

BEHAVIOR OF YOUR SIBERIAN HUSKY

As a Siberian Husky owner, you have selected your dog so that you and your loved ones can have a companion, a protector, a friend and a four-legged family member. You invest time, money and effort to care for and train the family's new charge. Of course, this chosen canine behaves perfectly! Well, *perfectly* like a dog.

THINK LIKE A DOG

Dogs do not think like humans, nor do humans think like dogs, though we try. Unfortunately, a dog is incapable of figuring out how humans think, so the responsibility falls on the owner to adopt a proper canine mindset. Dogs cannot rationalize and dogs exist in the present moment. Many dog owners make the mistake in training of thinking that they can reprimand a dog for something he did a while ago. Basically, you cannot even reprimand a dog for something he did 20 seconds ago! Either catch him in the act or forget it! It is a waste of your time and your dog's time—in his mind, you are reprimanding him for whatever he is doing at that moment.

The following behavioral

problems represent some which owners most commonly encounter. Every dog is unique and every situation is unique. No author could purport for you to solve your Siberian Husky's problem simply by reading a script. Here we outline some basic "dog speak" so that owners' chances of solving behavioral problems are increased. Discuss bad habits with your veterinarian and he/she can recommend a behavioral specialist to consult in appropriate cases. Since behavioral abnormalities are the leading reason that owners abandon their pets, we hope that



Puppies learn the principles of the pack through interaction and play.

you will make a valiant effort to solve your Siberian Husky's problem. Patience and understanding are virtues that should dwell in every pet-loving household.



DOGGIE DEMOCRACY

Your dog inherited the pack-leader mentality. He only knows about pecking order. He instinctively wants to be “top dog,” but you have to convince him that you are boss. There is no such thing as living in a democracy with your dog. You are the one who makes the rules.

AGGRESSION

Aggression can be a very big problem in dogs. Aggression, when not controlled, becomes dangerous. An aggressive dog, no matter the size, may lunge at, bite or even attack a person or another dog. Aggressive behavior is not to be tolerated. It is more than just inappropriate behavior; it is not safe with any dog. It is painful for a family to watch their dog become unpredictable in his behavior to the point where they are afraid of the dog. And while not all aggressive behavior is dangerous, it can be frightening: growling, baring teeth, etc. It is important to get to the root of the problem to ascertain why the dog is acting in this manner. Aggression is a display of dominance, and the dog should

not have the dominant role in his pack, which is, in this case, your family.

It is important not to challenge an aggressive dog as this could provoke an attack. Observe your Siberian Husky's body language. This is a primitive, natural breed. Huskies absolutely know how to communicate their minds through their bodies. Does he make direct eye contact and stare? Does he try to make himself as large as possible: ears pricked, chest out, tail proudly furred? Height and size signify authority in a dog pack—being taller or “above” another dog literally means that he is “above” in the social status. These body signals tell you that

Aggression within a team is completely unacceptable. These dogs must be unquestionably reliable.



PHOTO BY KENT & DONNA DANNER



your Siberian Husky thinks he is in charge, a problem that needs to be dealt with. An aggressive dog is unpredictable in that you never know when he is going to strike and what he is going to do. You cannot understand why a dog that is playful and loving one minute is growling and snapping the next.

The best solution is to consult a behavioral specialist, one who has experience with the Siberian Husky if possible. Together, perhaps you can pinpoint the

SET AN EXAMPLE

Never shout, jump or run about if you want your dog to stay calm. Huskies can be quite excitable and need to learn when it's time to play and when they should be calm. You set the example for your dog's behavior in most circumstances. Learn from your dog's reactions and act accordingly.

cause of your dog's aggression and do something about it. An aggressive dog cannot be trusted, and a dog that cannot be trusted is not safe to have as a family pet. If the pet Siberian Husky becomes untrustworthy, he cannot be kept in the home with the family. The family must get rid of the dog. In the very worst case, the dog must be euthanized.

Barking is not necessarily a sign of aggression, it is simply a dog's way of communicating verbally.



Just look at this puppy! A born leader.

