
Southern CKCS Club

WELFARE ORGANISATION

(By Katherine Li using notes adapted with kind permission from
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Possible Problem Behaviour with your Rescue Cavalier

Please read the word 'his' and 'him' in this document to apply to both males and females.

Although we try to find out as much as we can about your new friend before placing him with you, it may not always be possible and sometimes certain problem behaviour will only surface after you have lived with your dog for a while. In general Cavaliers adapt amazingly well but sometimes changes in environment, circumstances and certainly a new home may bring on undesirable behaviour in your Cavalier. Each dog should be treated as an individual as each one has its own personality. This information is to be used as guidelines only and is designed to give you a brief idea about each problem and a solution. If it does not work or you are in doubt, please seek advice from your vet and ask to be referred to an animal behaviourist, pet behaviour counsellor or qualified dog trainer who will give you professional advice and an assessment of your dog if necessary.

Consistency is the key to having a confident dog. Whatever behaviour programme you decide to follow, make sure the whole family is involved so your dog is certain of what is expected of him.

Jumping

This is usually an excitement problem, your dog wants to get to your hands and face as quickly as possible, because this is where all his praise comes from. Some Cavaliers do jump and it is easier to avoid this problem if you start young enough.

The easiest way to stop the problem is to ignore your dog, turn your back and do not speak to or touch your dog. As soon as your dog stops jumping up and either turns to do something else or sits / stands back and looks, turn around and praise and reward him. He will soon learn that jumping is very boring, but sitting or standing and waiting for attention gets him praise and treats.

Stop this from becoming a bad habit with your dog by sitting on the floor and encourage him to sit or lie down while you are giving him love and attention. If he bounces at you, gently catch him and put his feet back on the floor with a command of 'Off'. This way your dog will learn that lovely attention is given when his feet are on the floor, but he is placed on the floor if he bounces at you. If your dog's jumping can be channelled in the right direction, you can teach him great tricks.

Barking

This can be caused by a variety of reasons from attention seeking to fear. Barking is one of the ways dogs communicate, and when a dog barks it is because he has something urgent to say. You need to find out why your dog barks to be able to effectively treat the problem. A dog that is keen to bark can also be great fun because you can teach him lots of tricks connected with barking.

A good way to stop the excitement barking dog is to use distraction, this can be either food or toys and use these distractions to take the dog's mind off of barking and focus it onto playing a game or working for a treat. Every time your dog barks, distract him for a second so that he shuts up and then give him a command such as 'quiet or ssshhhhh' and then reward with a treat.

Boredom is a frequent cause of excessive barking. If you think your dog is under stimulated, think about making it a bigger part of your ordinary life. Include some games and play in your walks. If your dog has to be left alone, supply it with some constructive toys, such as a Kong toy or a Wobble Bone, or hide treats around the room, to occupy him.

Other causes of persistent barking may be more deep-seated, and enlisting the services of an animal behaviourist may help

Mouthing

It is a perfectly natural behaviour and all it means is that your dog has not learned 'bite inhibition'. This means he has not learned that putting his mouth on you and closing his mouth is not a nice thing to do and it hurts you.

This behaviour is often started when your dog was a puppy. Puppies use their mouths to explore, to initiate play and reactions from their brothers, sisters and mother. If this behaviour gets too rough, the other dogs will squeal and may nip or growl at the pup. In this way the pup learns to inhibit the bites it gives. When puppies are taken from the rest of the pups and dam at 6 or 8 weeks, this learning is not complete and unfortunately, often owners tolerate and unconsciously encourage the behaviour when it is still 'cute' and non-painful.

This can be solved fairly easily, but sometimes may take longer with the older dog. Have a pot of treats, quite boring ones first and then moving onto tastier and tastier ones later on. Offer your dog a treat and if his teeth touch your fingers that are holding the treat when he goes to take it, a sharp cry, withdrawal of the hand and turning away (ending the interaction or game) teaches him to inhibit his bite. As soon as he looks a bit puzzled or steps back, praise him and offer the treat again. He should take it gently this time, if not then repeat again, if he is gentle, let him have the treat and praise like mad. As he begins to learn, associate his gentle behaviour with the words 'gently, gently' as he takes the treat from your hand.

Chewing

If the chewing only occurs in your presence and never when you are out or not watching, then it is probably attention seeking and will continue as long as you show the dog you care about the behaviour. Trying walking out every time

he starts chewing. Or simply look the other way. You may sacrifice a few things, but IF it is attention seeking behaviour, he will never stop unless you ignore it.

If chewing/destruction only occur when you are out and your dog would not even try to chew when you are in the house (i.e. it is not just opportunistic) then it may be a sign of anxiety. Make sure that your dog has plenty of opportunity to chew legitimate things (bones, chews, rubber toys) and has been well exercised and fed before you leave it. If the destruction is severe or continues despite this, you must ask for help from your vet. Do not punish this behaviour since you will make your dog more anxious.

