MANAGING MULTI DOG HOUSEHOLDS AND AGGRESSION



Danielle Beck, BSc (hons), MSc CABC

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What are we going to cover?

- What is aggression
- Causes of aggression
- Relationships within multi dog households
- Maintaining relationships within multi dog house holds
- Common problems seen within multi dog households •

How to help

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What is



aggression?

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What is aggression?

In my case load 95% of ‘aggression’ I see is absolutely normal behaviour, for that individual, in that context!

It’s not always acceptable or appropriate; but it is normal :)

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What is aggression?

The other 5%?

Well these are the animals that display – abnormal aggression;

It’s out of context

Lacks triggers

Often lacks warning

It’s rare

Usually has an underlying medical problem

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Defining Aggression

Aggression is a **normal** species-specific behaviour, designed as an anti predator tactic, conflict resolution or management strategy, depending on the species displaying the behaviour (Abrantes, 2003; Perez-Cembranos et al 2013).

The aggressive response may vary due to previous learning, which may exacerbate or change the aggressive response itself and is a common behavioural problem seen by behaviour counsellors in many species (Overall, 1997; Lindsay, 2001).

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What is aggression?

For many species aggression has a specific purpose within certain contexts, such as;

- Defending Territory

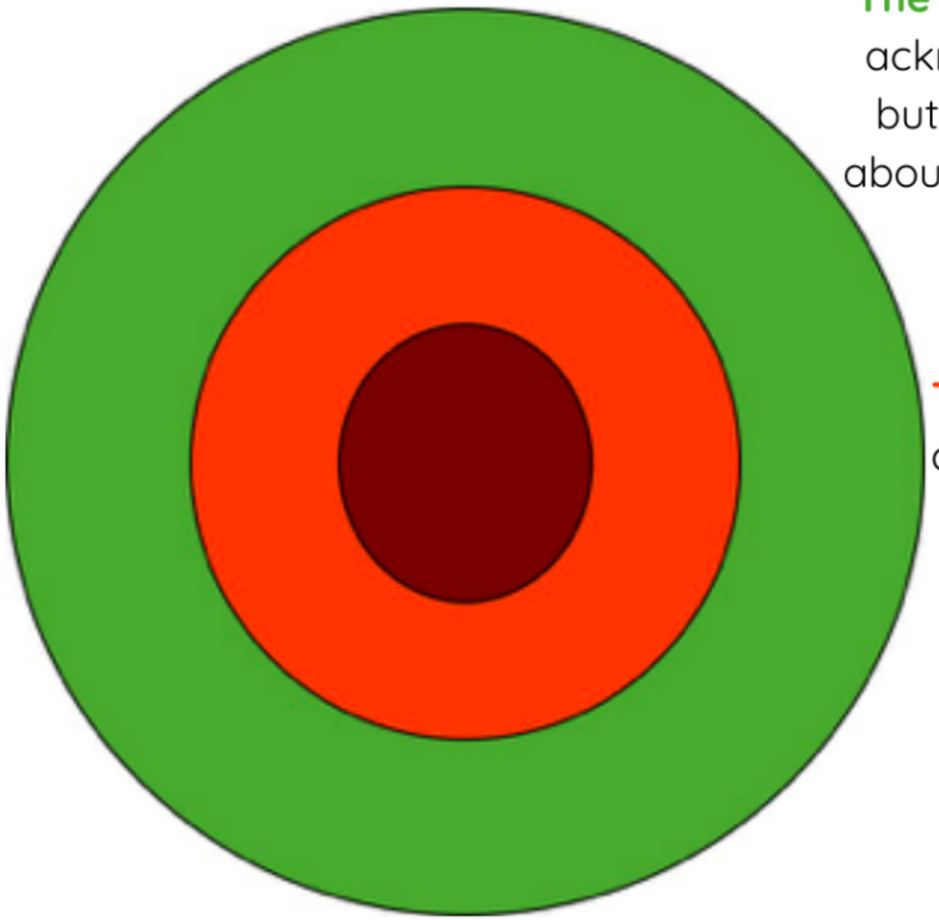
- Mating / breeding rights
- Anti predator tactics etc

- Animals that are exposed to real or perceived predators or threats have a short space of time to determine if the threat is real or not, and how they're going to act.

This is based on the costs and benefits of fleeing over not fleeing e.g fight or flight.

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Life in Bubbles



The outer bubble - When you first acknowledge the potential threat, but it isn't close enough to worry about, but you monitor the situation

The reactive bubble - This is the distance that you choose to take appropriate action to avoid the threat,

The Personal bubble - This is the distance you feel threatened most, if the efforts to avoid the threat have been ignored you will react. This is unconscious and purely reactional.

If an animal is threatened it will react by;

- Fleeing, - A flee response aims to out run, or put a comfortable distance between, themselves and the threat (Appleby, 1997; Mertens, 2002),

- Freezing, - whereas freezing is an inhibitory response, related to a threat at a distance (Lindsay, 2001).

- Fooling around - displacement behaviours

- Fighting - Fighting and aggression may also be used to avoid a threat, in order to escape once the threat has approached (Lindsay, 2001; Abarantes, 2005).

- Fainting - Toxic Immobility/ learned helplessness • Fawning - A

trauma response for compliance without question ?

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To fight or flight?

Fleeing is the most commonly used anti predator tactic. However, the cost of fleeing can be outweighed by the presence of food, potential mates or sexual rivals. Due to this many animal species have developed intrinsic anti predator tactics to enable them to reduce the cost of fleeing and save energy through the use of;

- Crypsis,
- Body armour,
- Feigning death,
- Defensive displaying,
- Defensive aggression,
- Good body condition,
- Large body size,
- Loss of body parts,

- Learnt experiences,
- Increased cover,
- Distance to refuges.

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Learning and aggression

Your next encounter with the threat may change your choice of reaction depending on what worked last time. If something worked you will use it again, and possibly will start to use it earlier, even before the threat is in your personal bubble. The best form of defense in some situations is offense.

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Is dog aggression normal?

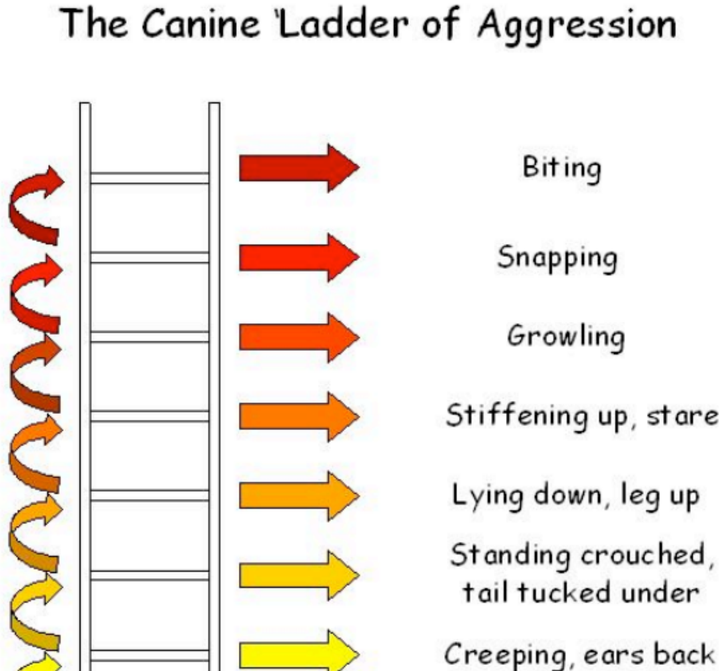
YES! AGGRESSION IS NORMAL FOR ALL SPECIES :)

As dogs are a social species they will avoid a fight wherever possible, using appeasement behaviours to reduce conflict (Abarantes, 2005). If appeasement behaviours don't have the desired effect, and the threat passes a critical distance, aggression may be used as their last form of defence (Appleby, 1997; Abarantes, 2005).

Therefore, fear aggression is an inherent normal behaviour, adapted by learning, taking into account the situation, motivational factors and an individuals threshold for aggression (Lindsey. 2001; Mertens, 2002; Landsberg et al, 2013).

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- Dogs communicate their intent through body language, which enables fast communication to reduce and resolve conflict (Abarantes, 2005; Landsberg, 2013).
- If the reciever is unable to understand or misinterprets the dog's communication, problems may arise, particularly when the dog's conflict resolution behaviour is misinterpreted.
- A dog communicates its response to a threat through a series of steps, referred to as the ladder of aggression (Shepherd, 2002).
- If appeasement behaviours don't have the desired effect,



aggression is used as their last form of defence (Abarantes, 2005).

- If successful, aggression may become a learned form of active defence.
- Therefore, learning can cause aggression to escalate and become persistent (Overall, 1997).

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The Science Bit!