AGGRESSION TOWARD OTHER DOGS

A dog's aggressive behavior toward another dog stems from not enough exposure to other dogs at an early age. If other dogs make your Siberian Husky nervous and agitated, he will lash out as a protective mechanism. A dog who has not received sufficient exposure to other canines tends to believe that he is the only dog on the planet. The animal becomes so dominant that he does not even show signs that he is fearful or threatened. Without growling or any other physical signal as a warning, he will lunge at and bite



Today a pup on a playground... tomorrow an agility champion! As puppies play and grow, they develop coordination skills.

the other dog. A way to correct this is to let your Siberian Husky approach another dog when walking on lead. Watch very closely and at the very first sign of aggression, correct your Siberian Husky and pull him away. Scold him for any sign of discomfort and then praise him when he ignores or tolerates the other dog. Keep this up until either he stops the aggressive behavior, learns to ignore the other dog or even accepts other dogs. Praise him lavishly for his correct behavior.

DOMINANT AGGRESSION

A social hierarchy is firmly established in a wild dog pack. The dog wants to dominate those under him and please those above him. Dogs know that there must be a leader. If you are not the obvious choice for emperor, the dog will assume the throne! These conflicting innate desires are what a dog owner is up against when he sets about training a dog. In training a dog

to obey commands, the owner is reinforcing that he is the top dog in the “pack” and that the dog should, and should want to, serve his superior. Thus, the owner is suppressing the dog’s urge to dominate and making him obedient.

An important part of training is taking every opportunity to reinforce that you are the leader. The simple action of making your Siberian Husky sit to wait for his food instead of allowing him to run up to get it when he wants it says that you control when he eats; he is dependent on you for food.

Although it may be difficult, do not give in to your dog’s wishes every time he whines at you or looks at you with pleading eyes. It is a constant effort to show the dog that his place in the pack is at the bottom. This is not meant to sound cruel or inhumane. You love your Siberian Husky and you should treat him with care and affection. You

NO BUTTS ABOUT IT!

Dogs get to know each other by sniffing each other’s backsides. It seems that each dog has a telltale odor, probably created by the anal glands. It also distinguishes sex and signals when a female will be receptive to a male’s attention. Some dogs snap at another dog’s intrusion of their private parts.

(hopefully) did not get a dog just so you could boss around another creature. Dog training is not about being cruel or feeling important, it is about molding the dog's behavior into what is acceptable and teaching him to live by your rules. In theory, it is quite simple: catch him in appropriate behavior and reward him for it. Add a dog into the equation and it becomes a bit more trying, but as a rule of thumb, positive reinforcement is what works best.

With a dominant dog, punishment and negative reinforcement can have the opposite effect of what you are after. It can make a dog fearful and/or act out aggressively if he feels he is being challenged. Remember, a dominant dog perceives himself at the top of the social heap and will fight to defend his perceived status. The best way to prevent that is to never give him reason to think that he is in control in the first place. If you are having trouble training your Siberian Husky and it seems as if he is constantly challenging your authority, seek the help of an obedience trainer or behavioral specialist. A professional will work with both you and your dog to teach you effective techniques to use at home. Beware of trainers who rely on excessively harsh methods; scolding is necessary now and then, but the focus in your training should always be on



NO EYE CONTACT

DANGER! If you and your on-lead dog are approached by a larger, running dog that is not restrained, walk away from the dog as quickly as possible. Do not allow your dog to make eye contact with the other dog. You should not make eye contact either. In dog terms, eye contact indicates a challenge.

positive reinforcement.

If you can isolate what brings out the fear reaction, you can help the dog get over it. Supervise your Siberian Husky's interactions with people and other dogs, and praise the dog when it goes well. If he starts to act aggressively in a situation, correct him and remove

Huskies require exercise or they may find other, less productive, ways to expend their energy.



PHOTO BY KENT & DONNA DANNEN



SOUND BITES

When a dog bites, there is always a good reason for his doing so. Many dogs are trained to protect a person, an area or an object. When that person, area or object is violated, the dog will attack. A dog attacks with his mouth. He has no other means of attack.

Fighting dogs (and there are many breeds which fight) are taught to fight, but they also have a natural instinct to fight. This instinct is normally reserved for other dogs, though unfortunate accidents can occur; for example, when a baby crawls toward a fighting dog and the dog mistakes the crawling child as a potential attacker.

