



FACULTY OF
VETERINARY &
AGRICULTURAL
SCIENCES



CASE STUDY
SMALL ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

The article 'Preventing Behavior Problems in Puppies and Kittens' by Kersti Seksel may be very useful for parts of this case study. The article is available in the case study folder.

You are working at a small animal clinic and have been asked to organise Puppy Preschool, which is starting this week, and Kitten Kindy (starting in 4 weeks' time) for a few months as the nurse who usually runs the program is on leave. This will be your first experience of running these classes.

Puppy preschool

so you decide to review some video of puppies in another class so you can watch the interactions and remind yourself of potential issues to watch out for. (The video doesn't have any sound).

<https://vimeo.com/528529488>

Question 1

What behaviours do you see in the puppies that suggest positive experiences with socialisation?

Question 2

The interactions between which two dogs would you monitor the most carefully from what you can see on this video?

You also spend some time with the nurse who normally runs these classes, who is also a dog trainer and extends your knowledge about the types of operant conditioning beyond what was covered in your lectures. These are sometimes known as the 4 quadrant or categories of operant conditioning.

Behaviour is a tool that animals use to get consequences, either moving towards something positive or away from something negative. Whatever happens immediately after a behaviour influences the chance of that behaviour happening again.

Note that positive and negative in this context doesn't mean good or bad. Positive means you add something and negative means you remove something.

In training terms, **reinforcement** is any consequence which **increases** the chance that a behaviour will increase. This is usually thought of as things like treats or toys (positive reinforcement), but negative reinforcement is also used –something the dog doesn't like is removed as a consequence of the dog's behaviour e.g. a dog that is pulling on the lead has the pressure removed when he stops pulling. Pressure/release in horses, which we will discuss next week, is also in this category.

Punishment is any consequence that **reduces** the probability of a behaviour. These can be positive punishments e.g. yelling at the dog or negative punishments – something the dog likes is removed e.g. you stop playing with a puppy when it starts biting.

Positive Reinforcement 🦷 The dogs behaviour causes something good to happen	Negative Reinforcement 🚫 The dogs behaviour causes a bad thing to stop
Positive Punishment 🏠 The dogs behaviour causes a bad thing to happen	Negative Punishment 🐾 The dogs behaviour causes a good thing to stop

Positive reinforcement: Good things start

Negative reinforcement: Bad things end

Positive punishment: Bad thing starts

Negative punishment: Good things end

Week 1

The first class is puppy-free to allow owners to concentrate on the content rather than their energetic balls of fluff. The 5 owners arrive, all with pictures of their puppies so you can share the all-important puppy cuteness moment.



You explain to the owners that puppies should always be rewarded for appropriate behaviour and ignored for inappropriate behaviours such as jumping. To teach them appropriate behaviour, owners need to consistently convey what they want the puppy to do through body language and perfectly timed rewards. They do not need to dominate the dog - it is now understood that dogs that use aggression towards humans or other dogs are not trying to be dominant but are actually confused, frustrated, fearful or still learning how to behave¹.

Question 3

What category of operant conditioning is giving food rewards for appropriate behaviour?

Question 4

What category of operant conditioning is ignoring inappropriate behaviours?

Common puppy problems

You move on to common problems with puppies, biting and chewing. These are common because they are normal behaviours in puppies. One owner, Divya, immediately says her Dachshund puppy Lamba frequently bites the family's ankles and hands, especially when he is not getting attention or if he is playing a rough game.



<https://www.ilovedachshunds.com/>

Question 5

Give Divya two pieces of advice to manage the problem.

Divya listens to the advice and says she will try it and report back.

Another owner, Felix, says they are chewing issues with their puppy, a Cavoodle named Murphy. In the 2 weeks they have had him, he has destroyed numerous pieces of paper, two shoes that were not a pair and a year 10 maths textbook, which had to be replaced.



<https://thecavoodle.com/cavoodle-and-older-dogs/>

Question 6

How could the advice you gave to Divya apply to Felix's situation with Murphy?