Figuring out the causes of Aggression

- Organic medial causes - seasons, testosterone, phantom pregnancy, metabolic causes, pain !
- Genetics,- species, breed, parents

- Stress! resulting in-
- Developmental problems,
- Fear aggression
- Territorial aggression,
- Dominance aggression,
- Defensive aggression,
- Resource guarding

- Frustration related aggression,
- Redirected aggression,
- Play aggression?
- Predatory aggression?



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How do we find out

- History
- Lifestyle
- Hormone cycles
- Vet history - pain, metabolic?
- Relationships

It's often an emotional thing!!

Like all animal's dogs learn in two main ways;

- Forming associations
- Learning through the consequences of their actions.

These associations are made on an emotional level, of which there are 6 that commonly occur. Fear, Anxiety, Frustration - Relief, Anticipation, Pleasure.

It's these emotions that drive the behaviours that we see, and their learning will strengthen or weaken these emotions and their associated behaviours.

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The Emotional Dog

TO help these dogs we need to understand them, and realise that: All

behaviours are driven by emotions,

which emotions are driving your dog?

The degree of these emotions would depend on their bubble and the distance from the ‘threat’.

Upon seeing the ‘threat’ and animal had 4 main choices
Mate with it, eat it, play with it, fight it

Their emotional state at the time and previous learning and distance will affect the reaction they choose

Their ‘go to move’

If a situation occurs that is ‘traumatic’ in nature, the behaviour used to avoid / escape the situation can be learned instantly and is **resistant to extinction!**

This behaviour will then become a reflex reaction, to similar situations, as it is derived through conditioned (unconscious) learning not operant.

This ability to form fearful associations linking innocuous predictive events, with impending threatening ones, is highly adaptive and useful

(Lindsey, 2001).

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Trauma and Defence

If a dog feels threatened or has sustained an injury during a confrontation, they may become anxious or even defensive towards anyone they see as a potential threat, which may be exacerbated if the dog anticipates pain.

If this is an owner it may result in more of a conflict-related aggression, as a result of fear and anxiety or high arousal and frustration (Lindsay, 2001, Landsberg et al, 2013). This may result in a conditioned emotional response through one trial learning if the aversive is salient enough (Donaldson, 2004;

Appleby and Pkuijmakers, 2005).

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Trauma and Defence

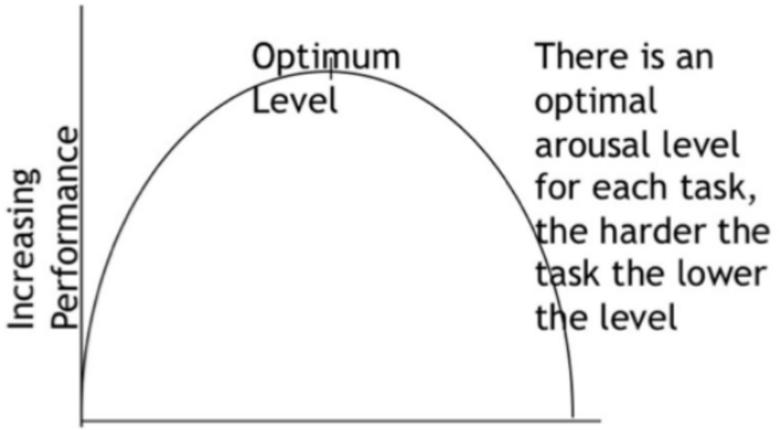
An aversive experience will result in activation of the sympathetic Autonomic Nervous System, which prepares the individual for fight or flight, and limits conscious behavioural control (Appleby and Pluijmakers, 2005)

The context of this fear determines whether or not it is maladaptive (Lindsay, 2000).

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Arousal, Choices, & memory

JERKES/DODSON/HOBBS LAW OF AROUSAL



- Jerkes & Dodson created the initial curve however, Hebbs (1995) introduced the term more generally.
- Hobbs used the curve to describe the relationship between arousal and performance.

- By doing this he changed the driving concepts for motivation from the BODY to the BRAIN !





High Arousal can result in tunnel vision

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Arousal and Frustration

Dogs who don’t receive adequate mental and physical stimulation are often easily aroused and more likely to become reactive when they feel frustrated (Lindsay, 2001; Askew, 2003).

If a dog is not in control of an anticipated outcome, reward or escape, or prevented from performing a desired behaviour, frustration may occur (Lindsey, 2000; Landsberg et al. 2013).



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Arousal and Frustration

Fear, anxiety and frustration have been suggested to increase an animal's level of arousal and aggression (Panksepp, 1998), which is often exacerbated by owner inconsistencies resulting in the dog's inability to predict outcomes.

A lack of self-control often exacerbates a dog's reactivity to frustration, which may trigger an aggressive response (Aloff, 2001; Askew, 2003).



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Arousal and Redirection

Redirected aggression results when the dog is displaying aggressive or frustrated behaviours towards an intended target, but is prevented from getting to the



target.

This results in frustration and a redirection of the aggressive behaviour onto an unintended target, often the owner or a family pet (Overall, 1997; Landsberg, et al. 2013).

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Predatory Aggressio

Hunting is a normal behaviour for a dog, which has been selectively bred for in many breeds.

Unlike other types of aggression predatory aggression is motivated by pleasure rather than fear / frustration, which can be identified by the



dogs silence and enjoyment of the chase (Alof, 2001; Ryan, 2008; Ryan, 2013).

Some dogs may switch from play or fighting behaviours to predatory, known as predatory drift (Donaldson, 2004; Ryan, 2008; Ryan, 2013).

This type of aggression is extremely serious, as a predatory dog intends on killing its prey.

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Elle Video



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Predatory motor patter

The predatory sequence in wolves is composed of six general hunting states which I describe as: travel, watch, approach, attack, target, and capture. In general, hunting states can be characterized according to the type of gait, or lack thereof, used by the wolves.

(PDF) The predatory sequence and the influence of injury risk on hunting behavior in the wolf /. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/35938430_The_predatory_sequence_and_the_influence_of_injury_risk_on_hunting_behavior_in_the_wolf [accessed Apr 15 2021].

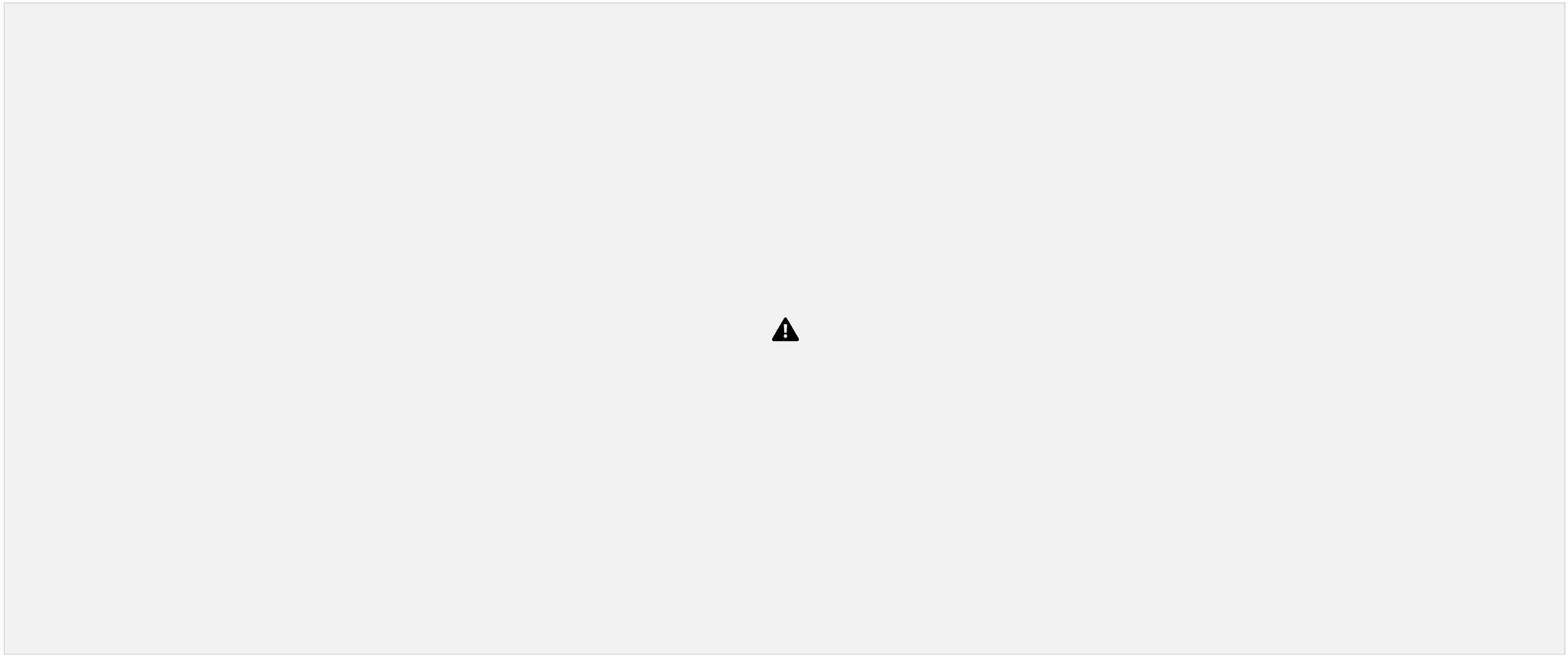
Impulsive first, self control on hunt, frustration tolerance if fail or keeps going



Image taken from School Of Canine Science - Facebook page

What does aggression look like?