If a dog is a biter for seemingly no reason, if he bites the hand that feeds him or if he snaps at members of your family, see your veterinarian or behaviorist immediately to learn how to modify the dog's behavior.

him from the situation. Do not let people approach the dog and start petting him without your express permission. That way, you can have the dog sit to accept petting and praise him when he behaves properly. You are focusing on praise and on modifying his

behavior by rewarding him when he acts appropriately. By being gentle and by supervising his interactions, you are showing him that there is no need to be afraid or defensive.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Dogs exhibit certain sexual behaviors that may have influenced your choice of male or female when you first purchased your Siberian Husky. Spaying/neutering will eliminate these behaviors, but if you are purchasing a dog that you wish to breed, you should be aware of what you will have to deal with throughout the dog's life.

Female dogs usually have two estruses per year, each season lasting about three weeks. These are the only times in which a female dog will mate and she usually will not allow this until the second week of the cycle. If a bitch is not bred during the heat cycle, it is not uncommon for her to experience a false pregnancy, in which her mammary glands swell and she exhibits maternal tendencies toward toys or other objects.

Owners must further recognize that mounting is not merely a sexual expression but also one of dominance seen in males and females alike. Be consistent and persistent and you will find that you can "move mounters."



PHOTO BY KENT & DONNA DANNEN

“Dog boxes” are the usual way of holding sled dogs while they wait their turn to race. For dogs that are trained for sledding, this is as ordinary as a dog crate is for a pet or show dog.

CHEWING

The national canine pastime is chewing! Every dog loves to sink his “canines” into a tasty bone! Dogs need to chew, to massage their gums, to make their new teeth feel better and to exercise their jaws. This is a natural behavior deeply imbedded in all things canine. Our role as owners is not to stop chewing, but to redirect it to positive, chew-worthy objects. Be an informed owner and purchase safe chew toys for your Siberian Husky, like strong nylon bones made for large dogs. Be sure that the devices are safe and durable, since your dog’s safety is at risk. Again, the owner is responsible for ensuring a dog-proof environment. The best answer is preven-

tion: that is, put your shoes, handbags and other tasty objects in their proper places (out of the reach of the growing canine

FEAR IN A GROWN DOG

Fear in a grown dog is often the result of improper or incomplete socialization as a pup, or it can be the result of a traumatic experience he suffered when young. Keep in mind that the term “traumatic” is relative—something that you would not think twice about can leave a lasting negative impression on a puppy. If the dog experiences a similar experience later in life, he may try to fight back to protect himself. Again, this behavior is very unpredictable, especially if you do not know what is triggering his fear.



Dogs need to chew, and Huskies are no exception. Get a safe chew toy from your local pet shop.



mouth). Direct puppies to their toys whenever you see them tasting the furniture legs or your pant leg. Make a loud noise to attract the pup's attention and immediately escort him to his chew toy and engage him with the toy for at least four minutes, praising and encouraging him all the while.

Some trainers recommend deterrents, such as hot pepper or another bitter spice or a product designed for this purpose, to discourage the dog from chewing on unwanted objects. This is sometimes reliable, though not as often as the manufacturers of such products claim. Test out the product with your own dog before investing in a case of it.

JUMPING UP

Jumping up is a dog's friendly way of saying hello! Some dog owners do not mind when their dog jumps up, which is fine for them. The problem arises when guests come to the house and the dog greets them in the same manner—whether they like it or not! However friendly the greeting may be, chances are your visitors will not appreciate nearly being knocked over by 45-50 lbs. of Husky. The



THE MIGHTY MALE

Males, whether castrated or not, will mount almost anything: a pillow, your leg or, much to your dismay, even your neighbor's leg. As with other types of inappropriate behavior, the dog must be corrected while in the act, which for once is not difficult. Often he will not let go! While a puppy is experimenting with his very first urges, his owners feel he needs to "sow his oats" and allow the pup to mount. As the pup grows into a full-size dog, with full-size urges, it becomes a nuisance and an embarrassment. Males always appear as if they are trying to "save the race," more determined and stronger than imaginable. While altering the dog at an appropriate age will limit the dog's desire, it usually does not remove it entirely.

dog will not be able to distinguish upon whom he can jump and whom he cannot. Therefore, it is probably best to discourage this behavior entirely.