For general chewing problems, ensure that your dog has a variety of good quality toys to chew on and a variety of substrates, e.g. high quality rubber toys, soft 'fleecy' type toys that are dog-safe, rawhide chews etc. It may be that you are not providing the type of chewing material your dog needs. Discourage chewing of your own things by using safe sprays such as bitter apple and then gently guide the dog to the 'correct' item and praise it. Do not punish or frighten your dog over this chewing behaviour or he will not be able to learn the correct behaviour. He is not doing it because he is 'bad'.

Chasing / Not coming when called

Some Cavaliers have a problem with chasing than others, because it is genetically programmed in them and they can't help it, e.g. chasing after rabbits on a walk in the fields.

If your dog has this problem it can be extremely difficult to stop and you will always have to be one step ahead of your dog. You need to make sure that you are more exciting than what he is starting to chase or in the process of chasing, by using noisy toys (squeaky ones, rattly ones or specific noise ones). Timing is crucial. Attract his attention and then run the other way to encourage him to chase you instead. When he is chasing you, crouch down and call him to you, gently take hold of his collar and give the treat and loads of praise. He has now learned that you are more exciting, because you give hugs and food if he chases you.

The best way to prevent this is to keep calling your dog back from the first moment you let him off the lead but make sure he is tagged and identified. Try it initially with a long extendable lead. If you then keep calling him back during the walk and giving loads of praise, maybe a game and also rewards, he will learn that coming back to you is always fun and worth doing.

Digging

This is always great fun for dogs and again some Cavaliers are more prone to digging up your plants and lawn than others. Remember in the wild, dogs live in dens under ground so digging is a very natural thing to do. They also enjoy the excitement and some even dig to make a cool place to lie in the summer.

The best way to solve the problem of your dog digging in unwanted places is to give him a digging area of his own. Make this from play sand and soil and make sure it is a safe place, large enough for him to really enjoy himself. Do not expect your dog to use the area on his own, you have to encourage him

and show him what fun it can be. Hide some toys, bones and chewy things in the ground, scatter some dried food around in the area to encourage him there and most importantly of all, play with him there. This means digging with him and showing him that there are things hidden in the ground. If he tries to dig where he is not allowed, go out to him, tell him to 'leave it' and move him to his digging area and encourage him to dig there. Always remember that you have to constantly replace the toys and treats as they are found and taken away. Make sure that your dog never has a chance to dig where he is not allowed. Spend plenty of time with them in their digging area and praise him loads when he is using it.

Fear

This could be fear caused by bad association or because your dog has never come across whatever it is before. Both can be resolved, sometimes completely and sometimes to an acceptable degree so that your dog can live a normal life.

When you get your rescue dog (this is from where 99% of bad association fear comes from), you will get some information which will give you an idea of how your dog has lived before and if anything has happened which may cause fear problems. If you know what the problem is, it is far easier to gently acclimatise your dog to this and slowly desensitise him.

Firstly you must let your dog go as close to the article / person as he wants to and act completely normally and say nothing to make your dog think there is anything wrong. When your dog shows signs of fear, DO NOT try and make him go forward or walk past it, instead try and encourage your dog to move away from the problem, either sideways or backwards, but do this in a fun and exciting way to take your dog's mind off being scared and to think about something else. Treats are always a good way, or a favourite toy works quite well and use your voice in a high and exciting way. Once you have moved him away from the problem, give him a command (sit is the easiest), reward him with a treat and let them look at the problem if he wants to and then just walk away normally. Repeat this everyday and everyday try and get a little bit closer, even just a few inches is encouraging, so always remember to take it slowly. Eventually you will be able to pass the problem within a few feet and then gradually reduce this to a few inches until there is no problem anymore. Once you have got to this stage, give the problem a name (e.g. If it is a dustbin your dog has a problem with, tell your dog 'it's only the rubbish bin'), this will help you later on if he suddenly gets an idea to be scared of this again.

Remember that when your dog is walking past the problem (later on in the training), praise him and keep his interest so he forgets about being scared. Some dogs will work through this in a few days, some a few weeks and some will take even longer and a few will always have a little idea in their mind that this thing is scary, but keep him, happy and keep his mind occupied whenever this problem appears.

An unsocialised dog can also exhibit fear. Unsocialised dogs are usually nervous, too scared to play with other dogs, too scared to go near people or your friends and will live a life where they do not feel secure about anything

except being indoors or in familiar territory. It is important to take things slowly and gently as socialisation is one of the most important things you can do and will make a big difference to his life. If your dog is not accustomed to going out, start with places which are not too noisy or busy and let him explore at his own pace and gradually build up his confidence. Keep praising and let him know you are around.

Build up the time to conquer the fear e.g. if he is shying away, pick up your dog at various times during the day and cuddle close for a few seconds. Increase the length of the cuddle as long as he is not panicking or squirming. Once he has built up confidence, ask someone else to do the same gradually. Eventually, he will learn to trust.

Scratching

The most common cause of constant itching is pollen allergy (such as mold, dust, etc.). Realise that allergies in pets, as in people, are genetic. Your pet may experience seasonal allergies. Your dog also may have parasites, like scabies or cheyletiella, or even a skin infection. If your dog is persistently scratching, visit your vet. There are many treatments your vet can administer to ease your pet.