What does aggression look like?



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What does

aggression look like?

- Growling?
- Biting?
- Lunging?
- Vocalising?
- Chasing?
- Stalking?

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At what point does it become aggression?

At what point does it become aggression?

- Growling?
- Biting?
- Lunging?
- Vocalising?
- Chasing?
- Stalking?

What about….

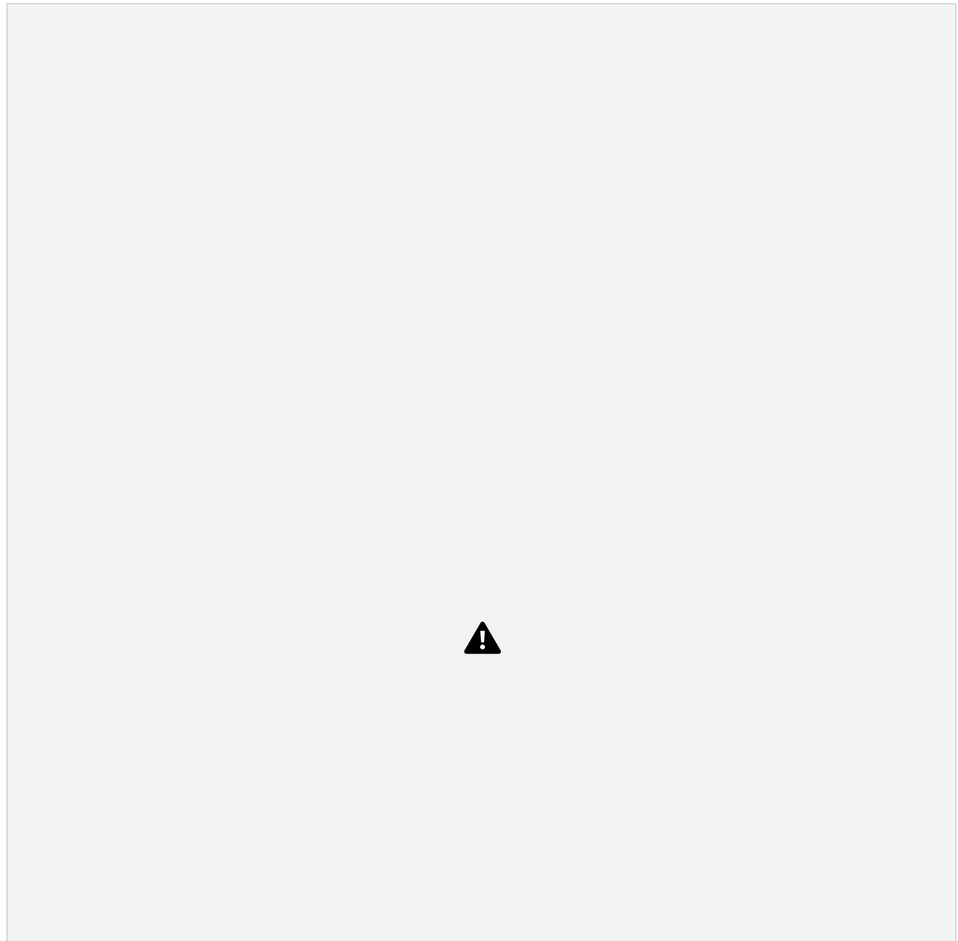
Looking away?

Nose licks?

Whale eye?

Freezing?

Muscle Tension?



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Play, Arousal & Aggression

Play is an important part of canine social development and helps maintain social bonds, strengthen motor skills and learn about their environments (Pal, 2010).

During this time young dogs have been know to bite, bump and attack their caregivers, and other pets, and uncontrolled play can pose a threat to other pets, family members, and visitors (Overall, 1997, Landsberg, et al. 2013).

Arousal levels are often increased during play, which can trigger an aggressive response, often due to frustration and over arousal, which lowers the dog's

aggression threshold.

Play aggression often involves growling, barking or snapping and is is often reinforced through owner reactions and the dog may have never learned how to play appropriately (Overall, 1997).

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Bitey Facey

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Just For Fun ?

Unfortunately, there are dogs out there that actively seek out a fight, as they enjoy it, it's a self rewarding behaviour.

It may have started out in fear, or even play but the confidence and rush takes over (Ryan, 2013)

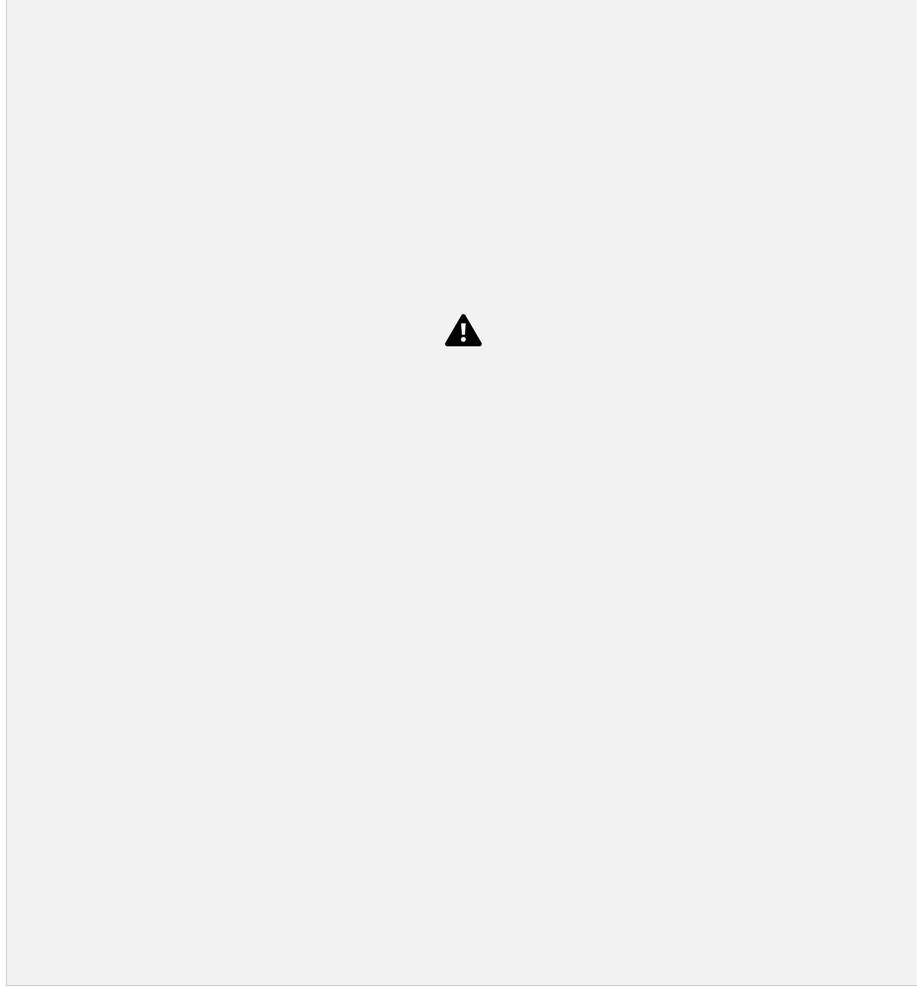
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Relationships within multi dog households

- Dominance?
- Age
- Sex
- Neuter Status
- Breed
- Resources
- Hormonal Staus
- Play

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What does the literature say about multi dog households?



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The canine human relationship

Dogs can trigger the release of oxytocin in humans and we can trigger the release in them :)

This increases feel good chemicals making both feel good (love neuropeptide)

The dogs can benefit as well, through resource supply and protection. - We’re a vital resource for this dogs?

Maclean, Evan & Hare, Brian. (2015). Evolution. Dogs hijack the human bonding pathway. Science (New York, N.Y.). 348. 280-1. 10.1126/science.aab1200.

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‘Dog parenting’ styles

van Herwijnen, Ineke. (2021). Contribution to the Special Issue on Clinical Ethology: Educating dog owners: how owner–dog interactions can benefit from addressing the human caregiving system and dog-directed parenting styles. Behaviour. 1-22.

