

Dog Behaviour Explained 1

1. No bad dogs, only bad owners?

This is the common response when I tell anyone I am a dog behaviourist, but it is just not the case. As a behaviourist, I only see good owners – people who have tried their best and are genuinely committed to their dog, willing to ask for help and invest time and money in supporting their dog. Many owners feel responsible or guilty for their dog's behaviour but the truth is some dogs are just more challenging than others!

There are many reasons dogs may develop behaviour problems; insufficient training or early socialisation, unfortunate circumstance or incidents, dogs genetically predisposed to certain behaviour traits or sensitive to emotional responses or a mismatch between owner expectations and dogs' normal behaviour. Most of these are beyond an owners' control but with understanding and commitment, most behaviour problems can be reduced to a manageable level, if not completely cured.

2. All dogs know their name, come, sit etc?

Many owners seem to think that their dogs should know basic commands without the need to teach them and that they are being naughty when actually nobody has taken the time to train the dog and teach him acceptable behaviour and how to respond when we ask him things. To a dog, living in a human world must seem very strange at times, and our arbitrary rules do not make sense to a doggy mind. However, dogs are very adaptable and trainable and given a little guidance, most dogs will happily go along with what we ask of them. Don't assume your dog knows and understands your commands and expectations unless you have put the time in to teach them!

3. Dogs can only see black and white?

Dogs' sight is actually dichromatic; they can see blue and yellow, black, white and grey. They have less cones (frequency detecting photoreceptor cells) than humans and no red cones. However, this means they have more room for rods (intensity detecting photoreceptor cells) and this combined with the tapetum (which reflects light within the eyes and is what we see when we shine a light on an animal's eyes) means they can see better than us in darker conditions. Human's vision is much better at focus, detail and colour, can identify objects at longer distances and has a wider binocular vision but dogs have better night vision than humans and a wider visual field.

Next time we will be answering:

Does reassuring a frightened dog reinforce that behaviour?

Can you teach an old dog new tricks?

Are dogs carnivores?