

Tellington TTouch helps with animal behaviour

By Barbara Janelle

TELLINGTON TTOUCH offers effective ways of dealing with a wide range of canine behaviour, performance and health problems. It uses understanding rather than dominance to develop cooperation, trust and harmony between humans and animals. Each dog is respected as an individual and ways are chosen to support that animal's learning process.

Linda Tellington-Jones, a native of Edmonton, Alberta now living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, developed this work for horses in the early 1970s. Classical training procedures combined with ideas from Feldenkrais Body Awareness Work for humans and a remarkable kind of touch work changed the way horses are trained in North America and Europe.

The name for this approach is TTEAM – Tellington-Jones Equine Awareness Method. In the mid-80s, Linda started to use the TTouch and TTEAM Ground Exercises with dogs and other animals with remarkable success. For the past 10 years Tellington TTouch has been used effectively to improve behaviour and health in a vast array of animals, from domestic pets to animals in zoos and wildlife rehabilitation centres around the world.

Tellington Touch, done by moving the skin in small, clockwise circles, brings

awareness to the body-mind, releases tension, and helps the animal learn through clear, non-threatening ways.

Tellington TTouch Ground Exercises improve behaviour, performance and help to address some health issues. Awareness, confidence and trust increase in both human and animal with this work.

Common behaviour problems such as shyness, fear of biting, fear of loud noises, and aggression are responses to fear. Dogs react instinctively to fear – fleeing, freezing or becoming aggressive. Tension locked in the body makes the animal more reactive and less able to cope with unusual situations. Working on the body to release tension and bring awareness is often the first step to changing behaviour.

FEAR, TENSION IN BODY

A fearful dog holds tension in its mouth, hindquarters, tail and legs. The mouth is closed, tight, and dry. Breathing tends to be shallow and the eyes do not blink regularly. The tail is stiff, and, in dogs with a strong flight responses, it is often tucked between the hind legs. The hindquarters are tight and sometimes reactive to touch. The legs and feet are rigid and frequently cold because the tension in the body restricts blood circulation.

Tellington TTouch circles relax the animal, promote better breathing and blood circulation. Through this non-invasive, supporting TTouch, the animal's confidence grows and its body awareness increases. The eyes soften and the animal takes in information rather



Barbara Janelle performs the Tellington TTouch technique on her six-year-old cat, Magic Bailey.

than reacting to difficult situations. Combined with ground exercises, which help the body to move more fluidly, even the most fearful of dogs quickly develop more confidence and enjoyment in life.

In cases where there is fear of a specific thing, such as of men, hats, baby carriages, etc., the concept of "chunking down" is used. A step-by-step process of reintroducing the animal to the frightening situation is used. Tellington TTouch helps show dogs learn to accept the presence and touch of judges. The TTouch helps owners identify physical problems sooner in their dogs, and makes veterinary examinations much easier. Nail clipping is not a problem after a few sessions of TTouch on legs and feet.

FEAR OF LOUD NOISES

For dogs who are afraid of thunder, working on the body during a period of good weather and then working the ears through one or two thunderstorms ends the fear reaction to that noise permanently. This same approach has been used successfully with gunshot shyness as well.

TTouch work on the ears quickly settles excited dogs, too. It is being used by more and more trainers in puppy and adult dog classes. Five minutes of ear

work before class begins results in animals who are quieter and more focused, and who learn more and faster. Even older excitable dogs will settle with just a few minutes of ear work.

AGGRESSION

Aggression is an instinctive response to fear, too. Tension in the body makes it much more likely that a dog will react rather than breathe and cope. If the dog is aggressive toward humans, Tellington TTouch (sometimes done initially with a muzzle on for safety) can provide a major breakthrough in trust between animal and human.

The ground exercises help the dog to breathe while focusing on tasks and movement. The use of non-habitual ways of moving (picking a way through ground obstacles which augments eye-ear-foot coordination) and being led (sometimes on two leashes by two people, one on each side) requires the animal to focus, think and adapt.

BUILDS CONFIDENCE

Doing TTouch and ground exercises with a dog who is aggressive to other animals builds confidence and camaraderie when done with a group of dogs and humans. Dramatic behavioural changes occur in very short periods of time.

Sometimes aggression is a response to pain, so one of the first questions to ask about a dog that shows aggression is, "Is the animal in pain?" Tellington TTouch can help relieve pain and lead to greatly improved behaviour. Tellington TTouch does not replace veterinary evaluation and treatment but it does offer owners safe and supporting ways to complement veterinary procedures.

Many owners and veterinary assistants have found that working a dog's ears for ten minutes before surgery and as the animal comes out of anaesthetic speeds recovery significantly. Rubbing the points at the tips of the ears will bring a dog out of shock very quickly. Working the ears is also helpful for dogs who suffer with car sickness, too.

BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Perhaps the most wonderful effect of the Tellington TTouch is the deepening in the relationship between dog and owner. The TTouch is a wonderful way to return some of the love that the animal gives. Owners who previously saw their dogs as "problems," report again and again that they understand their animals in very different ways now. They are so pleased to be able to help their dogs understand, learn and grow into wonderful friends. The sense of accomplishment, trust and love that replaces fear and doubt is profound as both animal and human grow in awareness and confidence.

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