



# ANIMAL COMMUNICATION INTERMEDIATE COURSE

## Part 2.3

Working with specific behavioral challenges

Behavioral issues:

So a behavioral challenge is essentially a behavior that the animal does that is causing harm to themselves, others, or their surroundings, or just a behavior that is deeply annoying to those around them. Animal communication can absolutely be helpful in a situation like this. Sometimes an animal will change a behavior just from a conversation about it. Most often however, in addition to the animal communication, there will be a need for training or behavior modification, or changing the environment to set the animal up for success.

This is why, even if we are not dog trainers or animal behaviorists, it's really helpful for us to read up on these topics, so that we have some tools and resources that we can direct people to, if we feel like these things might be helpful in that particular situation. You can even feel into intuitively whether a certain method of training might be helpful or not, for that particular situation and animal. You can run it by the animal and see if they'd be open to it.

It can be helpful to read books on animal behaviors by animal behaviorists, because you get a great sense of what tools they might use to navigate those situations. It also adds references to your mental box so that information from the animal can come through more clearly and accurately as well. If they want to talk about a specific type of training they've been doing, if you've heard of that type of training before, then it's going to be easier for you to recognize the energy of it in the session.



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One great book I always recommend for cat behavior is “Starting from Scratch” by Pam Johnson-Bennett. I have some training resources from various dog trainers I like. You might look into various videos and documentaries about certain animal types and their behaviors. You might get a sense from your own sessions which behavioral issues tend to come up a lot, and then you can have some resources on hand that you like that you can direct the client to for those particular behaviors.

With animal communication, it's always helpful to first invite the animal to share more about why they do the behavior in the first place. There could be many a reason for why they do something.

- Sometimes they just think they're supposed to do it, that it's helpful, or wanted. They may have been trained to do the behavior (unwittingly, by their human), or they're confused about what behavior is actually desired.
- It might be anxiety/fear based. It could be related to a general anxiety, or it might stem from a past trauma/event.
- Sometimes a behavioral challenge is actually health related, which is important to keep in mind. With any new behaviors, it's always a good idea for the human to bring their animal to get checked out by a vet, just in case.
- Some behaviors are highly instinctual, and it's not an active choice on the part of the animal, it is more like a compulsion.
- Sometimes there is no rhyme or reason, they just want to do it or they don't see why they shouldn't do it. They are feeling a reward from doing the behavior and they don't have a suitable incentive yet to change their behavior, or they don't see any other behavior that they could do that would fulfill their need yet.



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Once you get a sense of why the animal does the behavior and what their perspective is on the situation, that can then inform how you navigate through it and help them shift their behavior if that's at all a possibility. The steps of working through a behavioral challenge with animal communication would be the following:

- Reason – Why does the animal do this, and what needs are they trying to meet. Explaining this to the human, to foster understanding between them, and to help them see that the animal isn't doing the behavior just to be a pain in the butt. They're usually just trying to fulfill a certain need.
- Explaining – Explaining to the animal why the current behavior is destructive or unwanted, and explaining to them what behavior their humans would love instead.
- Training – What extra tools and training might be helpful in reaching the behavior we want? What incentives would the animal be open to, and what training techniques would work well with their personality and needs? You can feel intuitively into which techniques or extra tools and enrichment techniques might be suitable for that particular situation and animal. You can ask the animal if they'd be open to it.
- Compromising – What might the human have to do to help their animal through it. What behaviors does the human need to change in themselves, or what things in the environment could they change, to support their animal? Sometimes the animal can't help their behavior in their current circumstances, but there could be many ways in which the human can support their animal into a new behavior.
- Reframing – Shifting the animal's perspective on the trigger/issue, phrasing it in a way that appeals to their personality/needs. Showing them how the new behavior you're hoping for benefits them in the long run.
- Ideal situation – Making clear what the goal is and what that looks like.
- Coaching the client in how they can make sure they're communicating as clearly as possible with their animals.



