

Animal Therapist Vol. 3

 Behavioural therapy for animals

Volume 3

Imprint

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BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY FOR ANIMALS

LEARNING UNIT 1

Behavioural therapy for animals

Read through the entire learning unit once. Then make a note on this page of how you would like to benefit from this learning unit. Then work through the learning unit thoroughly and mark important points. The margins offer you the opportunity to note down practical examples and your own ideas.

1. LEARNING UNIT

MENTAL ILLNESS AND STRESS IN ANIMALS

Side note:

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first part of the training to become an animal therapist, the specific behavioural disorders and their treatment in dogs and cats are explained in more detail. This enables the animal therapist to acquire a general understanding of animal behaviour and a great deal of specialist knowledge in the area of behavioural disorders in dogs and cats.

Many of the behavioural problems that occur in dogs and cats can also be observed in the same way in farm and zoo animals. However, as both the living conditions and the demands of humans on these animals are very different, a certain degree of adaptation is required.

The animal therapist must realise that one of his most important tasks concerns the animal owner. Only if he is convinced of the therapy will he commit to it and thus contribute to its success. In particular, the animal therapist must ensure that

- the pet owner understands the problem and its background.
- the pet owner understands the effect of the treatment.
- the pet owner is convinced of the effectiveness of the treatment.
- To do this, use the conversation techniques explained in the first part.

The study programme is structured in such a way that the most common problem behaviours of dogs and their treatment are explained first and then the most common problem behaviours of cats are explained in more detail.

In particular, aggression problems and the most common form of dominance aggression are addressed, as well as anxiety problems.

However, problem behaviour in relation to excretion (urination and defecation) as well as hunting behaviour, begging, sexual disorders and destructive behaviour are also discussed.

The solutions and treatment approaches listed have proven themselves in practice, but do not claim to be exhaustive. With increasing experience in dealing with animals, the animal therapist will be able to adapt the treatment approaches more and more to the animal.

The same applies to the behaviour of horses and other animals.

"Wherever an animal is forced into the service of man, the suffering it endures concerns us all."

Albert Schweitzer

In the following learning unit, you will learn why dogs and cats are increasingly suffering from mental illness and stress and how this is expressed. You will learn how a change in human living conditions affects animals living in the home and how these changes are expressed.

1.2 THE SPECIALITY

Animal behaviour therapy, a field that has also been scientifically recognised in Europe for some years now, still has a certain exoticism about it. Are animals now also "discussed"? Who are the therapists? Do they work scientifically or do they indulge in mere intuition as "animal sympathisers"? There is a great deal of interest in animal behaviour, knowledge about the needs of the respective animal species and skills for living together with humans. Pet owners are often spoilt for choice as they have to filter the right, scientifically correct information from the multitude of articles available in magazines, newspapers, books, radio and television programmes, as well as training courses, workshops and seminars. Likewise, most breeders and dog school operators are neither sufficiently ethologically trained nor do they have the appropriate certification or professional training. It is well known that the first port of call for pet owners seeking advice is the vet. They are competent and capable of examining an animal's state of health and treating illnesses. Unfortunately, animal behaviour therapy is not an obligatory part of the veterinary licensing regulations at universities in Germany, which is why only a few veterinarians can be assumed to have the necessary expertise.

Side note:

1.3 THE INFLUENCE OF THE PSYCHE ON DISEASES AND THEIR APPRECIATION

Side note:

The need for recognition as a veterinary speciality becomes particularly clear when the treating vet can only succinctly explain to the patient's owner that their pet has a psychological problem and therefore cannot be treated. Pet vets in particular should be aware by now that many diseases in dogs and cats must be seen in the context of the psyche of the animals and their owners, whether as a primary or concomitant factor, especially as the frequency of classic diseases is decreasing in line with the increase in "welfare problems" and interfamilial problem behaviour between humans and animals. After diagnosing a behavioural disorder or an illness related to a behavioural problem, the veterinarian can treat it themselves or refer the patient to an animal therapist trained in behavioural therapy. However, the scientific foundations of animal behaviour therapy are not only to be found in veterinary medicine, but also in ethology/biology and human psychology. The latter plays a prominent role in the behavioural therapy of dogs and cats, as pet owners are not only involved in the therapy of their pets, but also have to take responsibility for the success or failure of the therapy as so-called "co-therapists". But why are dogs and cats increasingly suffering from mental illness and stress?