1. Authoritative parenting style
“Appropriate care regards receiving sufficient resource supply and protection, whilst at the same time being allowed to explore and develop”
children that were happy, capable and successful

2. The authoritarian style is high in demandingness, but lacks responsiveness. 3. The permissive style

is its opposite as it is high in responsiveness, but lacking demandingness

4. When both demandingness and responsiveness are low to absent, the style is labelled as uninvolved (Baumrind, 2013).

The resemblance between parenting styles directed at child or dog was greatest for the authoritarian style

A focus on correcting the dog's undesirable behaviours through use of verbal or physical corrections

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'Dog/Owner Parenting' styles

Dogs may likewise benefit from high levels of demandingness and responsiveness from their caregivers

It is known that guide dog success can be affected by the nursing style of the Dam (Bray et al., 2017).

More demanding nursing styles, where the puppies made more effort were more successful guide dogs

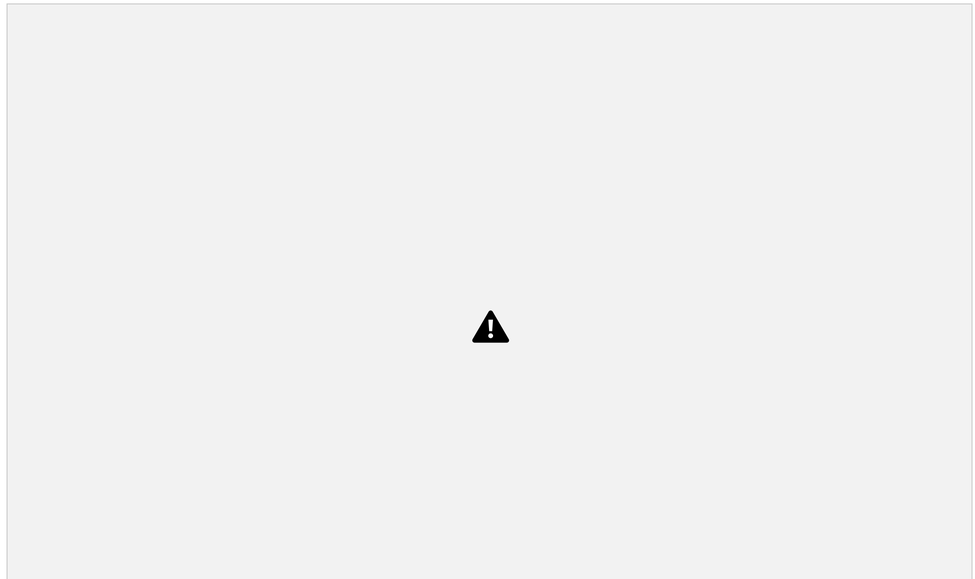


Why is this relevant ?

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‘Dog/Owner Parenting’ styles

WE know in children these parenting styles can result in mental health conditions in adults due to the insecure attachments that form. Does oxytocin play a role in facilitating social relationships between species?



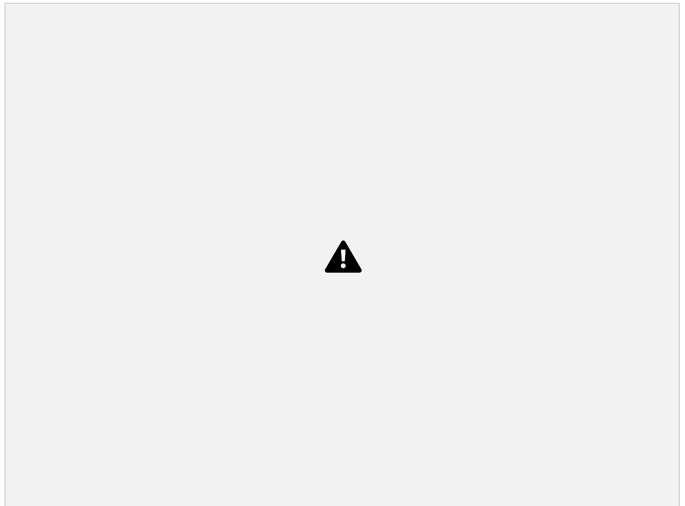
Think CARE system

If an authoritarian parenting style is used and high correction oriented over emotion / needs, the relationship may break down

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Inter-Dog Relationships

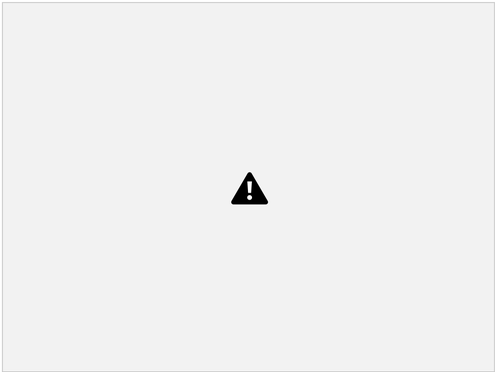
Dogs are highly successful at living in groups and communicating their needs to both dogs and humansIt has been suggested that domestication has altered the social behaviour of dogs compared to wolves, and submissive behaviour is used to defuse conflicts (Bradshaw,Blackwell & Casey, 2009).



The investment a dog will put into gaining/defending a resource or a territory will depend on how valued that resource is to the dog at that

time (Jones-Baade, R. and McBride, 1999), which can be a cause of an aggressive confrontation, often mistaken for dominance.

The prevention of a coveted object being removed, either intrinsic or extrinsic, is a highly adaptive and desired trait in a natural environment, which gives the dog an advantage over a dog that doesn't guard (Donaldson, 2002).



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Resource Guarding

A resource guarding dog will not relinquish the item to it's owner and will growl, snap or bite if the owner attempts to remove the item.

Often these dogs will steal items in an attempt to gain the owners attention to solicit play, which is then met with a challenge when the owner attempts to take the item (Overall, 1997).

Resource guarding has a basis in fear, as the dog is anxious about losing an item and will display aggressive behaviours to prevent the item from being removed (Lindsey, 2001, Landsberg et al., 2013).

What about other dogs?....

This can result in an increase in its aggressive response in an attempt to maintain access to the item (Landsberg et al., 2013).

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Holly Video

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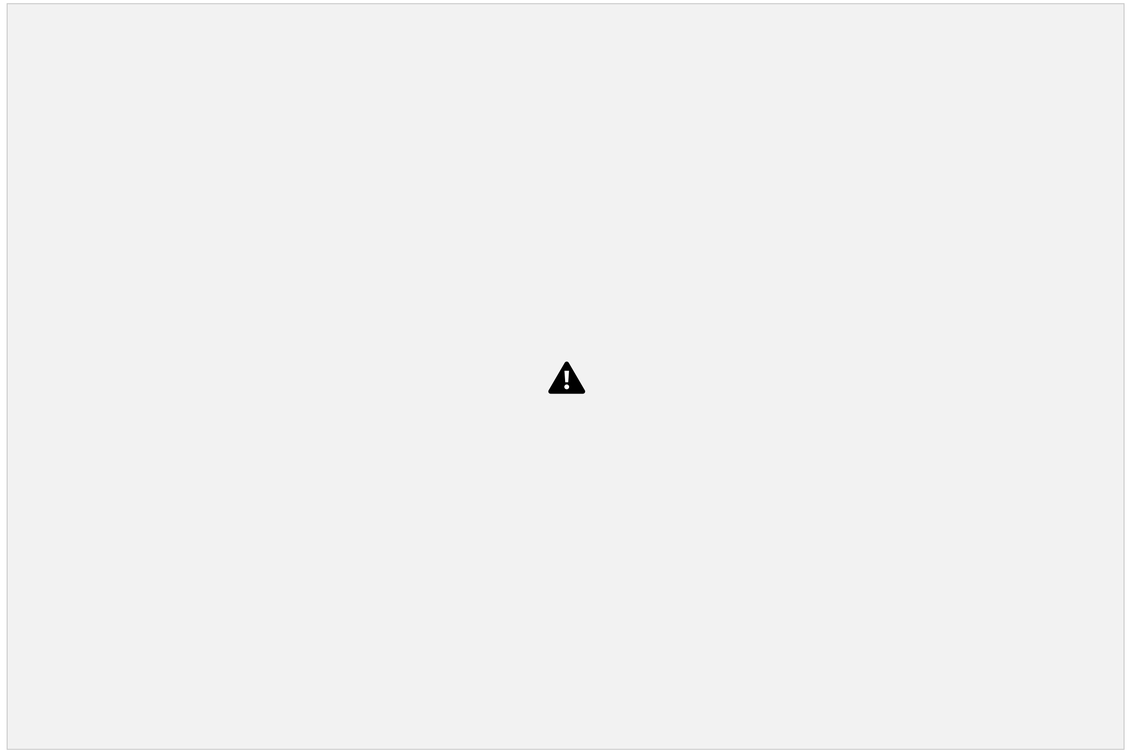
Diefa Video

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Understanding

Dominance



Inter-Dog Relationships

Dominance is often used to term the relationship between a dog and its owner, particularly if the

dog is displaying aggression over a resource.