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On that last point, if the animal's human is sending the animal mixed signals all the time, that could potentially undo everything. So I typically will share with the client that when they're talking out loud to their animal, they're automatically sending the gist of what they're trying to communicate, and the animal is often picking up on a lot of it. But we'll send mixed signals. For example, if we say don't bark, we're sending them an image of them barking, and they're getting mixed signals. In a similar way, if I say don't think of an elephant, you're going to think of an elephant. So I share with the client that in order for them to have the most clear communication possible about behavioral issues, it's important to focus on the thing they want their animal to focus on or do. So instead of saying "don't bark when someone comes in", we would say "Calm and quiet greetings please. Or remind them how much humans love to see excited body language as a greeting, but we want to protect our ears, so wonderful if the animal can greet people quietly, using tail wagging, etc.". Or if you want them to stop jumping on people, you would encourage them to keep all paws on the floor when greeting people.

Not everyone is aware of their own communication with their animals, and it's helpful to bring their awareness to it, so they can even give their own animals reminders in a way that is effective, and not counter-productive.



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Creating a harmonious multi-animal home:

With any home that has multiple animals, there's always a risk of fighting between the animals or general discontent between them, due to clashing personalities and needs.

As always, we want to make sure we get a clear sense of how the animals feel about each other, and why they are behaving the way they are. Did something happen between the animals that caused a rift? Did they never really get a chance to bond? The animal that tends to start trouble might naturally have a very dominant personality, or there might be multiple animals who are naturally very dominant and want to be at the top of the hierarchy. It could just be a clashing of personalities. Some might feel safer as the head, because of their past: Maybe they were picked on by others, so now they try to assert themselves aggressively in the hierarchy as a way to feel safe. Some animals might have such intense anxiety that they redirect that to the animals around them. Remember that health issues can always be at the root of behaviors like this, too, so it's important to make sure the animals get checked out by a vet if these kinds of struggles are happening.

Once we understand each animal's way of thinking, their reasoning and perspective on the situation, we can be much better informed about how to talk them through the situation. When we find what needs they are trying to fulfill with this behavior, we can see how those needs can be fulfilled in a different way. If they are asserting themselves aggressively because this is the only way they know how to feel in control and safe in the situation, then we want to work on their feelings of safety in the home in addition to seeing what changes we can make in their environment to foster that feeling of safety. We can also use this opportunity to talk them through their anxieties about control.



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If the animal is very focused on wanting more space or if they've been very territorial, I might find different ways to make sure they at least feel that that they have more space. That might mean they get more time outdoors, or maybe there's a way to build more space vertically in the home, such as adding more cat trees for cats. If they're territorial, I would find ways to allow them to mark their space in an appropriate way, such as with scratching posts, or I might encourage them to rub against objects to mark their space.

As you continue to communicate with the animal, you'll move on to the explanation for why a different situation is needed. This is a good opportunity to reframe the new situation for the animal. I often choose to share a desire for every member of the family to feel safe and comfortable in the home, including them. I explain that that means the animals of the home, as well as the humans, will need to work together to create that harmony, which will mean being more generous and kind to one another. I might talk the animal through a more harmonious idea of the hierarchy in the home, perhaps introducing the concept of a horizontal hierarchy where everyone gets to feel confident and have their needs met. In this situation, everyone can feel safe and comfortable. More dominant animals can be on top of the hierarchy without constantly needing to assert themselves. In this case, it's possible for them to shift into calm confidence instead of anxious control.

If their lashing out comes from a place of wanting to control others, I might help the animal see how futile that effort is, how everyone and everything around them is likely going to change and shift throughout their lives, and how ultimately we can only control ourselves and work on going with the flow. I might investigate what could help them get to that point of going with the flow. Do they need more exercise and play? What things can their human do to help?