The reasons for this are numerous and complex. In most cases, a lack of expertise on the part of pet owners, breeders and trainers with regard to species-appropriate communication and the specific requirements for keeping dogs and cats in a manner appropriate to their species and behaviour leads to the development of behavioural problems. The mental and physical under- or overstraining of dogs and cats, as well as training and husbandry errors in the puppy and youth phase of the animals, are also frequent causes of later behavioural disorders. The obvious differences between cats and dogs in this respect are ignored, with fatal consequences. Dogs, for example, unlike cats, are obligatory social animals, i.e. they urgently need conspecifics and/or humans as social partners, with whom they live in a pack "family". For some time now, humans have become the main social partners for dogs, as they are very well suited to each other in terms of their social order. In the course of the last fourteen thousand years, the

wolf from a wild animal to a domestic dog. Brain mass, dentition, sensory perception (smelling, hearing, seeing), gestures and facial expressions were reduced. Barking, on the other hand, became increasingly frequent and more differentiated, especially when communicating with humans. While the wolf only accepted the wolf as a social partner, humans became the primary social partner for the dog.

Side note:

1.4 THE POSITION OF THE DOG IN SOCIETY

At the provisional end of domestication (becoming a pet) is a human "art project" - the dog, unique in its diversity and viability as a breeding product of civilisation and modern society, in which it ideally leads a life as an "employee". But why do we keep dogs? Is it pity, by taking them from animal shelters into the family? Do dogs serve as "sports equipment" or protectors? Or do people see their pedigree dog as an object of prestige to show off? The dog as a social partner and companion and as a means of socialising is certainly the main reason for its popularity. Of course, there are also dogs in "work", where they serve humans in a variety of ways, for example as guide dogs for the blind or service dogs. The special thing for dog handlers is the fact that they are often in the public eye and frequently have to explain or justify themselves and their dogs' behaviour. The pros of dog ownership outweigh the cons in society. Not only do around 10 million people in Germany alone live with dogs in their household, but the majority of Germans (including non-dog owners) agree: "Life is happier with dogs"! The list of positive effects of dog ownership on society seems endless. These include

- Increased well-being of the pet owner
- Promoting closeness to nature,
- improved coping with everyday problems (dog has a stabilising, motivating and activating effect),
- the dog as a "crisis manager" (divorce, school grades, etc.) and
- the dog as an economic factor (one hundred thousand jobs, two billion euros saved in the healthcare system per year),

- "Dog in work" (service and rescue dogs, animal-assisted therapy)?

But unfortunately, the list of negative circumstances surrounding dog ownership is no less long. Dog owners are discriminated against and criminalised to the point of social exclusion. Frequent points of contention are the accumulation and disposal of dog faeces and the generalised obligation to keep dogs on leads and muzzles that is demanded in many places? Especially in urban areas, there are too few opportunities for dogs to run around. In addition, unscientific breed lists lead to downright paranoia. The level of fines for offences committed by dog owners seems disproportionate compared to other offences. In addition, a lack of expertise on the part of breeders, dog school operators and law enforcement officers or authorities makes a fact-based discussion difficult, while current laws and regulations are neither up-to-date nor scientifically sound.

Nevertheless, it seems that dogs have gained a firm place in human society. But what kind of animal is at the other end of the lead? What does it need to feel at home in the human pack?

1.5 HOW DO DOGS SEE US HUMANS?

Dogs regard humans as "conspecifics without fur" and transfer the rules of hierarchy to human family members. The main goal in a dog's life is to gain access to resources (food, a place to sleep, a loved one, cuddles, etc.) to increase individual fitness. For the dog, the family represents its pack, in which it initially strives for the best possible place, i.e. the highest ranking place. However, this often leads to competitive situations in the struggle for important resources. This is why consistent and consistent training and constant management of all resources in relation to the dog is of crucial importance.

Principles such as "navel of the world" and "nothing-in-life-is-free" must be implemented daily, not only in puppyhood, but throughout life! As a sovereign resource manager, a dog owner must always demonstrate to the dog through consistent training that he is the "boss" of the pack and not the dog. And this should be done with an absolute renunciation of verbal and physical punishment. Dog and human can live together harmoniously and stress-free if certain house rules are adhered to.

