

## Strange Canine Behavior and Disorders

**Severe behavior disorders can be successfully treated.**

*T.J. Dunn, Jr., DVM*

Posted: Thu Apr 1 00:00:00 PST 2004

Imagine the shock of coming home, letting your little dog out of his crate, and discovering that while you were away he suffered a torn and displaced eye.

That's what happened to Bruce Bachleda, of West Chicago, Ill. His Shih Tzu, Murphy, was so destructive when left alone that he needed to be kept in a spacious crate along with food, water, and toys. Nevertheless, Murphy's separation anxiety worsened.

No one knows how Murphy's eye was damaged, but the incident so troubled Bachleda that he sought help from John Ciribassi, a veterinarian experienced in treating canine behavioral problems at Chicagoland Veterinary Behavior Consultants, in Carol Stream, Ill. Murphy was treated with Clomipramine, and underwent desensitizing training at home. Today, the rehabilitated Shih Tzu couldn't care less when the Bachledas leave, and he no longer needs medication except for occasional storm phobia.

Other dogs aren't so lucky. There are hundreds of thousands of dogs in shelters and pounds across the country, most of them surrendered by owners who were unable to cope with their dogs' misbehavior. According the Humane Society of the United States, more than 4 million dogs find themselves in shelters every year, many due to behavioral problems.

Behavioral problems in dogs often stem from anxiety originating from fear, or expectation of a fearful event. Imagine how difficult it is to correct anxiety in a dog, when one considers that humans often need many months of counseling, and/or medication, in order to overcome an anxiety disorder.

How does one "counsel" a dog? Animal behaviorists often use a dual approach when attempting to achieve behavior modification in dogs. Skilled training, coordinating owner/dog interaction, persistent and patient repetition of training procedures, and positive reinforcement of good behaviors all are akin to human "counseling."

The second tool used to achieve behavioral modification goals is medication. Many of the drugs useful in animal behavioral modification are identical to those used to treat humans with similar psychological/behavioral disorders. Just as with humans, some dogs suffer from anxiety, phobias, hyperactivity, aggression, self-mutilation, and compulsive disorders. And just as in human psychotherapy, canine patients often require medications to assist in resolving those problems.