yes, emotional responses. To me it goes without saying “treat other living beings with the respect they deserve”. Therefore, thinking how you might feel before imposing something on your


dog may be a good rule of thumb and help you to develop a better relationship with your canine companion.

Key points | Warning signs

 An over active or lethargic dog may well be responding to stimuli we are not aware of.

 Many things can trigger a reaction e.g. smell, touch, noise, vision and lack of choice.

 Learning to observe and read canine body language is perhaps one of the most useful things you can do for your dog.

 Dogs, like humans need to have choices in order to help them cope with life.

Choice or control?



This dog has no choice. They don't control us; we influence dogs' lives. Let's work toward understanding them and sharing communication.

Dogs / Humans

Allowing children to emulate the behaviour of sensible calm adults gives them confidence, enabling them to make good decisions in life.



The word no is used too often with children and dogs. By giving them both choices, they are less likely to get into trouble and accept boundaries when they are necessary.

Why would I say no to my granddaughter wanting to wear my swimming hat and goggles? Sometimes we almost automatically say no, without thinking things through properly, as we may have our mind on something else, or we are rushed or agitated. I could ask “why don’t people let their dogs make the choice when they want to go in a particular direction or lie in another place?” To me it seems obvious to let the dog make decisions at certain times, especially when on a walk (their walk!) but the number of people who don’t allow them to make the simplest of choices (such as opting to stop and sniff) is so sad. I used to be one of those people, following the crowd without questioning, but can see now how unreasonable I was being.

Before laying down the law to prevent my dogs from doing a particular thing, I simply ask myself “is there any reason why they should not?” Usually I

allow my dogs freedom to act, providing it is within the boundaries I have set for them. This has transformed my relationship with my dogs, and more importantly, theirs with me.

Communication is a vital component of survival; every species has a right to be understood. We have taken over our dogs' lives in such a massive way. Many would have us believe that this is what they have done to us! How absurd is that statement when, if you examine the facts, clearly it is completely the other way round. Where the dog lives and with whom they share their lives; when, where and what they eat; when, where and for how long they sleep; when and where they toilet; when to exercise, what type and how long for, even their walking speed is invariably determined by us. For pedigree dogs we even decide who they mate with, when and where. Basically, every aspect of a dog's life is controlled by us. Surely the least we can all do in return is to try to understand them, not just the vocal side of things but the silent communication (body language) too, and look at things from their perspective instead of always from our own. Take the information I offer; spend time just being with dogs and observing them, that way we can really learn about how they are feeling in the different situations in which they are put. We will then be in the position to help them, rather than expecting them to always fit into our world. Be compassionate and give dogs some choices and simple pleasures in life which are appropriate for them. Let's try and lessen the distress of being misunderstood.

Like many others who live and work with dogs, I want to understand and learn more about them. This is what most of us aim to do in other relationships we form; we like to know how and what the other person is feeling. Once we realise they don't like, say, football we don't insist on them watching it and playing it day in day out. Even if that is something we enjoy doing, we might avoid or at least limit it when they are around to please them.

People in a successful relationship have respect for the feelings of one another. By reading this book I hope you have become aware that this can apply to dogs too; have consideration for their wants and needs in a similar way as you would a friend. I am overwhelmed by the effectiveness of the knowledge I now have and am confident that both my dogs and I are the

happiest we have ever been because I have allowed myself to let go of the control and, instead, learnt to understand and respect them. I can't emphasise this message enough, and hope you too will enjoy the delights that will unfold as you begin to really live with your dogs.




The picture in the Bullying chapter gives the impression that Hagrid was about to bite my granddaughter...





... in reality as these pictures show, they were peacefully interacting. It is important to look at the “big” picture, not just one behaviour in isolation and not jump to conclusions.

Key points | Choice or control?

 Communication is a vital component of survival for any living being.

 We can all learn more about how dogs communicate with us.

 Offering appropriate choices provides better long-term results than continually trying to control your dog. Choices give dogs confidence; aiding effective decision-making.

 Think before making restrictive demands on your dog; is it really necessary?

Acknowledgements

First I would love to thank everyone – family, friends, fellow students and advisors of dog behaviour – who have helped me on my journey, Sheila Harper being at the forefront. What an amazing talent you have for teaching. Thanks for not only improving my dogs’ lives but also totally changing mine (for the better!). I am indebted to you along with many other people and dogs whose lives have been transformed by your teachings.

Turid Rugaas – for identifying how dogs communicate via ‘calming signals’, highlighting the various ways in which we can interact with them: a series of truly amazing breakthroughs that can change the way we are around dogs. I must also congratulate Turid for the gift she has of making it all sound so simple, when it is! Trouble is we often like to complicate it all with science and academic words.