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When reframing the situation for the animal, it's really helpful to encourage them to see the bigger benefit of having the other animal companions around. I emphasize that they are potential friends and allies, potential playmates or snuggle companions. I remind the animal that even if they're not interested in having friends right now, the other animals in their home can still offer great emotional support when the humans go out for the day or leave for a vacation. If the animal is still not able to get to the point of seeing the positive possibilities, that is totally fine. If that happens, I might encourage them to just ignore each other and give each other more space for the moment.

If jealousy is at the root of their issues, and the animals are having a hard time sharing their humans, it's important to talk to the animal about how their humans have more than enough love for everyone, and in fact it can increase with the presence of other animals. Their humans' feelings of love and joy increase from seeing them all get along and bonding. The animal can even be helpful to their humans if they work on being generous and welcoming with the other animals in the home. I would also make sure the animal knows how much their humans appreciate them working toward this goal, and how the harmony created by this process can also help the animal feel more at peace, safe, and happy in the long run. It can be very helpful to show the animal the bigger, long-term benefit to themselves that short-term harmony can eventually generate.

Animal communication used for behavioral challenges is often about compromising: What changes does the human need to make? Remember: It's not just about making the animals change. Often, we have to help our animals by changing things in the environment, including our own behaviors and habits.

What could be helpful tools to make everyone happy? Would more interactive play as a group be helpful, to help the animals create positive associations with each other? What about treat parties? Weekly catnip parties for the cats?



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Training might be a good idea in a situation where animals aren't getting along, especially if it helps them work on their sense of boundaries and impulse control. Let's take the example of a dog who chases and barks at the other animals in their house in a way that isn't appreciated by the others. I would encourage the dog's human to work with a trainer and practice some safe-space training or boundary training. This is where you learn to call the dog over to their safe space (for example, their bed or mat), and have them stay there until they've been given the release word and are allowed to leave. Training like this could help the dog build self-control, which helps them learn to rein themselves in. It also encourages them to relax, even if they've been activated by a trigger, like another animal running by. If another animal in the home is being threatened by the one you're communicating with, you can also encourage that animal to give lots of space to the other one, so that everyone feels safe.

If there's a younger animal that keeps trying to engage an older animal in play, and the older one is just annoyed and therefore lashes out at the younger one: You would encourage the younger one towards more respectful ways of inviting the older one to play, or you might encourage him to find toys or other activities to do, that will give more space to the older one. You would also encourage the younger one to observe the older one more, to get a sense of if they're open to play or not right then.

As always, you want to make sure the animals know what the long-term goal is: a home where everyone feels completely safe and confident, where they can lean on each other emotionally, and where they can see each other as friends and companions, playmates, and snuggle partners. You might even visualize what that could look like so you can be crystal clear with your communication. Would you like everyone to be able to lie on the same couch and share their space fully? Maybe you see them sharing the same bed together. In your vision, perhaps they are engaging in play together. Let your mind visualize the possibilities, and remember to let the animal know how grateful their humans are for the efforts they make toward that goal.

And as mentioned, you would want to coach the client in their own communication with their animals, so that they are not confusing their animals.



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## Barking/Excessive vocalizing

Excessive vocalizing/whining tends to be a big issue for some.

Barking is a natural instinct and behavior. Some animals tend to be more vocal in general. Some do it as their way of vocally “talking” to their humans. Some animals are vocalizing more as a result of old age/dementia or confusion. Or as a result of increased pain. Some do it as a way of expressing anxiety.

So as usual, you want to invite the animal to share why they do it, what their perspective is on it. Is there a need they are expressing, in which case, can their human do something to meet that need?

You also want to share with the animal what behavior you’re hoping for instead, and why. You might explain to them that a lot of barking or a lot of vocalization often puts humans on edge, and this is why we’re hoping for them to move towards quieter ways of expressing themselves.