Often the dog's appeasement displays towards the owner are seen as evidence of this relationship (McGreevy, et al. 2012). Dogs are fast context learners, and respond quickly to changes in human body language, especially from challenging to non challenging (Gácsi et al, 2012), which may be interpreted as submissive behaviour by the owner after a confrontation. This evolution of appeasement signals, serve to prevent further attacks when competition is high over resources (Matsumura and Hayden, 2006). However, the term dominance in the current literature is explained as, a property of relationships within a species, and isn't a description of an individual (Bradshaw, et al. 2009). This kind of relationship occurs with known individuals of the same species, based on the outcome of interactions. The Resource Holding Potential (RHP) has been suggested to be more applicable, as it is based on the value of a particular resource, whoever wants it more is more likely to gain access to it (Bradshaw et al 2009).

Inter-Dog Relationships

Understanding

Dominance

This evolution of appeasement signals, serve to prevent further attacks when competition is high over resources (Matsumura and Hayden, 2006). However, the term dominance in the current literature is explained as, a property of relationships within a species, and isn't a description of an individual (Bradshaw, et al. 2009). This kind of relationship occurs with known individuals of the same species, based on the outcome of interactions. The Resource Holding Potential (RHP) has been suggested to be more applicable, as it is based on the value of a particular resource, whoever wants it more is more likely to gain access to it (Bradshaw et al 2009).

The current literature doesn't support the dominance theory, with regards to the interactions between the domestic dog and it's owners. The dogs previous learning and underlying emotions, taking into account context, are more likely to explain the reasons for any behaviours perceived as dominant (Bradshaw et al. 2009).

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Ethologists have argued against the existence of dominance as a personality trait. Individuals living in a group can be dominant or submissive with different partners, and thus dominance status within dyads is flexible, which does not fit to the definition of personality traits.

Relationships between dyads also involves affiliative behaviours in addition to, or even in the absence of dominance behaviours.

Some dyads avoid each other and thus do not interact, so it is not possible to easily determine the relationship . The fact that animals can form complex dynamic relationships that differ between dyads argues against the concept of dominance (and submissiveness) as a personality trait

Kubinyi, Eniko & Wallis, Lisa. (2019). Dominance in dogs as rated by owners corresponds to ethologically valid markers of dominance. PeerJ. 7. 10.7717/peerj.6838.

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Play Police

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What about emotions?

In multi-dog households, dogs perceived as dominant by the owner:

have priority access to certain resources (for exam-ple, resting places and food rewards), undertake specific tasks (defend the group during per-ceived threats and lead other dog/s during walks), display dominance (win

fights and over mark),
have characteristic personality traits (measured using single item statements),
and are usually older than subordinates[26].

The fact that owner estimates of dominance status corre-spond to previously established behavioural markers of dominance displays in dogs, suggests that dominance relationships are robust and well perceivable components of companion dog behaviour. It furthermore shows that owner-derived reports about dominance status have external validity. Additionally, there is evidence that owners scoring of their dogs' behavioural traits via questionnaire is also valid, as it corresponds to observational measurements of behaviour. For example, extraverted dogs spent more time in dyads in off-leash parks, highly amicable dogs spent more time in play, and neurotic dogs displayed a higher frequency of lowered or hunched postures

Kubinyi, Eniko & Wallis, Lisa. (2019). Dominance in dogs as rated by owners corresponds to ethologically valid markers of dominance. PeerJ. 7. 10.7717/peerj.6838.

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- At the same time dogs usually live together with other dogs which result in an interesting multi-species group situation, in which dog–dog social relationships can also affect the individual dogs' behaviour, whereas dogs in general seem to be dependent on humans without any actual dominance-related behaviour from the latter (as a consequence of the domestication process), they have to form and maintain their rank relationships with other dogs again and again.

Experiment 2: the effect of reported dominance rank status on social learning from a dog demonstrator Only the dominant dogs were seemingly unable to improve their detour latencies during the three trials, and dogs in the Single and in the Subordinate Dog groups were faster than the dominant dogs

Therefore, dominant dogs will preferentially learn from a human demonstrator and are less likely to learn from another dog.At the same time subordinate dogs are familiar with the situation when they have to pay attention to another dog's actions, because at home they have at least one pack mate who is above them in the "pecking order". They also regard humans as higher ranked individuals but between them and the humans there is usually the dominant dog as an immedi-ate rank neighbour. This might explain why subordinate dogs learn especially quickly from other dogs.

SEE THE PROBLEM WITH THESE BEHAVIOURS ?

Westgarth suggests (Westgarth, 2016), it is possible that a dominance hierarchy is not fundamental to the structure of the dogs' social system, but is rather the by-product of human observation.

Old Dogs

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Does Sex Matter?

- conflicts between dogs living in the same household are more common between dogs of the same sex, and female–female pairs are most often affected (Sherman et al., 1996; Wrubel et al., 2011).

- Previous studies have determined that hormonal activity influences

inter-dog aggression (Sherman et al., 1996) and aggression has been found to be more frequent in neutered females compared to intact females and neutered males (Wright &Nesselrote, 1987;Scandurra et al., 2018).

McGuire, Betty. (2019). Characteristics and Adoption Success of Shelter Dogs Assessed as Resource Guarders. Animals. 9. 982. 10.3390/ani9110982.

“Resource guarding was more common in adult and senior dogs than in juvenile dogs; and it was more common in small and large dogs than medium-sized dogs. Spayed females were more likely than intact females to guard food; neutered males and intact males did not differ in their likelihood of food guarding. Most dogs identified as resource guarders showed mild to moderate guarding. “

“Additionally, there was a tendency for seniors to be more likely than adults to guard food. This is the first study based on direct observations of dogs during behavioral evaluations at a shelter to examine the relationship between resource guarding and age. “

“The effect of reproductive status on propensity to guard resources varied by sex at the Tompkins shelter, with spayed females more likely to guard than intact females, and no difference in guarding propensity between neutered males and intact males”

Persistent phantom pregnancy ??

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Maintaining relationships within multi dog house holds