Pick a command such as “Off” (avoid using “Down” since you will use that for the dog to lie down) and tell him “Off” when he jumps up. Place him on the ground on all fours and have him sit, praising him the whole time. Always lavish him with praise when he is in the sit position. That way you are still giving him a warm affectionate greeting.

DIGGING

Digging, which is seen as a destructive behavior to humans, is actually quite a natural behavior in dogs, especially in Siberian Huskies. Even though your dog is not one of the “earth dogs” (also known as terriers), his desire to dig can be irrepressible and most frustrating to his owners. When digging occurs in your yard, it is actually a normal behavior redirected into something the dog can do in his everyday life. For example, in the wild, a dog would be actively seeking food, making his own shelter, etc. He would be using his paws in a purposeful manner; he would be using them for his survival. Since you provide him with food and shelter, he has no need to use his paws for these purposes, and

NO JUMPING

Stop a dog from jumping up before he jumps. If he is getting ready to jump onto you, simply walk away. If he jumps up on you before you can turn away, lift your knee so that it bumps him in the chest. Do not be forceful. Your dog soon will realize that jumping up is not a productive way of getting attention.



so the energy that he would be using manifests itself in the form of little holes all over your yard and flower beds.

Perhaps your dog is digging as a reaction to boredom—it is somewhat similar to your eating a whole bag of chips in front of the TV—because they are there and there is not anything better to do! Basically, the answer is to provide the dog with adequate play and exercise so that his mind and paws are occupied,



Huskies jump up as an expression of enthusiasm. This dog jumps up to say, “Welcome home! I missed you!”

Every dog is special and unique. Most owners of Siberian Huskies do not experience problems with their dogs' behavior, but it is always to be prepared for any possible problems.



and so that he feels as if he is doing something useful.

Of course, digging is easiest to control if it is stopped as soon as possible, but it is often hard to catch a dog in the act, especially if he is alone in the yard during the day. If your dog is a compulsive digger and is not easily distracted by other activi-

WARNING SIGNS

If your dog barks menacingly or growls at strangers, or if he growls at anyone who comes near his food while he is eating, playing with a toy or taking a rest in his favorite spot, he needs proper professional training because sooner or later this behavior can result in someone being bitten.

ties, you can designate an area on your property where it is okay for him to dig. If you catch him digging in an off-limits area of the yard, immediately bring him to the approved area and praise him for digging there. Keep a close eye on him so that you can catch him; that is the only way he is going to understand what is permitted and what is not. If you bring him to a hole he dug an hour ago and tell him “No,” he will understand that you are not fond of holes, or dirt or flowers. If you catch him while he is stifle-deep in your tulips, that is when he will get your message.

BARKING

Barking is a dog’s way of “talking,” and the Siberian Husky has so much to say that you may even hear him howl! It can be somewhat frustrating because it is not always easy to tell what a dog means by his bark—is he

SMILE!

Dogs and humans may be the only animals that smile. A dog will imitate the smile on his owner’s face when he greets a friend. The dog only smiles at his human friends; he never smiles at another dog or cat. Usually, a dog rolls up his lips and shows his teeth in a clenched mouth while rolling over onto his back, begging for a soft scratch.



If you live with multiple dogs, they all should be disciplined and should behave well with each other.

excited, happy, frightened, angry? Whatever it is that the dog is trying to say, he should not be punished for barking. It is only when the barking becomes excessive, and when the excessive barking becomes a bad habit, that the behavior needs to be modified. If an intruder came into your home in the middle of the night and the dog barked a warning, wouldn’t you be pleased? You would probably deem your dog a hero, a wonderful guardian and protector of your home. On the other hand, if a friend drops by unexpectedly and rings the doorbell and is greeted with a sudden sharp bark, you would probably be annoyed at the dog. But isn’t it just the same behavior? The dog does not know any better... unless he sees who is at the door and it is someone with whom he

is familiar, he will bark as a means of vocalizing that his (and your) territory is being threatened. While your friend is not posing a threat, it is all the same to the dog. Barking is his means of letting you know that there is an intrusion, whether friend or foe, on your property. This type of barking is instinctive and should not be discouraged.

Excessive habitual barking, however, is a problem that should be corrected early on. As your Siberian Husky grows up, you will be able to tell when his barking is purposeful and when it is for no reason. You will become able to distinguish your dog's different barks and with what they are associated. For example, the bark when someone comes to the door will be different from the bark when he is excited to see you. It is similar to a person's tone of voice, except that the dog has to rely totally on tone of voice because he does not have the benefit of using words. An incessant barker will be evident at an early age.

