

British College of Canine Studies

I am pleased to say I've completed the behavioural program which I have been enrolled in for the past 16 months. My goal was not only to graduate however to do so with distinction! The materials certainly allowed me to improve the quality of service I can provide to puppies, dogs, families and all of you, of course. I will continue to work and learn, keeping an open mind and heart as we move forward with our mutual goals to make the world a better place for humans and dogs!

Happy Puppy Assessments

We are now prepared to release information to all of you about the temperament testing and our Happy Puppy Assessments. The journey has been incredible! We started with the goal to assist breeders with their placements through the development of a sounder, fairer format than those we commonly see in the industry, however over time, have discovered that we can offer all of you so much more than we originally anticipated. Temperament assessments for breeders who are raising puppies to be family pets helps with suitable placements. Our format provides that and more than you can imagine so hold on to your hats everyone! We have some exciting information for all of you.

One of the most popular temperament assessment formats found in the industry has been so overused and publicly displayed that things have gotten out of control with people implementing the techniques without having a sound understanding of dogs first. From the outside, it looks as though we can merely follow a list of exercises, ensure we implement them for the correct duration and then slot the results we see into pre-defined categories. Dogs are so much more complex than that. You all know that and so do we. As a result, there is a great deal to consider when conducting assessments and how the assessor proceeds is truly based on how the puppy is doing. Overwhelming a puppy and trying to control his movements as soon as puppy enters the room is a mistake. If we want to learn about how the puppy behaves in a new environment with new stimuli and new people, isn't it our job to observe? Also, closely monitoring the energy and mood of the puppy is important because we don't want to create negative emotions throughout the assessment which will have lasting effects. Remember, assessment are often done at 7 weeks of age which is during the critical social stage of development. Experiencing a very strong, negative memory emotion as a result of a perceived threat, for example, creates strong memory links.

If I were a breeder, I would never allow any of my puppies to be subjected to such treatment for assessment purposes. You are our clients and you matter to both of us. You have had a chance to get to know me and what I bring to the industry through my behavioural knowledge. You know that I keep an open mind until I've had a chance to thoroughly analyse things from each and every angle before reaching a formal conclusion. I ask that you trust me enough to follow us to the end of this series over the next few weeks before rendering your full opinion. The validity of assessments will be weighed, the importance of following a sound assessment format will be

measured and just as importantly the need to ensure the assessor is qualified to conduct the assessment and render valid results from his or her observations will be reviewed.

We'll be releasing written materials to all of you as well as links to videos as we proceed throughout this segment, starting with the following:

A few random videos posted on YouTube for you to consider:

Video 1

In the first video, there are many things that I could flag, however, what I am focusing on here is the effect the assessment has on the puppy starting at 8:05 into the assessment where the alpha roll over is used to establish his level of dominance and forgiveness.

This technique is commonly used to determine dominance and forgiveness in a puppy however from one who has studied dogs to the extent that I have, this is a technique which should not be used by assessors during assessments.

1 - There are gentler ways to determine the forgiveness and rank of a puppy throughout an assessment.

2 – The Alpha Roll Over is used by dogs as a form of punishment. It is the last warning before the dog receive a bite. When a dog has done something wrong and when he has ignored the indicators that he has done something wrong (body language signals, sounds, energy from other dog), he may find himself the recipient of an Alpha Roll Over. The offending party will, most often, give in and will then be immediately released, having learned a lesson. The quantity and quality of such reprimands vary and that's an entirely different discussion. For this purpose, I'd like us to consider the following.

*In the puppy's mind, assessors that implement this are punishing a puppy for having done nothing wrong. How do you think that puppy will feel about new people in new settings in the future?

*The creating of strong memory links are a result of having experienced something which created a very strong positive or negative emotion so depending on how long the exercise lasts, and depending on the energy and so on, this exercise will have lasting effect. How damaged will the puppy be, only time will tell.