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WHEN IT GOES RIGHT,

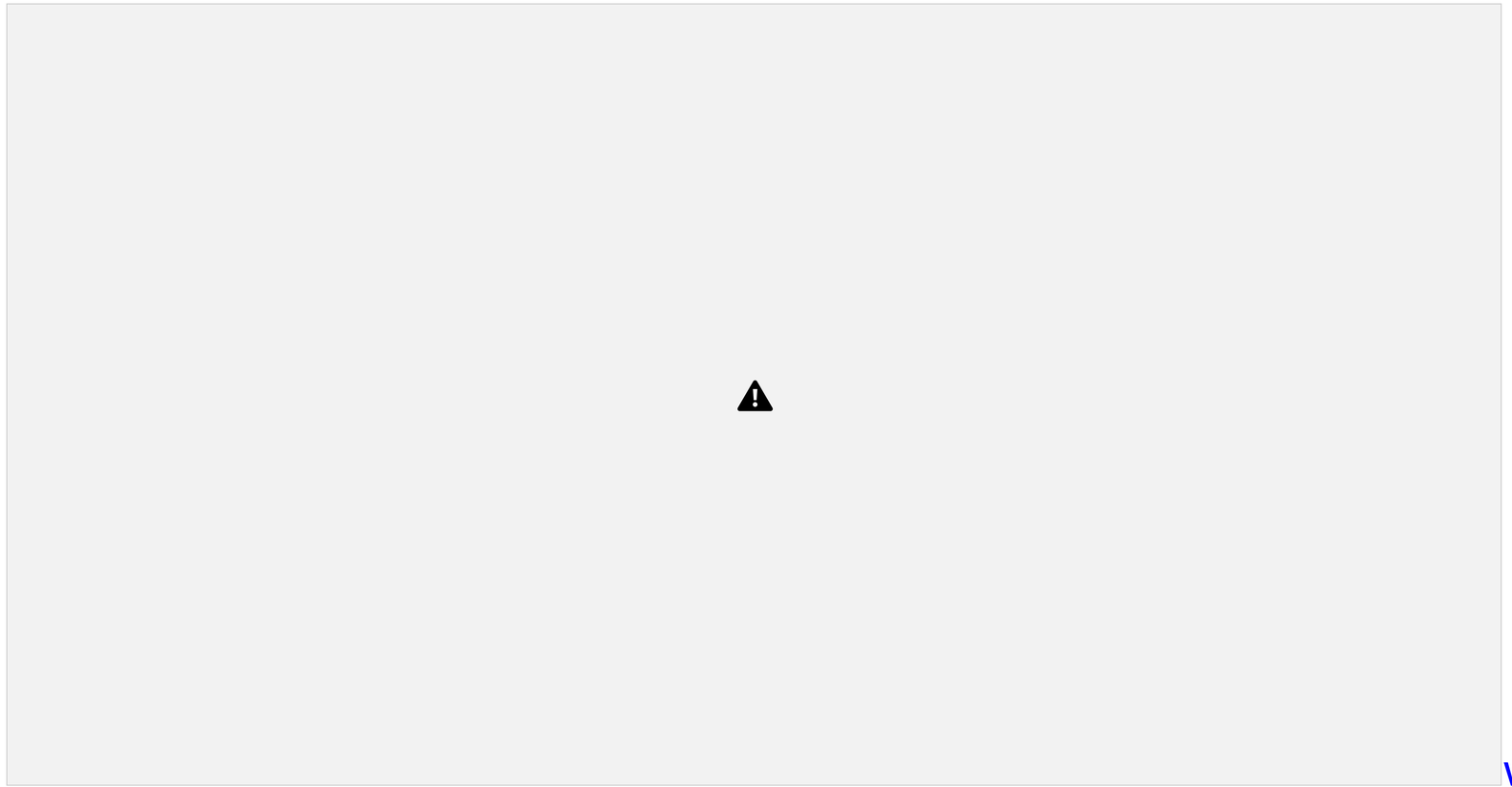
HOW DO I PREVENT PROBLEMS

- Resources
- Name training
- Let them sort it out?
- Feeding
- Sleeping
- Grooming
- Vet visits
- Medical issues and medication
- Can they be left
- playing

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Importance of safety (video)