There are some things that encourage a dog to bark. For example, if your dog barks non-stop for a few minutes and you give him a treat to quiet him, he believes that you are rewarding him for barking. He will associate barking with getting a treat and will keep doing it until he is rewarded.

FOOD STEALING

Is your dog devising ways of stealing food from your counter tops? If so, you must answer the following questions: Is your Siberian Husky hungry, or is he “constantly famished” like every other chow hound? Why is there food on the counter top? Face it, some dogs are more food-motivated than others; some dogs are totally obsessed by a slab of meat and can only think of their next meal. Food stealing is terrific fun and always yields a great reward—*food*, glorious food!

The owner's goal, therefore, is to make the “reward” less rewarding, even startling! Plant a shaker can (an empty tin can with coins inside) on the counter so that it catches your pooch off-guard. There are other devices available that will surprise the dog



TRAINING TIP

To encourage proper barking, you can teach your dog the command “Quiet.” When someone comes to the door and the dog barks a few times, praise him. Talk to him soothingly and, when he stops barking, tell him “Quiet” and continue to praise him. In this sense, you are letting him bark his warning, which is an instinctive behavior, and then rewarding him for being quiet after a few barks. You may initially reward him with a treat after he has been quiet for a few minutes.



This Siberian Husky is tired of waiting...he's howling to show that he's ready for the race to begin.

Whether it's food or objects around the house, your Husky may steal things that arouse his interest. Of course, this is a habit that needs to be corrected early on.



when he is looking for a mid-afternoon snack. Such remote-control devices, though not the first choice of some trainers, allow the correction to come from the object instead of the owner. These devices are also useful to keep the snacking hound from napping on furniture that is forbidden.

BEGGING

Just like food stealing, begging is a favorite pastime of hungry puppies! With that same reward—*food!* Dogs quickly learn that their owners keep the “good food” for themselves and that we humans do not dine on kibble alone. Begging is a conditioned response related to a specific stimulus, time and place. The sounds of the

kitchen, cans and bottles opening, crinkling bags, the smell of food in preparation, etc., will excite the dog and soon the paws are in the air!

Here is the solution to stopping this behavior: Never give in to a beggar! You are rewarding the dog for sitting pretty, jumping up, whining and rubbing his nose into you by giving him that glorious reward—food. By ignoring the dog, you will (eventually) force the behavior into extinction. Note that the behavior likely gets worse before it disappears, so be sure there are not any softies in the family who will give in to little “Oliver” every time he whimpers, “More, please.”

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Your Siberian Husky may howl, whine or otherwise vocalize his displeasure at your leaving the house and his being left alone. This is a normal case of separation anxiety, but there are things that can be done to eliminate this problem. Your dog needs to learn that he will be fine on his own for a while and that he will not wither away if he is not attended to every minute of the day. In fact, constant attention can lead to separation anxiety in the first place. If you are endlessly coddling and pampering your dog, he will come to expect this from you all of the time and it will be

more traumatic for him when you are not there. Obviously, you enjoy spending time with your dog and he thrives on your love and attention. However, it should not become a dependent relation-

goodbye and do not lavish him with hugs and kisses when you return. This is giving in to the attention that he craves and it will only make him miss it more when you are away. Another thing you



Well-behaved Huskies are cozy in their “dog boxes” while they await the beginning of the sled race.

PHOTO BY KENT & DONNA DAMMEN

ship where he is heartbroken without you.

One thing you can do to minimize separation anxiety is to make your entrances and exits as low-key as possible. Do not give your dog a long drawn-out

can try is to give your dog a treat when you leave; this will not only keep him occupied and keep his mind off the fact that you just left, but it will also help him associate your leaving with a pleasant experience.



“LONELY WOLF”

The number of dogs that suffer from separation anxiety is on the rise as more and more pet owners find themselves at work all day. New attention is being paid to this problem, which is especially hard to diagnose since it is only evident when the dog is alone. Research is currently being done to help educate dog owners about separation anxiety and how they can help minimize this problem in their dogs.

