



Library Article

Preventing Potential Problems in Puppies

Author and Copyright Holder - Linda Aronson, DVM . Published in the VetSpeak Section of the Shaggy Sentinel, May, 1997. Minuteman Bearded Collie Club.

(Minor editorial changes by E. Sell for the health web page)

Last month we dealt with crate training, and a couple of the more common problems faced by the new puppy owner - housebreaking and separation anxiety. This month we'll look at some of the other potential problems of new puppies, and examine ways to prevent that cute fuzz face from turning into a screaming juvenile delinquent. Beardies are designed for a purpose - herding and all around farm work. This is a high energy sort of job, so Beardies were not meant to be couch potatoes. In general, it is true that if you do not give a Bearded Collie a job, then he will find one, and it probably won't be one you like - even if it starts out as being cute.

Barking. The more Beardies you have the more they tend to bark. As Patti Carmejoole has remarked, they must each have their own focus. If your Beardies are quiet then you are blessed, and most other Bearded Collie owners do not wish to hear about it. Teach the Bearded Collie to bark on command, then you can praise him when he's barked because someone has come to the house; by giving him a large food treat, he can't bark and chew at the same time. The problem arises when your Bearded Collie continues to bark beyond the appropriate time (i.e., he perseveres). The preferred method of extinguishing barking is to ignore it. For example, if the dog continues to bark, you don't react until he stops, then lavish praise, treats etc. (a single one word command without repetition, "quiet", may be given, then no more is said). The trouble is that the more you ignore him the more desperate he will be to gain your attention, and the behavior will escalate before it extinguishes. If you know his will power is greater than yours, do not embark on this route, as it will just teach him he has to bark louder and longer to obtain attention. You will have your best chance with this method before the barking is established so don't blow it.

Citronella collars are expensive, but work much better than electric shock collars or noise makers. In the multi dog house though, the dog wearing the collar will get sprayed when the other dogs bark, even if he didn't join in, which can confuse him, and one poor patient of mine in a house of crazy Keeshonden ended up vomiting because he got too many whiffs of citronella



Library Article

courtesy of the pack. One bonus to this method is that you will also have less of a bug problem. Of course, most Bearded Collie owners put up with the barking. The problem is it's rather self-fulfilling. You bark your head off, and the guy in the brown or blue suit who's trying to break into the house (read drop off package/mail) runs away, gee are you a fierce guard dog or what? Most Bearded Collies wish to scare off the intruder, but once they've met someone they are immediately part of the flock, so you bark when they try to escape from your control etc.

Chewing. In my experience some Bearded Collies are big chewers and others aren't. Some are selective chewers. In puppyhood, young Ghost took on the challenge of childproof bottles, and neatly learned to open them This was disconcerting, particularly when he opened Grandma's progesterone, fortunately he just looked for the challenge, and didn't eat the contents. Now he restricts his chewing to sheepskin and leather, expensive tastes, but probably somewhat natural. There are those who advocate sprays, pastes and various concoctions to coat chewables. Of course, experienced Bearded Collie people will laugh at these, as most Bearded Collies of course relish the bitter apples and sour grapes of this world. Tabasco sauce - yum! Give them lots of good alternates and make the selection variable, but don't give old slippers, unless you want pup to try a new slipper when he gets the opportunity. One method is infallible - management, if you don't want pup to chew it, put it where he can't get it. If it's lower than ten feet, and not triple locked Bearded Collies can probably get at it. They do love a challenge, but fortunately ingenuity comes with age, and by the time they can open doors and crate latches, they are probably not teething heavily, and your treasured possessions may be safe. Gumming and nesting does not count much.

Biting. This should really come under a more general heading of respect. Puppies bite each other, and are liable to bite people too, especially if the people behave like puppies. To avoid this, don't get down on the floor and wrestle with them. Puppy biting is normal. In the litter, pups bite each other and learn two things, 1) if fat Stan bites me it can hurt, OUCH, 2) if I bite sister too hard she not only screams but she won't play with me for a bit. Learn from this. If puppy bites, don't spray him in the face from a squirt bottle, grab him by the muzzle and pin him to the ground, or otherwise unleash the wrath of the gods. Scream 'OUCH' at a volume commensurate with the severity of the nip. (This should be one reflex response that comes easily.) Then pick up your toys and walk away. Put him quietly in the crate



Library Article

for time out if it's that time, but the Beardie will learn that "I bite, she yelps, she stops playing, oops I'd better not bite." A kinder, gentler education.

Training. With this, we come to the subject of training. Another emotive subject, at least it is for me, and probably should be for everyone. The problem I have with 'traditional' dog training is that it doesn't really work that well, especially for the average dog owner. In part that is because timing is a crucial aspect of training. If you are training in a negative fashion, using correction, then your timing had better be impeccable or you are punishing the wrong thing, and confusing that little puppy brain. And few people have their timing that good. If on the other hand your timing is slightly off with positive reinforcement the effect on pup is less devastating, although not without consequence. That great clicker treat trainer, Karen Pryor (author of *Don't Shoot the Dog* - a must for your doggy shelf), has a video in which she trains a guppy or some such small fish to swim through a hoop. In the clip you watch the guppy learn his trick, experiment with the boundaries etc., just as a dog would. Then the fish swims through the hoop while Karen is momentarily distracted, and he doesn't get his reward. No-one who has not seen a guppy throw a hissy fit would believe what follows. He flounces to the bottom of his aquarium and hyperventilates, thrashing his fins around. (The color isn't great, but I think he goes blue in the gills too!)

Clickers are wonderful, they even come with wrist bands, and once dog learns click means I did it right, it doesn't matter if Mom takes a couple of minutes fumbling through the treat bag - sustenance is on the way. It also works at a distance. By shaping - initially rewarding approximations to the behavior, and gradually refining the reward criteria until only the full behavior is rewarded, and breaking down complex behaviors into the sum of their parts and teaching each part, training becomes a positive, fun interaction between you and your Beardie. This approach can be practiced all the time, any time you say a word to him, not a chore you both have to dread.

For treating dominant dogs we have a program called nothing-in-life-is-free or working for a living. The principle is that we will be valued more by our dogs (it works with the kids too) if instead of giving them everything (food, attention, treats, games, exercise) for nothing they have to give us something first, a sit, down or whatever behavior we're working on at present - see how that could fit into even the busiest day. The program also teaches the dog it's a dog and to be respectful of your space. I love my



Library Article

Beardie kisses and hugs, but my dogs know when I tell them I don't want them at a particular time I mean it, whether it's because I actually have decent clothes on, or something in my hands I don't want sent flying. Similarly, they have learned to respect the space of guests who may be allergic, or too small or frail for boundless Beardie affection or, heaven forbid, who don't like dogs.

There's not room to discuss training methods in depth, I'm told I write too much as it is, but I leave you with a thought from my boss. When people protest that they like to have their dogs sit on their laps, even though we are having trouble conversing across Scruffy's head, he inquires, "I suppose it all depends upon whether you want to be the king or the throne."