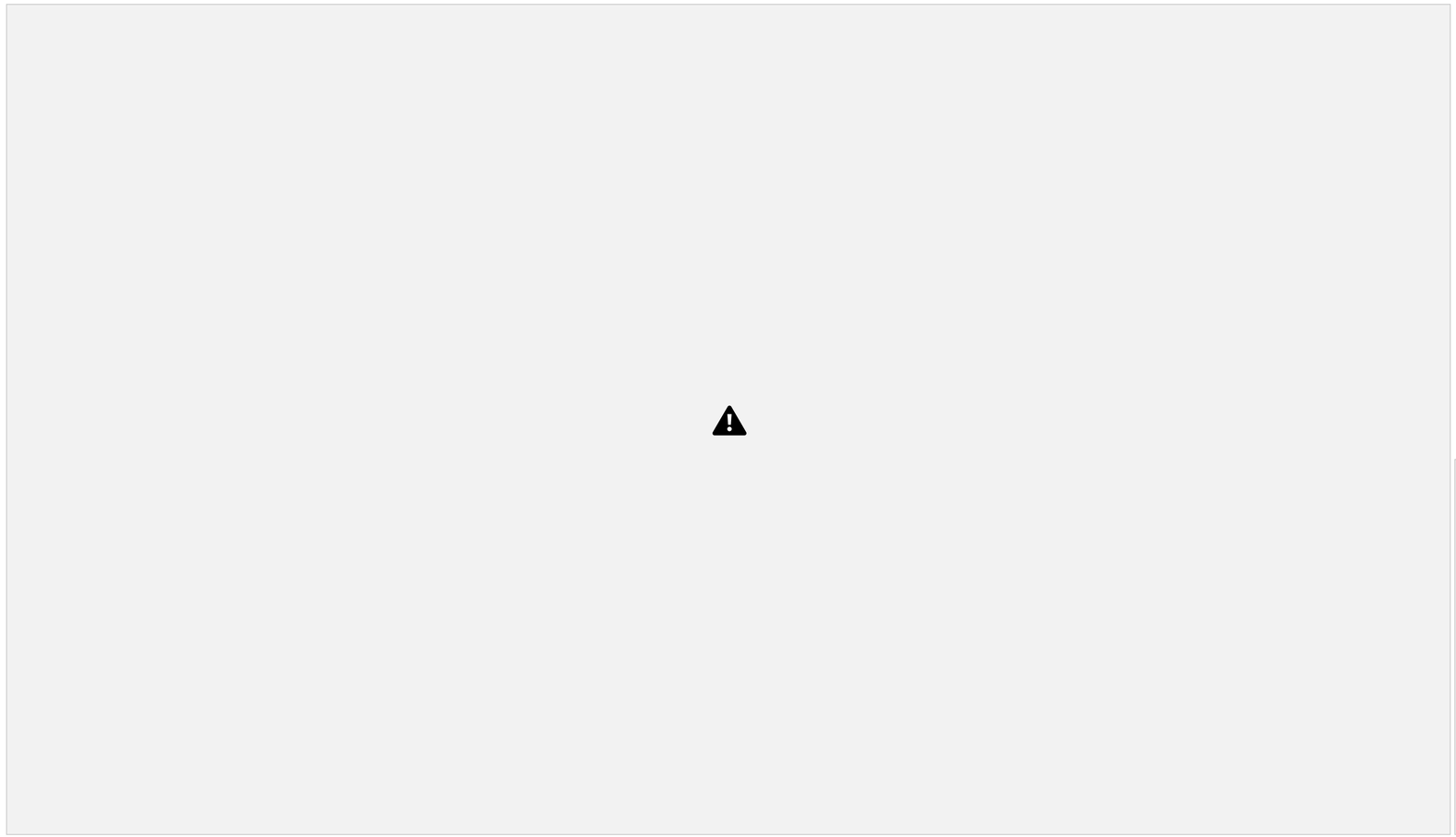
INCREASE PREDICTABILITY

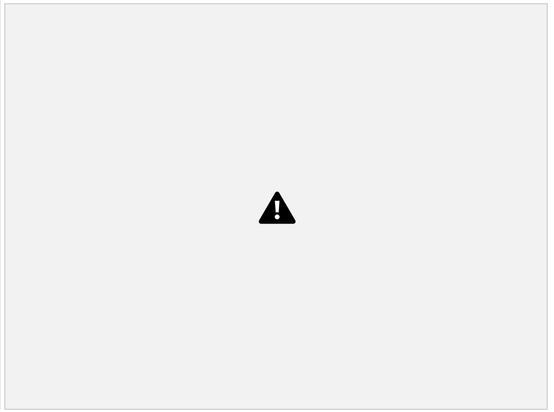


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Importance of play

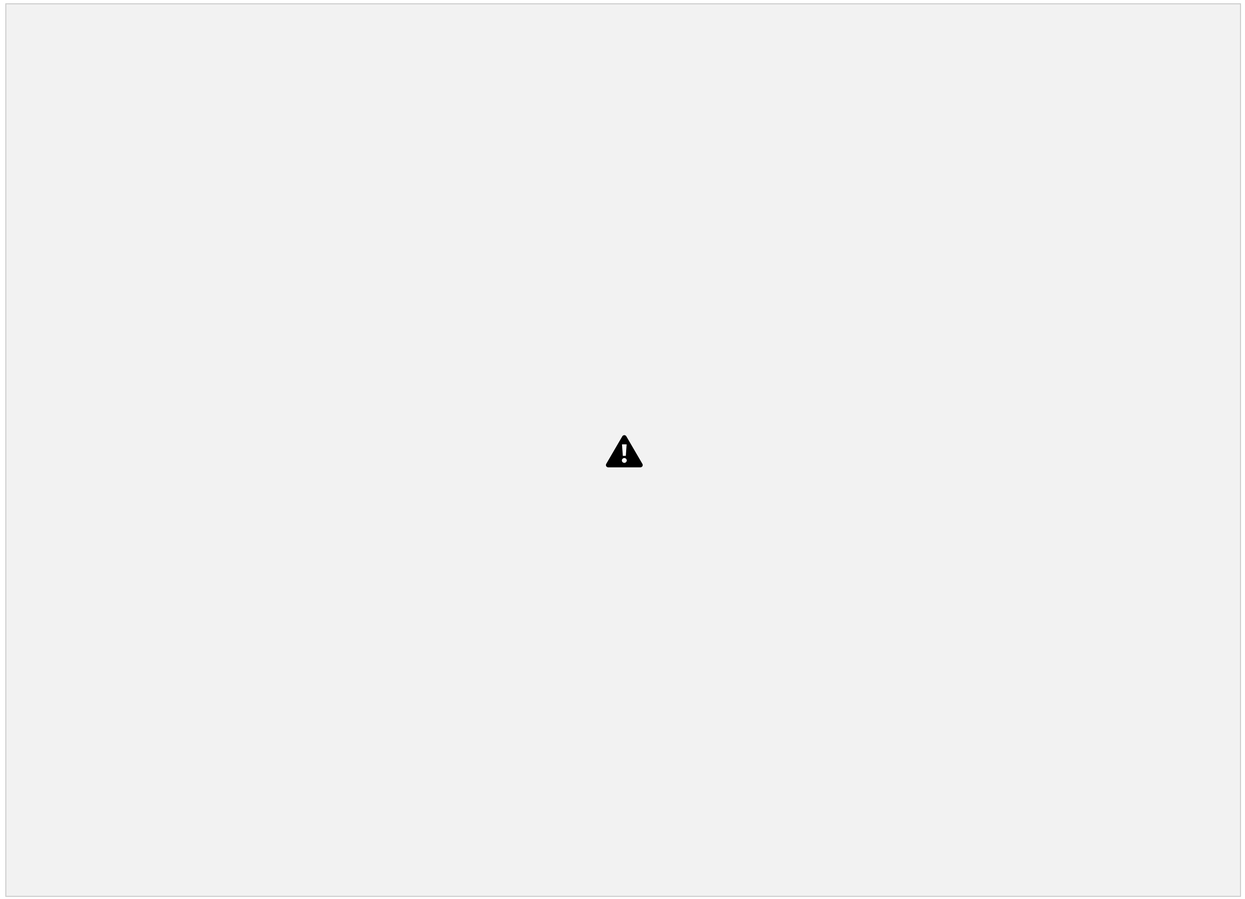




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Bitey Facey

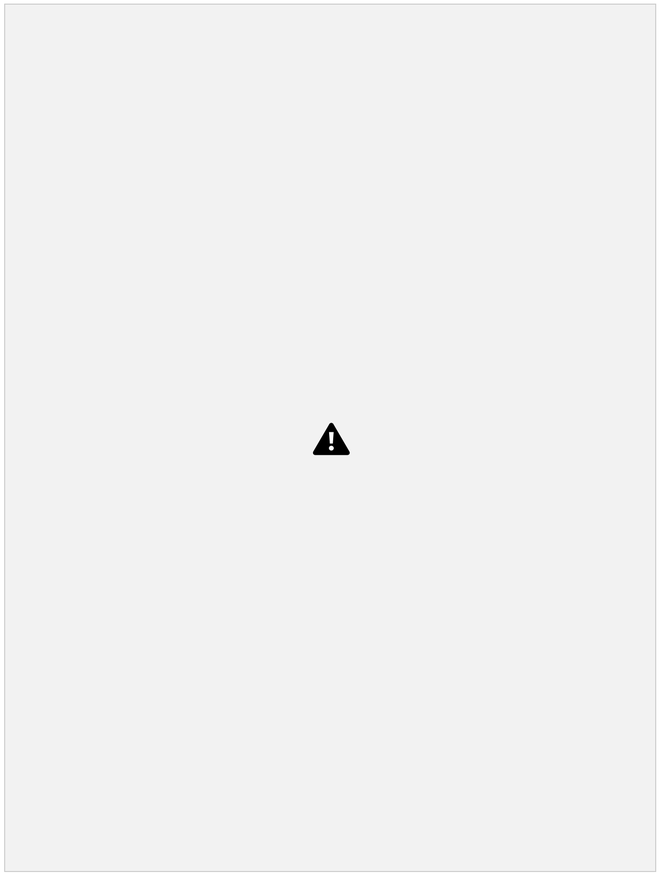
Relationship building game

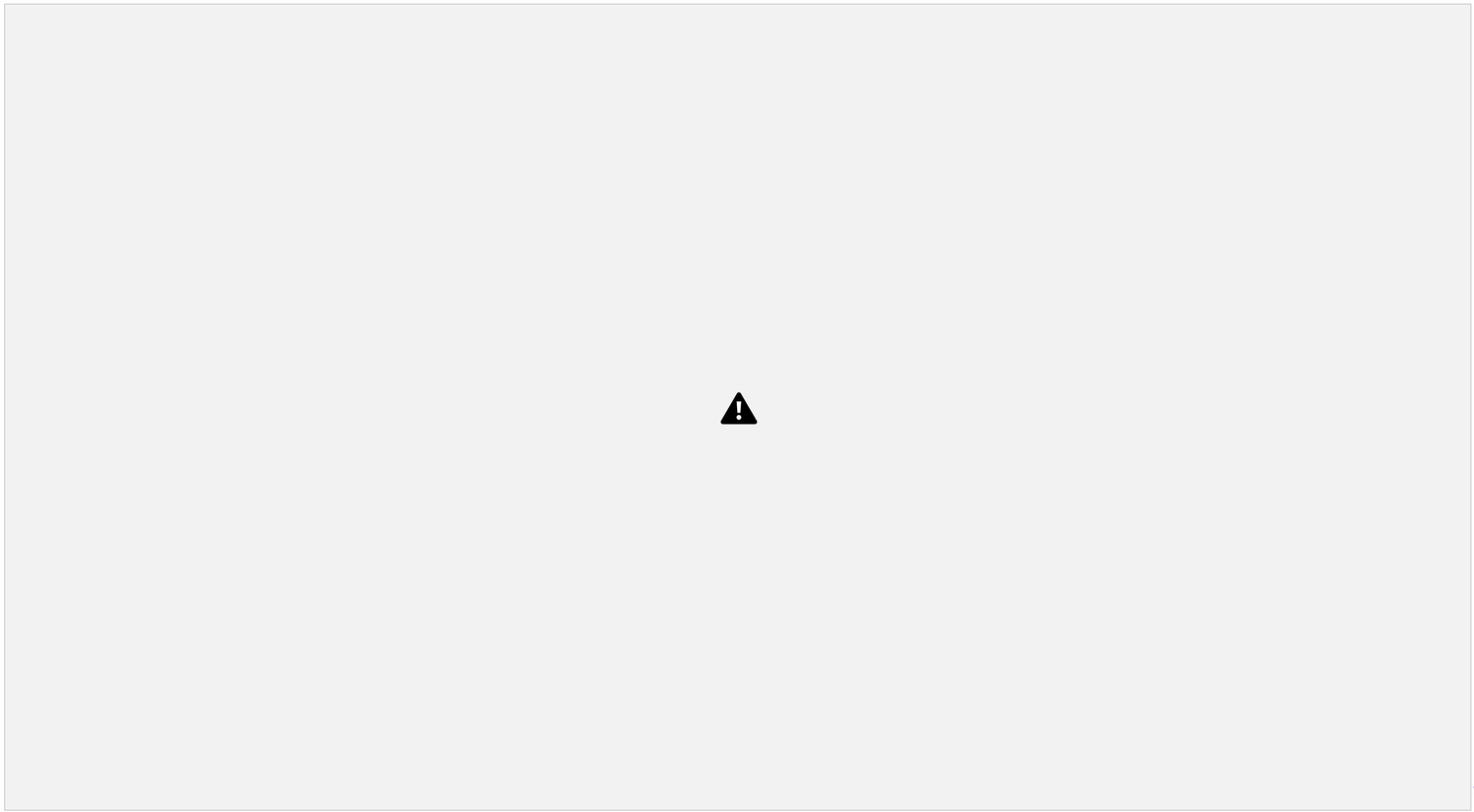


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Sharing - should or shouldn’t?







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COMMON PROBLEMS WITHIN MULTI DOG HOUSEHOLDS

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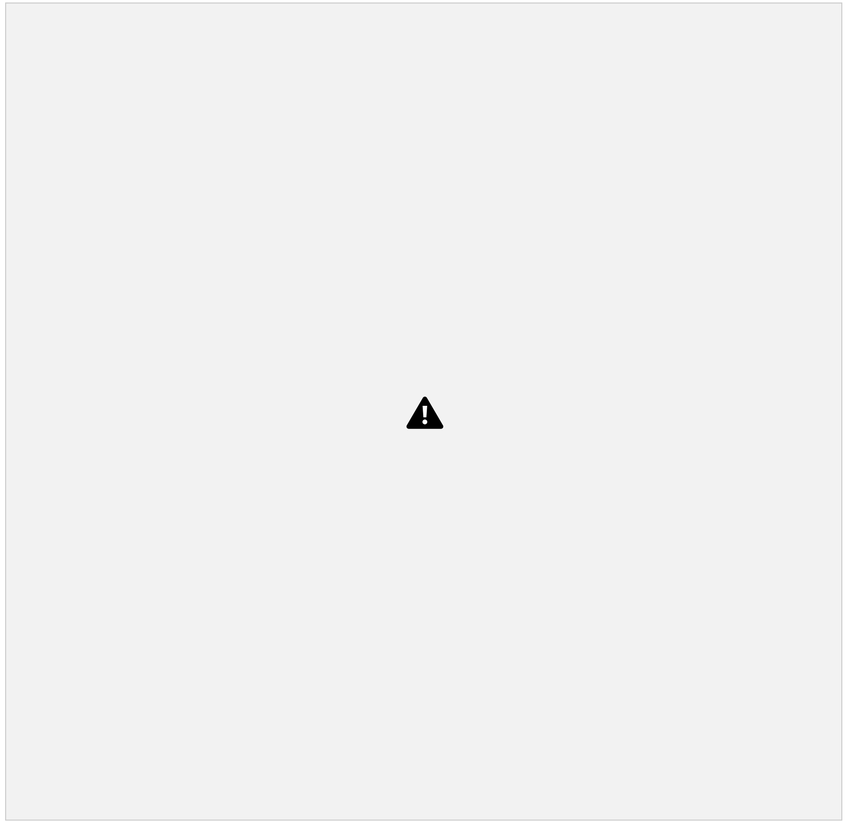
Taking it in turns

Sibling rivalry / stationing video

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Resource Guarding

Let them work it out video



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Jacobs, Jacquelyn & Coe, Jason & Widowski, Tina & Pearl, David & Niel, Lee. (2018). Defining and Clarifying the Terms Canine Possessive Aggression and Resource Guarding: A Study of Expert Opinion. Frontiers in Veterinary Science. 5. 115. 10.3389/fvets.2018.00115.

