

CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

Behavioral Vaccine # 4

We all understand that puppies need to get vaccines for things such as parvo and rabies. But it is equally as important for puppies to get what is now being called “behavior vaccines.” These are the types of experiences that help your pup become comfortable in your world and they reduce the risk of fear and aggression later in life. Each week, we will talk about things you can do to “vaccinate” your puppy against problems later on.

Why Is It Important for Puppies to Manage Their Enthusiasm?

Dogs tend to be enthusiastic about the simple things in life, which is one of the reasons we love them. However, if dogs aren’t taught self-control when faced with exciting events, their excitement can lead to frustration, frustration can lead to arousal, and arousal practiced over and over can lead to aggression. It’s a slippery slope that can lead to a dog developing uncontrollable behavior such as barking, growling, and thrashing when on leash, behind a fence or peering out a window.

Why Self Control Doesn’t Come Naturally...

Puppies come with an “on” switch pre-installed, but no “off” switch. Frustration is a natural response to not being able to get what you want, especially when it’s just out of reach. When certain events are paired over and over with frustration they can become triggers of over-arousal and aggression.

Behavioral Vaccination Training

The 3 most common events that lead to over-excitement and aggression issues are: 1. Seeing other dogs and people on leash, 2. Seeing dogs and people through a window, 3. Seeing dogs and people over or through a fence. While all 3 are important, numbers 2 & 3 are easy to avoid simply by not putting your dog in that situation unsupervised. Walks, however, are an important activity for dogs and people to enjoy and deserve the most attention.

- **Seeing other dogs and people while on leash and out on a walk.**

Step 1. When out and about with your puppy, take along yummy treats or his favorite toy. When your puppy notices another dog or person, mark the event with the word “yes” and give your puppy a yummy treat (or play with the toy). Once your puppy begins to respond with quick anticipation to the word “yes” immediately after seeing another person or dog, move on to step 2.

Step 2. Begin to say your puppy’s name immediately after he sees another dog or person. If he doesn’t respond go back to step 1. If he does respond give him 4–5 small pieces of treat one after the other for keeping his focus on you.

- **Seeing other dogs and people through a fence or a window.**

Keeping your puppy supervised when he has access to this type of set-up is very important. Otherwise a problem may develop.

Step 1. Follow Step 1 & 2 listed above.

Step 2. Begin to call your dog to you, mark with a “yes” and reward.

Step 3. Begin to call your dog to you, ask him to sit or lie down and reward.