The last question of the night is from Lara, owner of Waffle, a 14 week old Border Collie. Lara also has a 6 year old cat named Honey. Honey is nervous around Waffle and runs away when she sees him. Waffle then chases Honey. Honey has a platform on top of a scratching post that Waffle can't reach so she does have a safe space but sometimes she has a long way to run to it. Another problem is that Honey has started sometimes urinating away from her litter, which she has never done before. Waffle is fascinated by Honey scratching in the litter and always noses around when she is in the litter tray.

Question 7

What is the most likely reason Waffle is chasing Honey?

Question 8

How might Lara modify the environment to decrease Honey's stress from being chased?

Question 9

Why might Honey have started avoiding the litter tray?

Question 10

What changes could you recommend that might encourage Honey to use her litter?

Week 2

The puppies arrive and they are as cute as you expected. With the puppies on their leads you work on getting them to learn to sit by using positive reinforcement. You demonstrate how holding the food above the puppy's nose and slowly moving it up and back over the puppy's head will lead the puppy to start to sit. As soon as the puppy sits, a reward is given. No words are needed until the puppy performs the behaviour reliably. Only then is the action paired with the word "sit." You explain that puppies should not be forced to sit by pulling upon the lead or be pushed into the "sit" position with pressure on the rump.

After the puppies lose concentration, you move on to discuss toilet training. It was very timely because one of the puppies, Molly, urinated on the floor at the end of the learning-to-sit session. Her owner Sam says this is typical of her because she's very naughty about going to the toilet. He puts her outside to toilet regularly, where she just whines and cries at the door to be let back in and does not go to the toilet. Once he lets her back in, she often goes to the toilet straight away. He has tried rubbing her nose in the mess, but she is still having accidents.



<https://www.rescuepets.com.au/blog/blue-staffy-puppy/>

Question 11

Why do you think Molly does not go to the toilet when Sam leaves her outside on her own?

Question 12

What is your opinion of Sam rubbing Molly's nose in the mess? Is there a better strategy Sam could use?

Week 3

This week the puppies will start to be let off their leads two at a time. This is to ensure that they greet each other properly and the experience is positive for both.

Waffle the Border Collie and Roscoe, a large cross-bred puppy, are chosen to go first.



<https://www.ionabordercollies.com.au/>

<https://www.boredpanda.com/mixed-dog-breed-mutts/?utm>

Waffle is wagging her tail and very excited, and Roscoe runs straight up to her and bowls her over. He then growls and bites her neck. Waffle squeals and runs away. Roscoe runs after her and starts to chase her around the room. Roscoe's owner Anne says, "it's okay, he's just playing, he always does this". Roscoe then runs up to Molly who is sitting next to Sam's feet and tackles her. Molly growls and snaps at Roscoe but he doesn't listen, he just keeps trying to play with her. You catch Roscoe and return him to his lead.

Question 13

Why could another puppy playing roughly with them have a negative effect on Waffle and Molly?

Question 14

How could the rough play have a negative effect on Roscoe?

All the other social interactions proceed without issue and you finish the class familiarising puppies and owners with the types of handling that will be required for vet visits e.g. handling ears and paws.

Week 4

At the final class, the puppies have a great time playing and demonstrating their new behaviours. While they are playing, Divya approaches you to say that your advice has helped a lot with Lamba. They are all enjoying him so much that they are getting an 8 week old kitten next weekend, which they have named Adhira. Divya asks if they can use the same advice for the kitten as for Lamba with socialisation, toileting and training using positive behaviour reinforcement with treats and ignoring unwanted behaviours. You suggest she comes to your Kitten Kindy which starts the following week, which she agrees to do.