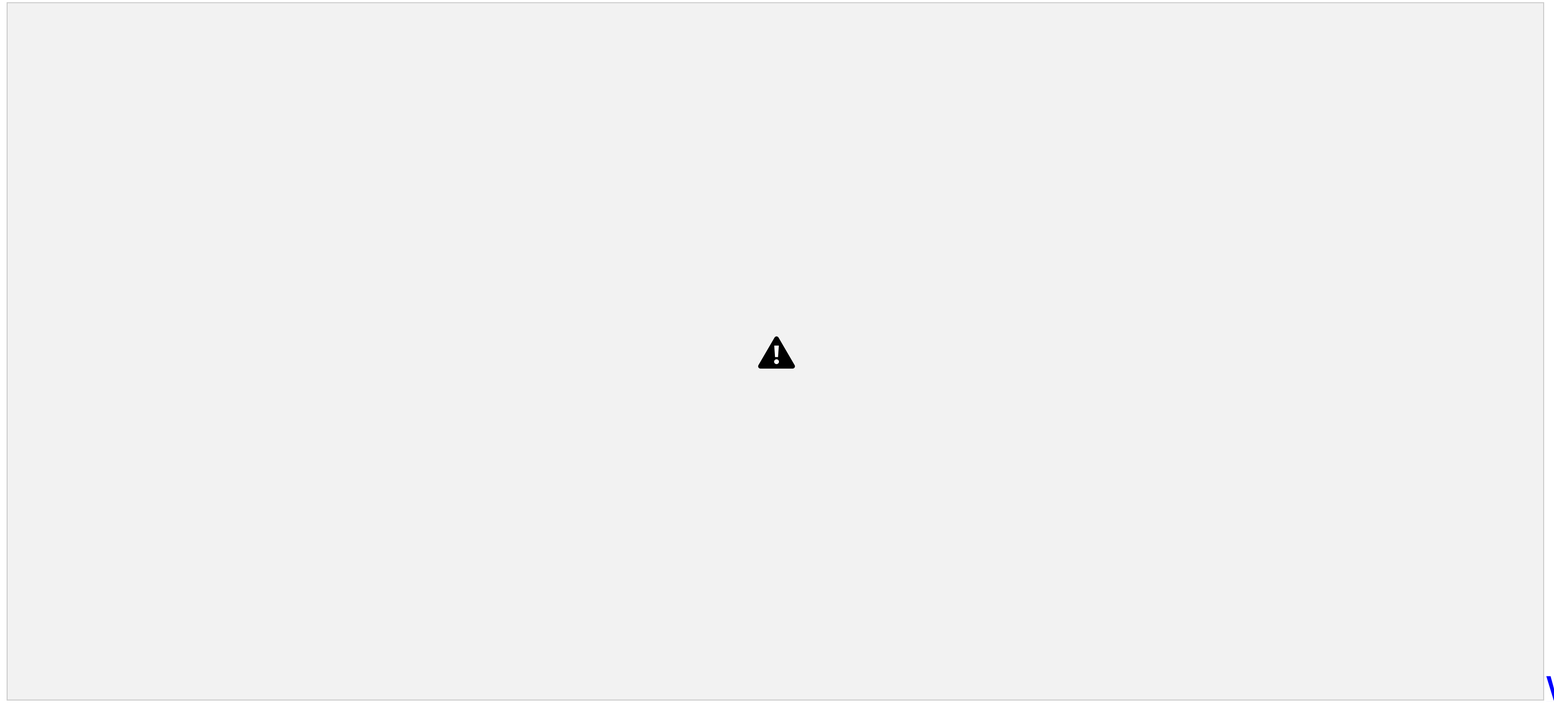
Will we ever agree?

Considering 100% consensus was not reached regarding terminology among experts in the field, future authors and

clinicians should provide clear definitions where terms are applied to ensure effective communication between all parties and to ensure consistency in canine behavior research. Based on expert contributions, we define resource guarding as “the use of avoidance, threatening, or aggressive behaviors by a dog to retain control of food or non-food items in the presence of a person or other animal.”

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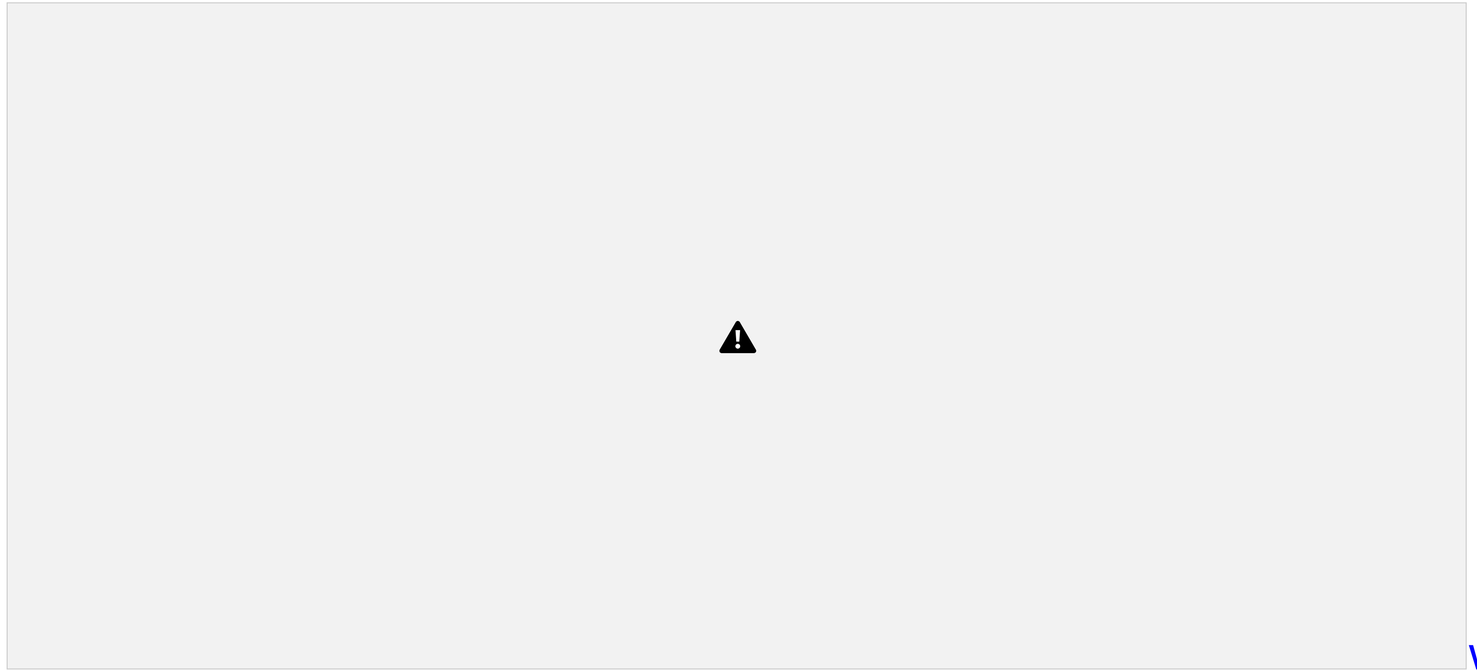
Impulse Control, Self Control, frustration tolerance



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Impulse Control, Self Control, frustration tolerance



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In conclusion how can we maintain healthy relationships

- Resources
- Name training

- Let them sort it out?
- Feeding
- Sleeping
- Grooming
- Vet visits
- Medical issues and medication
- Can they be left
- playing

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Thoughts?

Thank you for listening