*What you'll see here in the video is a very strong negative emotion in puppy as a result of having done nothing wrong and terrible associations thereafter. Puppies start to develop their aggressive inhibiting signals at 3 weeks of age (body language signals) and they continue to develop and fine tune them for years. This assessment really messes puppies up because:

- In the video, you'll see that initially the puppy didn't struggle and was quiet. If he did this to a dog that was punishing him the dog would have let go and the whole thing would have been over in seconds.
- You'll notice here that the individual holding the puppy held her there for an entire 85 seconds! Almost one minute and a half while the puppy cried and struggled to be let up.
- So puppy's attempts at being quiet and still in order to be released didn't work, therefore she escalated to moving.
- Her attempts at struggling didn't work so she escalated to vocalizing.

- Her attempts at vocalizing didn't work so she gave it all she had.

Perhaps the assessors feel they learnt more about her from this experience however I ask, what did the puppy learn during this experience? As one who has studied behaviour, I could tell you that it's not good. In the puppy's mind, she was being punished for no apparent reason. This puppy stated to learn aggressive inhibiting signals at 3 weeks of age and will continue to develop those signals for years to come. Having experienced this Alpha Role Over for no reason and having had no luck communicating with her aggressive inhibiting signals will have a lasting effect on puppy. Also, she was clearly very upset with no reprieve.... Strong negative memory link.

If one is going to assess dominance and forgiveness, there are gentler ways to achieve this without risking the creation of strong negative memory links and without punishing the puppy for having done nothing wrong.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyXUrWwjgdk>

Video 2

So this lady starts to engage the puppy as soon as he is left in this environment and 11 seconds into the assessment puppy is subjected to the Alpha Roll Over. What the heck is the rush here! Puppy hasn't even got his bearings yet and up to now the assessor is controlling the outcome of the assessment by overpowering the puppy verbally and physically. If we're assessing the temperament of the puppy in this new environment with new stimuli and new people, shouldn't we sit quietly and observe instead of overpowering him in every sense while he is trying to get his bearings?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XRWzoGfFEU>

Video 3

We spend a great deal of time trying to teach puppies and dogs that the way they play with children and people differ from the way they play with other dogs. The assessor here antagonizes the puppy in a way that not only gives the wrong signals on how to play with children, teens and adults, he actually triggers him to become quite reactive and vicious sounding. Considering the majority of our puppies are bred to be domestic dogs, I don't know of many mothers who would be comforted by a puppy that played with a child in such a manner.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRDdw7-l8Us>

So, having trust in the format and faith in your assessor is incredibly important as you have just seen!

Now, please take a moment to watch the 1st video on the benefits breeders have seen from our assessment format.

1. We are assisting breeders with proper placements of their puppies.
2. We are educating owner about their individual puppies which will allow them to best address their needs especially during the socializing stage of development to 16 weeks of age. Visuals of reactions and techniques for empowerment are given to each and every owner by the breeders and puppies certainly do not pass or fail our format, we simply get a better glimpse into who they are once removed from familiarity (siblings, mother, environment and humans).
3. Our breeder clients obtain a separate video with verbal assessment for each puppy allowing them to review, analyse and compare. What's particularly interesting is after several litters, the breeder can compare the genetic variance affecting temperament from different sires and dams! This will assist in future selections of sires and dams when considering behaviour as well as addressing specific needs of those future litters.
4. We assist breeders in identifying certain needs which may have to be addressed before puppies leave the litters. An example is if the puppy has poor bite inhibition at 7 weeks of age, that puppy could spend more one-on-one time with Mom before he / she leaves for his / her new home. This will give Mom the opportunity to teach better bite inhibition. Another example is if we see a puppy that is very sound sensitive, exercises can be done with puppy before he leaves for his new home, improving on desensitizing!
5. We are pleased to say that for the most part, we are seeing a narrowed range for puppies within a litter on a behavioural scale! So, for example, on a scale of 1 to 10 with one being a puppy that shuts down completely and 10 being an out-of-control puppy that has no inhibitions, with our responsible breeders we are mostly seeing a 5 point variance (from a 3 to a 7 range). This is great and an absolute huge testament to the dogs you are bringing into this world! We do still, however see extreme unexpected responses to stimuli from one or two puppies out of some litters for not apparent reason and it's so wonderful to find these when they are present as together we can find a way to address these issues, while the brain is still malleable, rendering the best results of helping to desensitize them.