Dog aggression towards a child

After the class, Felix takes you aside to discuss a problem with his older dog Lulu. His cousin had come over to meet Murphy, the new puppy and brought his 3 year old daughter Chloe with him. They had been very careful with Chloe and Murphy, giving Murphy plenty of space to back away from Chloe if he chose to, but Murphy had been very happy to interact. The issue came later in the day when Chloe approached Felix's other dog Lulu, an 8 yo Cattle Dog who he had adopted from a shelter about 18 months ago. Chloe had visited many times before but never been interested in Lulu. This time Chloe approached Lulu, who was on her bed in the corner and went to pat her on the head. Lulu tried to bite Chloe's hand, grazing it but not drawing blood. Lulu has not bitten anyone while Felix has had her, and it was obviously a very upsetting incident for everyone. He wants to know if he should have Lulu euthanased.

Question 15

What questions might you ask Felix to try to understand more about Lulu's behaviour?

Question 16

What would you recommend as the next step to assess Lulu?

Question 17

When Felix arrives with Lulu the next day, she is she is licking her lips, yawning and panting a lot. What type of behaviours is she displaying?

Following up from your conversation from the night of puppy class, you find out from Felix that, other than Chloe, Lulu hasn't really been around children since they have had her. Thinking back, he feels Lulu has always stayed well away from Chloe, not showing aggression but not interacting at all and that they should have done more to introduce them. They don't know a lot about Lulu's life before she was adopted other than she lived with several other dogs. She has not been aggressive towards Murphy generally, although has indicated a couple of times that she wants to be left alone when he is annoying her, which he has done. They walk Lulu locally and in an off-leash park and have not had any issues with aggression towards other dogs.

Question 18

Give 2 reasons why Lulu might have bitten Chloe.

You conduct a complete physical examination on Lulu and do not find any abnormalities. Felix agrees to you taking blood and urine for a complete blood count (CBC), biochemistry panel and urinalysis. She is up to date with worming and vaccination

Question 19

Why is it important to rule out medical conditions in behavioural cases?

You discuss options for managing this situation with Felix. As Chloe does not live in the house with Lulu and there are some options for managing this situation, Felix decides against euthanasia. You also decide that, since the problem has occurred once, Chloe visits only roughly every 2 weeks and there have not been other behavioural issues with Lulu, that medication is not necessary. This leaves environmental and behavioural modification as treatment strategies.

Question 20

Name one environmental and one behavioural modification you could use in this situation and explain how each might work.

Kitten Kindy

The following week is the first Kitten Kindy. There are 4 kittens: Ming (grey and white DSH (domestic short hair)), Adhira (tabby and white DSH), Wakanda (black DLH) and Luna (Ragdoll). You start with a discussion of kitten socialisation.



https://www.123rf.com/photo_3801544_small-grey-kitten-on-a-white-isolated-background.html



<http://www.allaboutthekitties.org/2017/11/vandita-brown-tabby-w-white-female/>



<https://www.petfinder.com/cat-breeds/collections/black-cat-breeds>



<https://www.thehappycatsite.com/ragdoll-cat-colors/>

Question 21

What would be similar or different about important items or situations that a kitten should be socialised to compared to a puppy?

Question 22

How would training be similar or different for a cat vs a dog?

The next topic is to talk about common kitten problems. Wakanda will only use the litter tray if the older cat in the family has not used it and is still urinating in other spots around the house. Luna is attempting to climb up the curtains, which her owner Linda is not happy about.

Question 23

What advice would you give to these owners?

When the kittens come to class, you do some simple training, handling and massage.

If you are not familiar with cat massage, this video has some tips.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqtZQcn8LI0>

Question 24

Research the synthetic pheromones available in Australia and consider how they might be used in the cases discussed.

Question 25

Research the different types of aggression that occur in dogs. What types might Lulu have been showing? Why is it useful to think about what type of aggression an animal might be showing?

Question 26

You are advising a new cat owner how to prepare the cat for its first vet visit. What advice would you give them?

Question 27

As the vet, what aspects would you consider in your own preparation for that consult?

References

RSPCA 2021. What is the RSPCA's view on dominance dog training? [online] Available at: <<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-rspcas-view-on-dominance-dog-training>> [Accessed 5 February 2021]

Seksel, K., 2008. Preventing Behavior Problems in Puppies and Kittens. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 38(5), pp.971-982.