

LOOK FOR THESE RESPECTED COMMENTATORS IN THIS ISSUE:

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Dogs & Human Social Cues

There is some question as to whether dogs' responses to human social cues are a direct result of domestication or whether environmental factors play a role. This study reviewed what is known about the ability of shelter dogs and pet dogs to follow certain human social signals.

A substantial bond between a pet dog and its owner seems to have a significant impact on the dog's response to human social cues. Shelter dogs may lack environmental stimulation, may be subject to chronic stressors, and may be deprived of attachment bonding to handlers during their limited interactions with humans. Differences in typical housing situations were compared; it was found that if shelter dogs are able to form bonds with handlers, those bonds may not be as strong as pet dogs' bonds with owners.

The literature evaluating dogs' ability to follow human pointing gestures indicated that shelter dogs were less able to follow these signals as compared with pet dogs. When

confronted with puzzling situations, both shelter dogs and pet dogs gazed at humans. Different life experiences were linked to varying levels of begging behaviors.

This review substantiated the importance of understanding differences between dog populations and their ability to respond to their owner or handler, with the goal that this information will help facilitate increased human interaction with dogs at shelters.

Commentary

General practitioners often hear that a pet behaves a certain way because it either was abused or lacked socialization earlier in life. This study emphasized the importance of not only looking at the background of the pet when making conclusions about its behavior but also accepting that the pet may not be able to respond to social cues because of patterns in its history. This serves as a reminder for potential adopting families to acknowledge the time required to develop a true bond with a shelter dog. A better understanding of canine behavior can help increase the chance for dogs being adopted from a shelter and decrease the risk for abandonment.

—Heather Troyer, DVM, DABVP, CVA

Source

Duranton C, Gaunet F. Effects of shelter housing on dogs' sensitivity to human social cues. *J Vet Behav.* 2016;14:20-27.

Shelter dogs may lack environmental stimulation, may be subject to chronic stressors, and may be deprived of attachment bonding to handlers during their limited interactions with humans.

INSIDE

43	DOGS & HUMAN SOCIAL CUES	45	LEVETIRACETAM	48	AUTOLOGOUS PROTEIN SOLUTION
44	ONCHOCERCA LUPI	46	PHLEBOTOMIES & ANEMIA	48	BUPRENORPHINE
45	CANINE CHRONIC BRONCHITIS	46	LIPID NANOEMULSIONS	49	B-CELL LYMPHOMA
		47	CANINE MAST CELL TUMORS		