You may have to accustom your dog to being left alone in intervals, much like when you introduced your pup to his crate. When your dog starts whimpering as you approach the door, your first instinct will be to run to him and comfort him, but do not do it! His anxiety stems from being placed in an unfamiliar situation; by familiarizing him with being alone, he will learn that he is okay. That is not to say you should purposely leave your dog home alone, but the dog needs to know that while he can depend on you for his care, you do not have to be by his side 24 hours a day.

When the dog is alone in the

house, he should be confined to his crate or a designated dog-proof area of the house. This should be the area in which he sleeps, so he should already feel comfortable there and this should make him feel more at ease when he is alone. This is just one of the many examples in which a crate is an invaluable tool for you and your dog, and another reinforcement of why your dog should view his crate as a “happy” place, a place of his own.

COPROPHAGIA

Feces eating is, to most humans, one of the most disgusting behaviors that their dog could engage in, yet to the dog it is perfectly normal. It is hard for us to understand why a dog would want to eat its own feces; he could be seeking certain nutrients that are missing from his diet, he could be just plain hungry, or he could be attracted by the pleasing (to a dog) scent.

While coprophagia most often refers to the dog’s eating his own feces, a dog may likely eat that of another animal as well if he comes across it. Vets have found that diets with a low digestibility, containing relatively low levels of fiber and high levels of starch, increase coprophagia. Therefore, high-fiber diets may decrease the likelihood of dogs’ eating feces. Both the consistency of the

stool (how firm it feels in the dog's mouth) and the presence of undigested nutrients increase the likelihood. Dogs often find the stool of cats and horses more palatable than that of other dogs. Once the dog develops diarrhea from feces eating, he will likely quit this distasteful habit, since dogs tend to prefer eating harder feces.

To discourage this behavior, first make sure that the food you are feeding your dog is nutritionally complete and that he is getting enough food. If changes in his diet do not solve the problem, and no medical cause can be found, you will have to modify the behavior through environmental control. There are some tricks you can try, such as adding an unpleasant-tasting substance to the feces to make them unpalatable or adding something to the dog's food which will make it unpleasant tasting after it passes through the dog. The best way to prevent your dog from eating his stool is to make it unavailable—clean up after he eliminates and remove any stool from the yard. If it is not there, he

cannot eat it.

Never reprimand the dog for stool eating, as this rarely impresses the dog. Vets recommend distracting the dog while he is in the act of stool eating. Another option is to muzzle the dog when he is in the yard to relieve himself; this usually is effective within 30 to 60 days. Coprophagia most frequently is seen in pups 6 to 12 months of age, and usually disappears around the dog's first birthday.

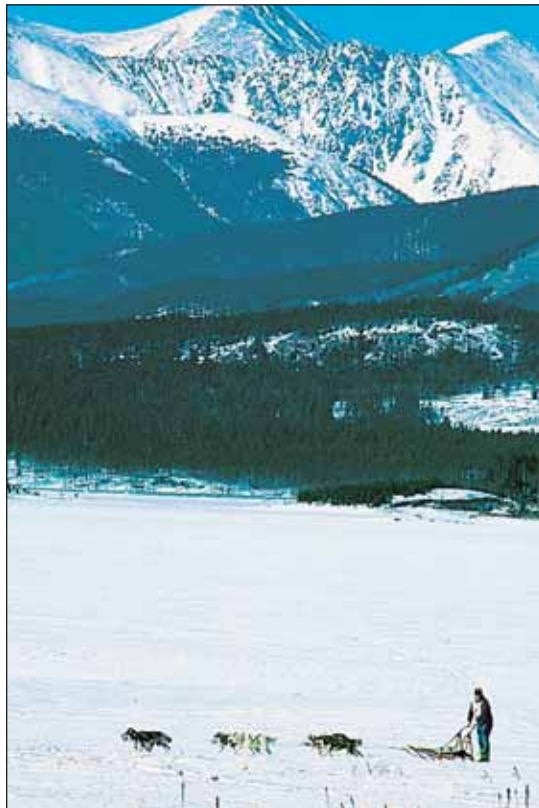


PHOTO BY KEV & DONNA DANNEN.

A musher and his team of Huskies race over a frozen lake as they pass by Grays and Torrys Peaks, Colorado. The peaks are 14,250 feet in elevation.