This is a behavior that often the human has accidentally trained their animal to do, for example, a cat who meows incessantly until they’re fed, and then their humans feed the cat mid-meow, the cat then associates the food as a result of meowing a lot. So that can be something to think about. Maybe asking the cat to do a sit first before you give the food, and so she associates the food with sitting instead of the meowing. Also noticing if the cat is an excessive meower, does the human talk back out loud to the cat, that’s likely just encouraging the cat to meow more because they’re getting a reaction. It might be helpful if the human thinks their thoughts to the cat instead (for example reminding the cat how much longer until dinner time, or encouraging them to settle down, or encouraging them to find a toy instead), to avoid accidentally encouraging the cat to meow more.



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Some dogs need clear bark/shush training to really help clarify what we're actually looking for. It's confusing sometimes for them what to do instead, and so doing some training with them can be hugely helpful for giving that clarity. It also helps so that the humans have a clear cue to give, that isn't just yelling at the dog to be quiet (because yelling can often feel like you're joining in on the barking, and can have unintended results).

Ian Dunbar is a trainer I like who has a lot of great free resources online. There's a bunch of others out there as well. I have a stash of different training resources I can send to people after a session for some of the most common issues with dogs, for bark/shush training, for dog-dog reactivity when on walks, for helping them develop boundaries, Recall training, if I feel like training is helpful.

[Separation anxiety – Peeing, wrecking furniture, howling/crying etc](#)

There's a spectrum of this. It's not always going to be full anxiety. Sometimes, it's just loneliness. Sometimes it's severe physiological anxiety that gets triggered. Some have a hard time being in a different room than their humans.

For some, the sense of being in a pack or herd is very strong, and they feel unsafe when the pack isn't there around them all the time. So in this case you want to explain to the animal that in our society there's going to be situations in which the human has to go places without the animal with them. Despite that, they are still all part of the pack/herd, that the pack will separate but always comes back together. Anytime the human goes out, they always come back. I use the rubber-band metaphor with dogs sometimes. I show them how the modern pack is very flexible in our society, and that sometimes the pack expands out to where the different people and animals in the pack are in different places but they're still connected, and they always come back together, like a rubber band.



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I also like to explain to the animal how the howling/barking doesn't actually help, in that their humans aren't usually able to hear them, and also it just making the animal more exhausted.

You would want to perhaps work on shifting their perspective on this as being their downtime, that their job is just to relax and take care of the home. To rest and take care of themselves so that they have energy to have fun when their humans do come home. How grateful their human would be if they made an effort towards self-soothing. How helpful that is to the humans for them to know that their animal companion is home relaxing and safe. You can encourage them towards certain activities, such as chewing on chew toys, or taking a nap in a special spot, etc.

Animal companion to help make the dog feel less alone?

Does the dog feel like distraction is a good way for them to not get too anxious? Would they need something like a kong filled with food or something to work on while their humans are away, so they have something positive to focus on?

Do they need extra support with medications/supplements/homeopathic/flower essences/reiki etc.

Most often some animals need some support with training, in which case, what type of training would the animal be open to? What would be a good fit for their personality? Are they treat motivated? Are they toy/play motivated?

Crate training is often recommended. Would that be something the animal thinks is helpful? For some it would cause much worse anxiety if their biggest fear is being enclosed in tiny spaces, etc. For some it's super helpful to remove temptation of going after furniture etc etc.



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Would training with treats be something the dog is open to? Something like slow baby steps of the human asking the dog to sit in their spot, and the human gradually just grabbing their keys, then putting them down and tossing a treat to the dog. Then going out just opening the door without going out, then immediately closing it and tossing a treat to them. And then going out one step, and immediately coming back, give a treat. Then going out and closing the door one second, then coming back, toss a treat etc etc etc. building up to gradually being out longer. Would it be helpful using treats as a way to help them shift into the perspective that their humans leaving is a positive thing, and they can rely on their humans always coming back.

And then of course making sure you address any specific worries that the animal has, and seeing how you can help them through that. Is a fear of abandonment? Making sure the animal knows that their human is committed to them for the rest of their life and will always be back.