Side note:

1.6 THE NEEDS OF THE DOG

Side note:

The dog is a hunting predator and an outdoorsman, an "outdoor animal" that, depending on its disposition, requires more or less daily exercise, even in adverse weather conditions. The running animal needs regular free running for exploration (exploration and movement behaviour "dog") and for elimination (defecation and urination). Kennels and tethering, compulsory use of a lead and exclusive use of the property are not appropriate for the species, but torture! As a good observer and sensitive companion who can detect any mood swings in humans, he learns relatively quickly to show both desired and undesired behaviour.

Dogs like to learn a lot, also by observing their human social partner. With the help of the famous "canine gaze", they try to get support from humans. They learn from the success or failure of their actions by displaying certain behaviours more or less frequently. It is a very rational thinking creature that will soon stop performing an action if it continues to be unsuccessful.

The early puppy phase is of particular importance. In the so-called "nursery" (starting between the third and fifth week of life), dogs have to get to know other dogs, a wide variety of people and many sounds, smells, other animals, objects and much more in a positive and fear-free way! In doing so, they build up a reference system that helps them to access positive and negative experiences more quickly in later life. Problems occur more frequently later on where they have not familiarised themselves sufficiently with the "dog world"!

Dogs speak "without words" and have a multifactorial communication system (smelling, hearing, seeing, touching). They speak a different "language" to humans and can therefore only carry out the commands that humans have previously taught them or successfully trained them to do over many thousands of repetitions.

1.7 THE NEEDS OF CATS

Cats are different and diverse! Domestication (becoming a pet) took place much later with our domestic cats than with dogs. It was not until 1850 that different breeds of domestic cats were defined and specifically bred.

bred. The different breeds no longer developed solely out of use (adaptation to certain environmental situations), but people moulded the domestic cat according to their interests and ideas. The relatively late influence of humans (breeding) alone means that today's domestic cat is still more similar to its original wild form than the dog. Although the brain mass has been reduced by up to twenty-seven per cent compared to the wild form (including a decrease in sensory organ performance - domestic cats hear worse than their wild relatives), cats can live very well outdoors without social partners such as conspecifics or humans. Like dogs, they are hunting predators, but unlike dogs, they are facultatively social, whereby the cat environment is generally more important to the animals than the social partners cat and human! They are considered individualists with special personality traits. They often live as loners or in a family environment as "freelancers", with humans acting as guests of their cat(s) in their own home as more or less tolerated managers of the cat's life.

Side note:

1.8 THE POSITION OF THE CAT

Cats never establish a hierarchy with humans. Based on the natural territorial requirements of cats of three to five square kilometres, an ad libitum outdoor area (cat flap), where the natural need to hunt in the morning and evening hours (hunting predator), exploration and marking behaviour and a species-specific elimination behaviour (defecation and urination) are possible at the same time, is to be regarded as optimal. Outdoor cats show significantly fewer behavioural disorders such as stereotypies, aggression and fears or undesirable behavioural patterns or behavioural problems (marking behaviour within the home, hunting behaviour on the wrong subject or object, uncleanliness due to inadequate toilet management, etc.) than our "house cats".

The ability to live together in a group is in principle dependent on the food supply, genetic factors and the attitude towards social partners, whereby the "outdoorer" can manage its contacts with conspecifics itself.

When choosing a cat, certain things should be clarified in advance in order to achieve the most harmonious cat household possible. Among other things, the breeding selection for a corresponding lifestyle should be taken into account. So-called "farm cats" that have been "outdoorers" for generations should remain so when they are adopted by their new owners.

The way in which they are reared also plays a certain role. For example, problems in living together are to be expected in the case of inadequate socialisation up to the seventh week of life (low-contact "nursery"), as well as when "free-rangers" are transferred to purely indoor keeping. Particularly problematic is the so-called hand-rearing of kittens before the seventh (ninth) week of life by the owners without the presence of an adult cat, who is normally responsible for the training of emotional and motor self-control. In all cases, there is a risk of anxiety, frustration, aggression, hyperactivity and stereotypies.

Side note:

OWN SUMMARY

MENTAL ILLNESS AND STRESS IN ANIMALS

What will change when you put these findings into practice?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

What questions are still open?

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[illegible][illegible]

CONTROL QUESTIONS

1. What is the main goal in a dog's life?
2. What are the different needs of dogs and cats?
3. What does the ability to live together in a group of cats depend on?
4. What are the basic requirements of dogs and cats in terms of husbandry and behaviour?