

Dogs Behaving Badly

Expert answers your questions about bad behavior in dogs.

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Benji the Beagle was friendly. Too friendly — he'd straddle your leg to show it. The behavior wasn't a problem for Benji, but it embarrassed Benji's owners, who called in Nicholas Dodman, DVM, author of *Dogs Behaving Badly* (Bantam, 1999). He dismantled Benji's behavior, a classic case of dominance aggression, by thinking like a dog.

"Somewhere deep down inside the dog gazing lovingly in your eyes, there are elements of the wolf — there's a wolf in your living room," Dodman said from his office in Massachusetts. "That doesn't mean you can't share warmth and fun that makes dogs such endearing pets, but you need to understand the beast."

Dodman, director of the Behavior Clinic at Tufts University School of Medicine and professor of behavioral pharmacology, put Benji and his owners on a strict regimen of dominance control. "A 'tough love' approach lets a would-be dominant dog know who is in charge," Dodman wrote in *Dogs Behaving Badly*. "This relatively simple program reduces dominance aggression within a two-month period in about 90 percent of cases."

His book provides a step-by-step guide to treating dominance aggression, sexual behavior and other problems. It's an A-to-Z compendium of dog behavior what it means and how you can change it.

When Dodman began his veterinary career in England 20 years ago, "Behaviorism was in the dark ages," he said. "Medications to help problems were anticonvulsants to sedate [a dog], depress it to a vegetable-like state. Behavior wasn't modified, it was simply suppressed."

Dodman, who joined the Tufts Behavior Clinic when it opened 10 years ago, recommends medication in concert with behavior modification if a problem is extremely difficult. He often treats dogs "whose lives are like a living hell. They're in hysteriathey'll salivate, snap their teeth off in crates; they're so anxious they explode in diarrhea. For somebody to say, 'I don't believe in drug therapy,' for God's sake, why not? Do you have no humanitarian feelings at all? Although behavior modification over two or three months can produce some noticeable improvement, your dog is suffering. It would be better for the dog to give it the medication right from the beginning."

If Dodman sounds like the patron saint of behaviorism and behavior pharmacology, he is. It's his mission in life. "I'm as obstinate as a Bull Terrier. I hang on until I get a solution and only then I can lay it to rest."

And Benji the Beagle? He and his owners are living happily ever after.

With characteristic humor and compassion, Dr. Dodman helped DOG FANCY readers with problems they were having with their pets. He proved again dogs don't behave badly — for dogs.