Improving dog welfare: Helping owners decode their dogs’ behavior

Research Objectives

The Center for Canine Behavior Studies (CCBS) is a not-for-profit 501c3 company that undertakes canine behavior research to benefit both owners and their dogs.

Detail

Address
Center for Canine Behavior Studies, Inc
PO Box 984
Canaan, CT 06018
USA

Bio
The Center for Canine Behavior Science (CCBS) is a research organization that has been in operation for seven years. Its mission is to ensure a harmonious relationship between dogs and their owners. Taking a citizen science approach, CCBS conducts research through questionnaires sent to their dog-owning membership.

Funding
- The American Foundation
- CCBS membership and CCBS board members

Collaborators
- Nicholas H Dodman, Veterinary Behaviorist, Co-Founder, CEO and President
- Chris P Janelli, Co-Founder and Board Chairman
- Ian Dinwoodie MS, Informatics Expert and Statistician
- Vivian Zottola MS, Human–Animal Relationship Specialist
- Allie Tellier, Executive Director

References


Personal Response

How can owners and canine professionals get involved with CCBS’ research?

Go to the website dogstudies.org. There you will find CCBS’ home page. Scroll down that page and there is a heading ‘Join the CCBS Community.’ Click on the button that says, ‘Become a Friend’. There you will find a sign-up box that says ‘Join our Research Community’ asking for your name and email. Membership is free. That’s all it takes. We promise not to overload you with emails, but will from time to time ask you to volunteer to answer some questions via online study questionnaires. We will also end you a quarterly newsletter to inform you about our current activities, and more. You can unsubscribe at any time.
In the USA, more than three million dogs end up in shelters each year. Of these, one in five will be euthanised. Behavioral problems are the most common reason for owners surrendering their dogs to shelters. However, a better understanding of the genetic and environmental factors that can contribute to the development of these behavioral issues could help to solve this issue.

The Center for Canine Behavior Studies (CCBS) dedicates to canine behavior research. The center helps to educate owners to better understand their dogs, providing information about what is – and what is not – normal behavior, as well as the most effective ways of addressing common issues, such as aggression or separation anxiety. Nicholas Dodman, Co-Founder, CEO and President of CCBS explains, ‘CCBS strives to be the premier resource for dog owners when their dog misbehaves. We pride ourselves on educating owners to better understand and interact with man’s best friend’.

CCBS conducts its research through carefully crafted electronically distributed surveys to its ‘citizen scientists,’ dog owners and professionals. The study findings are put into practice; they are used to help owners, trainers, and veterinarians improve their understanding of canine behavior, as well as identify the strategies that best provide long-term solutions for behavioral issues. Ultimately, CCBS aims to help dog owners have a more harmonious relationship with their dogs, offering all dogs the best chance of a forever home.

**IMPORTANCE OF CANINE BEHAVIOR RESEARCH**

When owners become frustrated with unwanted behaviors in their dogs, they are more likely to surrender the animal, and, currently, a high number of dogs with behavioral issues are euthanised. Moreover, behavioral problems are a source of poor welfare in companion dogs, impacting not only the dog and owner, but also the professionals who work with dogs.

This is why, through its studies, CCBS is dedicated to finding solutions for canine behavior problems. Such solutions will reduce surrender, allowing dogs to remain in their owners’ homes as valued members of the family. The findings from CCBS surveys have established the importance of guiding the decision-making of new owners after acquiring a dog, allowing them to plan better and manage the expectations they have for their new companion. This will prevent the development of unwanted behaviors and improve the bond between human and dog.

**OWNERS’ IMPACT ON CANINE BEHAVIOR**

In surveys investigating owner personality traits and training methods in relation to canine behavior problems, the CCBS researchers found that the tendency of dogs to display behavioral problems was associated with their owners’ use of aversive or confrontational training methods; the prevalence and severity of canine behavior problems increased with these methods. Such methods were associated with aggression, anxiety, reduced ability to learn, and reduced willingness to interact with strangers.

An owner’s personality traits often influence how they interact with their dogs. Moreover, interaction style has a direct influence on a dog’s ability to learn and their likelihood of displaying undesirable behaviors. As a result, the researchers were able to confirm that the relationship between owner personality
and companion dog behavior is driven
by the style of the owners’ interactions
with their dog.

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL ADVICE
Fear- and anxiety-based behavior
problems are the most prevalent among
companion dogs, followed by aggression-
based problems. In a CCBS survey
investigating the effectiveness of various
professionals and behavior modification
programs, the majority of owners found
professional advice useful in treating their
dog’s aggression. Moreover, seeking
advice from a trainer, behavior consultant,
or veterinarian was associated with
an increased probability of improving
behavioral issues.

In just over one fifth of cases (22%), dogs
were brought to a veterinarian in relation
to their behavior issue. Of these, 15%
were found to have a relevant underlying
medical issue, the most common
being pain, seizure, thyroid problems,
or cognitive dysfunction. This finding
indicates that all dogs with behavioral
problems should have their medical
needs assessed before proceeding with
retraining techniques, as these could
prove to be a contributing factor.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION
AND TRAINING
In another study, CCBS found that
several behavior modification techniques
are beneficial for treating fear and
aggression. These include improved
communication between dog and owner,
habituation, frequent short training
sessions, and participation in dog sports.
Positive reinforcement was associated
with a reduced likelihood of aggressive
behavior and owners who employed
best training practices for managing
behavior were able to establish more
positive relationships with their dog. In
contrast, using punishment in response to
undesirable behaviors, while sometimes
ceasing the behavior in that moment, is
not an effective long-term solution and
can actually worsen fear and aggression.
It is important to note that an estimated
51 percent of all dog bites resulting from
canine aggressiveness are to children
who are often at face level with the dog.
This potentially preventable situation can
be life-altering for the child and the dog,
making proper management and control
of dogs and children equally important.

Puppy training and socialization is
effective in reducing behavioral problems
later in life. It also provides early
exposure to environmental stimuli and
various cues, making it less likely that
the puppy will develop a fear of these
stimuli, thus improving future learning
and behavioral outcomes. In a study
investigating the impact of preadolescent
training, the CCBS researchers found
that employing puppy training in the
first six months is associated with a lower
likelihood of dogs displaying aggression,
compulsive behavior, excessive barking,
or destructive behavior as adults.
Moreover, puppy training classes with a
qualified professional identify problematic
behaviors while the dog is still young,
allowing early intervention.

Based on owners’ survey responses,
the older a dog was, the less likely
they were to have previously attended
puppy training sessions. This indicates a
growing awareness regarding the benefits
of puppy training and an increasing
availability of classes.

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CCBS conducts its research through
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owners and professionals.
Center for Canine Behavior Studies

Research - Education - Support for dogs and those who love them.

Please give today to the Center for Canine Behavior Studies

www.centerforcaninebehaviorstudies.org/donate

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Partnership enquiries: simon@researchoutreach.org