You can coach the human through good ideas for their own communication with their animal. Maybe the animal finds it helpful if their person tells them where they're going and how long until they'll be back (they get the gist of it if their told the length of time the human will be gone).

## Anxiety in general:

Sound anxiety

Inanimate object anxiety

Person anxiety

Anxiety about other animals



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Anxiety in an animal can come in so many different shapes and varieties, for so many different reasons. With an animal who is generally anxious, they tend to be on high alert for any threats in their environment. When I connect to an animal like this, it often feels like they are very sensitive to stimuli in their environment, and they have a hard time gauging what is actually dangerous and what isn't. For example, they might be worried about any and all sounds, especially if they can't see what caused them. They might jump any time your neighbor down the street slams their car door. They might be worried about inanimate objects. An unexpected slipper lying in a new spot might make them jump, or they might be too scared to walk by the trash can. They might be worried about certain people, or all people. They might be worried about certain animals, or all other animals.

Using animal communication can be helpful to identify what, specifically, the animal is anxious about: if it's just certain things that spark the anxiety, or if it's more of a generalized anxiety, and why they have that anxiety. What about the triggers feel scary to them? Did the anxiety come from traumatic events in their past? Or is it more of an issue of an overactive nervous system?

Does the animal need extra support with medications or supplements that target their anxiety? Would alternative therapies help support the animal's nervous system, such as acupuncture or massage therapy? Would training be helpful in this situation? I believe training is helpful in most situations involving anxiety, to help the animal potentially associate those triggers with positive things, such as treats or play. Training also helps give the animal a game plan for what to do or focus on when they see their trigger.

Using animal communication, we want to make sure we explain and reframe for the animal how their triggers are actually benign. We should also explain to the animal why they are safe in those triggering situations.



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For example, there are many animals that are skittish of sudden sounds. Some animals are wired to be much more sensitive to environmental stimuli, and so their brains are on constant alert for anything that happens in their environment, and they might worry that anything and everything they hear is a potential threat. So, you would naturally want to explain to the animal what those sounds actually are, where they come from, and how benign those sounds really are. You might explain to them how we actually really like having those sounds around us, because it tells us life is continuing on around us, that the neighbors are doing their thing. You might explain to them that the goal is where the animal feels fully safe and relaxed in their home, no matter what sounds are happening around them. You might encourage them to find something else to do any time they start to worry about sounds, for example if they feel anxious they can go find a chew toy to work on, or something else that can help them self-sooth.

It might also help explaining to them that they can safely expect these big sounds or changes to happen in our environment every day, and that they're always going to be completely benign. It's safe for them to relax through those sounds, and it's safe for them to file those sounds as background noise.

And with any environmental stimuli anxiety, that's essentially the same technique I would use. Getting a sense of why they are anxious about it, how do they view it, seeing what things they feel like would be helpful, what their humans can do to support them, and then talking the animal through the triggers, and helping to reframe those triggers.

If it's an anxiety about strangers, you might want to show the animal that their humans have safety under control, and will avoid anyone they know who is bad. You also want to explain to the animal that, perhaps despite their past experiences with strangers, most strangers are going to love animals, and would love to snuggle or play with them. So you would want to start reframing the idea of strangers as potential friends. And then of course their human might have to work towards really demonstrating that they assume most strangers are potential friends as well.



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It can be key to help the human become aware of their own tendencies towards anxiety and how that could potentially be making the animal's anxiety worse. Sometimes it's a cycle of the animal become anxious about something, then their human starts to become anxious about the same thing because they know how it affects their animal, and then that contributes even more to the animal's anxiety because they can now also feel their human's anxiety which makes them worry more. So coaching the human through how they can master their own anxiety in those cases, so that they are supporting their animal, rather than making it worse without realizing it.

## Nighttime wakeups

I've had a lot of clients schedule sessions with me solely based on their need to find a solution to their animal companion waking them up in the middle of the night.