Marilyn Aspinall – who has done much editing and re-editing, giving me confidence and courage to follow through stress reduction and management techniques with my Mastiff, Hagrid. Rehabilitating Hagrid has proved to be challenging, but oh so rewarding. It’s always more difficult to work with your own dogs as emotions get in the way. Marilyn complements me well with her patience (when I keep updating my thoughts), methodical approach, rationality, organisation and planning. Through working on this book I have come to trust Marilyn implicitly and we have become great friends. Thanks for sticking with it and me.

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Jean Gough – for your assessment and views from another angle, and truly welcome remarks, which may have made the book longer, but also hopefully, clearer! Of course, when it comes to dogs, I could go on forever and at times it seemed that’s just what I did.

Colin – my ever patient, loyal, loving partner, who has had bags of patience with all the interruptions in his life and the endless: “Colin, can you check this please?” At the outset, like the rest of my family, Colin was sceptical about my change of approach towards the dogs, thinking it was just a fad of mine. Over the months and years, Colin has come to recognise this is a way forward, not just in helping dogs but for all animals, as opposed to my previous backward steps in trying to control their lives. Colin is always full of encouragement and helped me to realise the need for these practices to be known by a wider public.

Jaffa and Hagrid – thanks for the invaluable information, through your communication and the wonderful relationship we now have. To all the dogs who have come into my life one way or another: I am sorry for not understanding at the time, as well as being thankful to all who tried, through their language, to show me the right direction. Now I am open minded, I am able to help dogs and owners alike to progress.

More acknowledgements:

Writing and producing this book has been a great experience, mainly due to the willingness of some lovely people who want to help others understand this better way of working with dogs. They too have had their eyes opened and realise the need for change in the world we share with our companions whether canine or human. There are many wonderful people who have been so supportive of me whilst writing this book and I would like to mention a few of them, thanking them for their contributions:

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Adrian Jackson – the most patient, organised, skilled graphic designer (and the rest) in the world. I do hope you will work with us again. Maybe we’ll have a plan next time.

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which quickly turned into a book. Again, thanks for your patience, as we struggled to learn more about how to work with a graphic designer!

Jeremy Bassett – who, through his love of working with dogs in this way offered his wonderful skills in marketing to help get this valid (and vital) information out into the public domain.

About me

Throughout my life I have kept and worked with a broad range of animals (including several dogs!) and ran my own successful pet sitting business. I have qualifications in animal care and management and have completed my OCN on the IDBTS (International Dog Behaviour and Training School) course with Sheila Harper.

I am the proud owner of Jaffa, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, who was unwanted by a pet sitting client and Hagrid a rescued English Mastiff who, when I had him, was in very poor health, nervous and would have been perceived as a potentially “dangerous dog”. They have taught me so much, as have all my dogs.

I am now able to help them have a better life due to what I have gained from the IDBTS course and working with Sheila Harper. I only wish I had known what I know now 20 years ago.

Having had previous experience of many different types of training and behavioural methods, most of which relied on exercising some form of dominance or control over the dog, I realised that they only produced short-term results or made matters worse. After attending further courses, run by Sheila and other similarly enlightened people, I am now able to use my knowledge and experience to help others understand their dogs, work with them to develop a positive relationship, deal with existing issues and prevent other problems developing by putting the ideas and methods I promote into practice.

A good relationship consists of understanding, sharing and trust. This shared relationship lays down a solid foundation for a rewarding partnership to flourish, encouraging problems to dissolve naturally.



Since writing this book, Jaffa is no longer with us. She had a number of breed-related diseases which beset Cavaliers; one more victim of the way we continue to influence and control dogs' lives, in this instance, trying to produce an idealised dog without due regard to health. As a result of Mitral Valve Disease, Jaffa was put to sleep on February the 1st 2011. She was a wonderful soul; a sweet natured girl, sensitive and eager to please. Eventually she learnt it was okay to be herself, once I had found out how to implement boundaries without imposing control, commands or demands.

We all (humans, dog and cats) miss her so very much. I am glad that I was able to change Jaffa's life for the better by the choices I permitted her to make. Please act now for yours and your dog's sake, to allow them to have happy lives whilst you both enjoy the wonderful relationship you can have when you learn to let go of control. Observe yourself and your dog as you both enjoy the freedom that letting go brings.



Further information and reading

Below are a few of the people I have gained much knowledge from.

I hope you will too. Please look them up:

[Sheila Harper](#)

[Turid Rugaas](#)

[Sally Askew](#) : the founder of the European Guild of Canine Bowen Therapists (amongst many other talents)

[Nicole Mackie](#)

[Winkie Spiers](#)

[Professor Marc Bekoff](#)

[Barry Eaton](#)

[My website](#)

Thank you all so much.

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