

# Canine Behaviour and Training:

## Information for vets, veterinary staff and clients

### Newsletter Summer 2016



#### *Sound Sensitivity and Progression to Phobia*

As I'm sure that you are aware, sound sensitivity is not uncommon in dogs. Dogs' hearing is very acute and they don't understand a modern noise like we do, for example, a firework display is totally inexplicable to a dog! In addition, some dogs are pre-disposed to sound sensitivity with certain breeds like the Border Collie being particularly prone to this problem. A positive socialisation programme can help proof a puppy against sound sensitivity and therefore the best time to encourage owners to assist pets with firework sounds is before their first exposure to the genuine stimulus, by ensuring adequate habituation during the first twelve weeks of a puppy's life (Vet Times Oct 10th 2015). However, playing a firework CD in a busy puppy class is not the way to do this!

Of course, fireworks are not the only noise that dogs are likely to develop a problem with, although they can be a major initiating factor when it comes to noise phobia. It is common for a fear of fireworks to generalise to include other types of bangs. From here the situation may degenerate further until, for example, you have a dog that is terrified by the door banging or the crackle of a fire or a twig snapping on a walk. In urban areas the 'firework season' can now extend from mid-October until after New Year and the shooting season and bird-scarers have similarly extended the season in the countryside.

A sensitivity can quickly generalise to a phobia: for example, if the owners are out having left the dog in the utility room and a loud noise occurs the animal is likely to feel more frightened without the owners' protection. This extra vulnerability may be increased if access to a customary hiding place, such as behind the sofa, is not available. The loss of control that results from being denied this coping strategy may be enough to trigger progression to phobia – and a separation problem!

Sound phobias are a particularly distressing problem both for pet and owner, but if sound sensitivity is effectively dealt with by referral to a suitably qualified professional, it will help to avoid escalation of this stressful and upsetting condition which is both difficult and time consuming to rectify.

#### *Trigger Stacking*

It is common amongst behaviourists and trainers to refer to the stimuli which cause an individual to react as 'triggers'. Different stimuli can trigger a fearful, frustrated or excited response depending upon the individual and the situation.

If a single trigger occurs, provided that it is not too intense (close, loud, etc) then despite being aware of the stimuli, the individual dog is likely to be able to cope and from a temporary increase in arousal the individual will return to their resting state. Of course, the more intense the stimuli then the more extreme the response and the slower the recovery time is likely to be. If the animal reacts to an additional stimulus before their arousal level returns to the resting state then they will be more likely to have a stronger reaction to this new trigger, and so on infinitum! This state of affairs is often called 'Trigger Stacking.'

The veterinary surgery is an obvious example for trigger stacking to occur. Many dogs are frightened of the vets as a result of a painful condition causing a negative association and, if

The Canine Behaviour and Training Society (formerly UKRCB) was founded in 1992.

TCBTS members are skilled professionals with a proven track record in modern, kind dog training methods and the treatment of canine behaviour problems.

There are three levels of TCBTS membership:

1. Student:

Undertaking an approved academic course in canine behaviour alongside improving their practical dog training experience.

2. Provisional:

Members who have completed an approved academic course and are currently having their skills and competence assessed by TCBTS education officers.

3. Full:

Members who have met the very high academic and practical necessary experience requirements of TCBTS.

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**Your local TCBTS member is:**

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**[www.tcbts.co.uk](http://www.tcbts.co.uk)**

the individual is also frightened of strangers as a result of poor socialisation, then a veterinary examination which is already inherently frightening becomes even more so. Add to this a dog that is also worried by other dogs, their experience of the waiting room will probably already have them in a state of high arousal, for certain individuals this may be enough to tip them over into an aggressive response. Of course the veterinary surgery is not the only place where trigger stacking is likely to occur and management of different triggers is certainly one of the things that a qualified behaviour practitioner will attempt to communicate with their clients when dealing with a pet's behaviour problems.

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## *Snake Bite Treatment for Dogs*

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**BECAUSE SNAKE BITES MAY CAUSE A SERIOUS RISK TO YOUR DOG'S HEALTH, PLEASE CHECK WITH YOUR VET NOW TO ENSURE IT IS SAFE FOR YOU TO USE PIRITON IN THE CASE OF AN EMERGENCY. YOU MUST CHECK AGAIN IF YOUR DOG'S HEALTH ALTERS.**

During the spring and early summer it is the time of year when snakes are drowsy and so more likely to bite an approaching dog. I have heard of two cases recently on Ashdown Forest so thought it useful to let owners know what to do if their dog is bitten by an adder.

Piriton is the only over-the-counter antihistamine which might be suitable for your dog but please note, as above, that these notes are for guidance only and you must check with your vet whether your dog is able to have Piriton. As with all medication, Piriton has side effects and may have adverse effects on the health of your dog, particularly if your dog already has a medical condition and/or when a dog is already on other medication.

**YOU MUST NOT USE ANY OTHER TYPE OF ANTIHISTAMINE ON A DOG.**

The usual dose recommended by a vet is:

- 4mg for a small dog (usually one tablet)
- 8mg for a larger dog (usually two tablets)

Please note that this advice is for First Aid emergency use only but you must still immediately take your dog to the vet, as in the case of a snake bite the vet will usually give further treatment, such as steroid injections. There is always the risk that even after having an antihistamine a dog may go into shock (anaphylactic shock) so, again, you must always consult with your vet immediately.



**The Canine Behaviour and Training Society (formerly the UKRCB) are proud to be one of the founding members of the ABTC. Promoting excellence in animal behaviour and training**  
<http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk>



### TRIGGER STACKING

If the animal reacts to an additional stimulus before their arousal level returns to the resting state then they will be more likely to additionally react to this new trigger and so on infinitum!

**The Canine Behaviour & Training Society's Annual Conference**

**Sunday, 2 October 2016:**

**Professor Daniel Mills:**

**Fighters, biters and dogs that hate to be alone**

**Promises to be an extremely informative talk!**

**TCBTS Members and non-members are very welcome to join us for what promises to be a day of interesting seminars and networking.**

**More information at:**

[www.tcbts.co.uk/event-2016-annual-seminar-fighters-biters-dogs-that-hate-to-be-alone](http://www.tcbts.co.uk/event-2016-annual-seminar-fighters-biters-dogs-that-hate-to-be-alone)

### SNAKE BITES

Be well prepared for emergencies by planning ahead and asking your vet's advice now ...