Unfortunately there is also the possibility that your dog may be suffering from Syringohydromyelia.

'Occipital bone hypoplasia resulting in caudal fossa overcrowding, obstruction of cerebrospinal fluid pathways and secondary syringohydromyelia (Chiari malformation) was first identified in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels in 1997. After the condition was reported it became apparent that it is very common in this breed. The classic clinical sign in the Cavalier is neck and shoulder discomfort (termed paraesthesia) which results in the dog scratching at the neck / shoulders especially when excited or on a lead. Typically this is on the side to which the problem is most severe. The condition occurs in both sexes and all coat colours. Mild cases may not require treatment or may be managed with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. A significant number of dogs have progressive signs and should be surgically managed.' - **Research by C. Rusbridge BVMS DipECVN MRCVS**

If you suspect your dog may be suffering from this, please seek advice from your vet and if your Cavalier is diagnosed with this problem, please help us with the research and contact C. Rusbridge at Stone Lion Veterinary Centre, 41 High Street, Wimbledon, London. Tel: 020 8946 4228 Email: neuro.vet@btinternet. com

Tucking tail under

There are a few reasons why your dog may keep his tail tucked between his legs, but most commonly the behaviour is a response to pain or discomfort. Your dog may be prone to back or hip pain, for example. Raising the tail can place pressure against these sore areas, so your dog keeps it tucked under.

Your dog may keep his tail tucked because of emotional distress. When dogs are depressed, frustrated, stressed, or afraid, they may tuck their tails to

demonstrate their emotions. Stressful changes in a dog's home environment could cause these emotional responses.

Talk to your vet about the change in your dog's behaviour. Your vet can check for physical problems that may be causing your dog discomfort, as well as investigating emotional and other causes.

Piddling

Lifting the leg to urinate on vertical surfaces in the house should be differentiated from housetraining problems or 'piddling' as described above. It will usually occur in un-castrated, young males who have previously been well behaved in the house but have also been observed in castrated males and in females, as well. There is a tendency for the marking to be near the entrances to the house; i.e. a message left by your dog showing possession of the house.

Close study of your dog's behaviour may reveal the stimuli triggering the urination. It may occur if a visitor arrives or when your dog is allowed in a room it does not often visit. Once used, your dog will have a tendency to be drawn back to the same spot. The behaviour can also be linked to a lack of a consistent hierarchy within your dog's household pack. Sometimes if the status of various members of the family pack is not settled, your dog will mark various objects of individuals in order to 'possess' the item and therefore gain rank.

All of this information gives clues as to how to approach the problem behaviour. You might consider having their pet assessed as to the effect of castration. Some young dogs will stop marking behaviour if castration is completed early in their life. If you are against castration, the following should be tried.

Make sure your dog has limited access to areas which he has previously marked. Clean the marked areas thoroughly with a strong odour eliminator. Ensure that you are allowing for the opportunity to toilet outside as frequently as is necessary. It is possible that you are missing the signs that your dog needs to toilet (not all dogs learn to go to the door or bark: many just pace about and look agitated). Ensure that your dog is having enough time to exercise and toilet (do not finish the exercise as soon as the dog toiles or he will learn to 'hang on'). Praise your dog lavishly every time he toiles outside and give him a command when he is actually toileting so that he associates the word, the action and the praise together. Since he will never be given that command inside he will start to learn what is required of him.

Preventing problems

Introducing children

All dog owners should remain alert to the dangers inherent in dog / children relationships and take steps to reduce the possibility of an incident occurring between their dog and a child. All children should learn to know and respect dogs and all dogs should be taught to know and respect children. Your dog should always have a safe place in which to withdraw from children. The children should be taught that it is the dog's place and he is not to be

bothered when he is there. The best system is an indoor kennel crate which can be locked if necessary. It is important for your dog to know he can get away from the children if needed.

Toys

Do not let your dog become possessive of toys. They are yours and only on loan to your dog. You can take them away at any time and you sometimes do. Toys are sometimes played with by you, and if there is too much growling or too much tugging, the item is taken away. Do not play tug of war games with your dog.

Handling

Examine your dog's mouth, teeth and paws everyday. Also put your dog occasionally on a table during the examination. This is done for only a few seconds at first, then increase the time as your dog begins to tolerate being handled. Give lots of praise and titbits for toleration. Be aware that if your dog protests being cuddled or handled it may be indicative of a problem in the status between yourself and your dog. You need to sort out that relationship before you can progress further! Teach your dog to take treats from your hand at the same time you pet it with the other hand. Teach your dog that being reached for by hands and being handled can be rewarding. It is important that your dog is used to being handled as if veterinary attention is needed on him, your vet will be able to examine and treat him more easily if he cooperates on the examining table.

A Final word

Lastly, always remember to take things slowly and never force your new friend into anything he does not want to do unless it is a life or death situation. There is always another day and always another chance to try again next time, some things will take weeks or even months to overcome or train, so please be patient.