There could be many reasons an animal is causing sleep disturbances. First, we have to remember that many animals have instincts that kick them into gear at dawn and dusk (some cats, for example). Additionally, many animals have learned to nap more during the day while their humans are busy with other things, which can then lead them to have a spike in energy around bedtime, and they take their boredom out on you. Nighttime disturbances may also be due to health issues, so, again, it is important to make sure the animal has seen a veterinarian. Additionally, older age can be a contributing factor to nighttime anxiety or confusion.

First up, when connecting to the animal, try to get a sense of why the animal is waking their humans up. Based on the animal's reasoning, see what compromises the humans could make in this situation, and what tools you could implement to alleviate the situation. If the animal has napped a lot during the day, their humans might need to help them adjust their schedule by being more active with them during the day or early evening before bedtime, to help them settle in for the night. If it's a cat who sleeps almost twenty hours a day anyway, then you might need to adjust their play and feeding schedule so that they play and eat closer to bedtime to help them sleep through the night.



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After making note of what compromises and tools may be helpful for the situation, you should take a moment to clarify and explain to the animal what the humans are hoping for and why. I think it can help to explain to an animal that humans have sleep needs that are very different from theirs. They might be shocked to learn that humans need one longer, uninterrupted period of sleep each night to be happy and healthy. You can let the animal know that they can be most helpful to their humans if they stay calm or quiet during that time. Perhaps they are welcome to sleep with their humans or spend time in the same room if they can stay calm and quiet.

If they just naturally get a boost of energy at night, you can encourage them to go find other quiet activities, such as quiet toys to play with in a separate room, that won't be disturbing to the humans. In this situation, they might appreciate you keeping the window blinds on one window open for them to look out of at night.

If the animal is simply bored, impatient to be fed, or something else that isn't urgent, then we can ask the animal to please let their humans sleep until the humans decide it's time to get up. Most animals like to know when to expect that and like it to stay the same time every day.

Do animals understand time? I think it varies from animal to animal. Most seem to have a different sense of time than we do. Generally, in my experience they can understand concepts such as a period of daytime or nighttime. When you are trying to communicate something that might not be fully translatable (because animals don't live their lives by watches and clocks), they still can understand the gist of what you're saying, because the information is being translated for them in a way they can grasp. That's the benefit of communication that isn't limited by human language. So, for example, when you are telling your animal companion that you will be going to work and will be back in four hours, you aren't literally telling them "I'll be back in four hours"—you are sending them a feeling of how long that is. It's not short, like five minutes or even an hour, and it's not super long, like eight hours. Each amount of time you're trying to communicate comes with a feeling of its own that the animal can understand the gist of. I do think some animals have an excellent internal clock, even if they can't tell you exactly what time it is on the clock. Some certainly thrive on having a strict schedule, and will let you know when you're late to do something.



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When communicating with an animal about wake-up times, I am sending them the concept of 6 a.m., and they are getting the gist of that concept as “early morning once it’s started to get light outside.” I also like to simply ask an animal to wait until their humans have shown signs of waking themselves up before they engage with them as they normally would. That way they have specific signs to look for that tell them it’s okay to get the day started.

The reframing in this situation would be focused on showing the animal how much their efforts to stay calm and quiet at night really help their humans be much happier during the day. It also reminds the animal that if their human is able to rest all night, they’ll have more energy to do other fun activities later. In addition, you should make sure to send the animal a vision of the ideal solution to this issue, where everyone is getting their needs met. Communicate a future in which the animal is calm, quiet, and relaxed throughout the night and morning, and if they are bored at night, that they go occupy themselves in a different room with quiet activities.

If an animal just has a case of restlessness, or just hasn’t considered that humans need a different sleep schedule than they do, I have found most animals very amenable to suggestions about trying to let their humans sleep.

Overall, working with behavioral challenges is a mix of inviting the animal to share their perspective on it, creating understanding between them and their human, some creative problem solving on our part including training resources and other tools, and some reframing for the animal.