

IS THERE A GREEN-EYED MONSTER IN YOUR PACK?

Jeal-ous *adj* **1a:** intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness **b:** apprehensive of the loss of another's exclusive devotion **2:** vigilant in guarding a possession

Tucker, our Cattle Dog mix, loves to play active, noisy games with my husband, Paul. Unfortunately, Katie, our Australian Kelpie, doesn't approve, and if Paul and Tucker try to engage in a rousing game of Growly Butt-Scratch or an energetic bout of Tug-'O-War, Katie charges into the den and effectively breaks up the game by making ugly faces at Tucker and biting his heels. Once Tucker is squelched, Katie runs to Paul, ears back, eyes squinting adorably, and demands attention for herself with a burst of irrepressible Kelpie energy. (I like to fondly describe Kelpies as Border Collies on uppers.)

You may have a dog at home who uses other methods, perhaps less aggressive, perhaps more, to come between you and another dog with whom you are interacting. Is this jealousy? If not, what is it? And whatever it is, how do we deal with it?

Trainers have mixed opinions about whether dogs truly display the much-maligned emotion known as jealousy. A glance at the definitions may explain why. If we define jealousy as "intolerant of unfaithfulness" or "apprehensive of the loss of another's exclusive devotion," then dogs probably would not be accurately described as being jealous. This definition implies the ability to analyze and react to past events, or anticipate future ones. Since dogs are pretty much "in-the-moment," they are virtually

incapable of anticipating a future loss, or of reacting belatedly to an event that is over and done with. When you walk in the door and your dog sniffs you all over because you have been petting someone else's dog, a more likely explanation than jealousy is that he is reading the other dog's scent with intense interest because it is new and different.

However, by the second definition, dogs certainly may be "jealous." Some dogs have mastered the art of possession (resource) guarding, and for many dogs, their owners are very valuable resources indeed. So, while unlike us humans, who are sometimes prone to sitting around feeling jealous and miserable because something may have happened to divert our beloved's attentions (or we think something *might* happen), a dog is likely to experience jealousy in the resource guarding sense only when a threat to the coveted resource is present and immediate.

Deb Jones, Ph. D., psychologist, author and positive trainer and canine behavior specialist for Planet Canine, in Akron, Ohio, agrees that dogs display behaviors that we can categorize as jealousy. "I believe that with both humans and animals there is an unpleasant emotional experience connected with the loss of desired resources," Jones says. "When that resource is a person and the experience is connected with competition for that person, we tend to label it as jealousy. When important resources are threatened, the result can be an increased effort to retain that resource."

Positive trainer Leslie Nelson, Training Director at Tails-U-Win! Canine Center in Manchester, Connecticut, prefers to think more in terms of basic resource guarding.

"While many dogs, especially in multi-dog household, appear to be jealous of one another," says Nelson, "I think what we are actually witnessing is a bit more basic. One

of the reasons I enjoy my dogs so much is that they live very much in the present and don't waste their lives held captive by destructive emotions." Nelson continues, "Having said that, dogs are very possessive about valuable resources. Your attention, your voice, your touch are all to be prized, and it is only natural that a possessive dog would want them all for himself."

Identifying Jealousy

Whether we prefer to call it jealousy or resource guarding, the behavior is the same, and it can be problematic. While it may be ego-gratifying to think that our dog wants our undivided attention, it can interfere with our relationships with other loved ones, and can even result in severe injury to other dogs or humans. It's a behavior that we should discourage, but before we can do that we need to be able to identify the green-eyed monster when he rears his ugly head.

A jealous/resource-guarding dog can be obviously aggressive, as Katie is with Tucker, or the display may be more covert. Jones describes the behavior of her Labrador Retriever (coincidentally, also named Katie). "My own Lab, Katie, is the queen of passive aggressive methods for gaining attention," explains Jones. "When I pay attention to another dog she'll sidle up to me and worm her way under my arm. She'll offer her paw or roll over to show her belly (asking for a belly rub). All these are very endearing ways of gaining attention," Jones continues, "but they are still quite demanding and purposeful. They serve to move attention away from the other dog and back to her – where she thinks it belongs!"

Canine jealousy can be defined as any behavior displayed by your dog that is intended to draw your attention and or physical presence away from another dog and back to him. Or away from another human! Most trainers' files are liberally salted with case histories of dogs who, with varying degrees of success, try come between husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, parent/child, and any other permutations of human relationships. Jealousy can be manifested by a behavior as apparently benign as your dog worming his way between you and another dog or person, or as serious as full-blown aggression. It might be cute when little Chico the Chihuahua tries to bite your boyfriend when he kisses you, but it could get in the way of a long-term relationship and it certainly won't be cute when you have to drive your boyfriend to the emergency clinic for stitches in his lip! Unfortunately, what may initially be perceived as an adorable attempt on your dog's part to claim your exclusive attention sometimes ends up in a one-way trip for the dog to the euthanasia room, when the behavior escalates to a level that draws blood.

Wherever your dog may be on the jealousy continuum, the sooner you start modifying the behavior the easier it will be to prevent it from escalating to dangerous levels, and to return to healthier relationships between your dog and your other loved ones.

Modifying Resource Guarding

The first step toward changing your dog's behavior is a good, positive training class. Training opens the channels of communication and strengthens the relationship between you and your dog. The more dogs you have, the more important it is for pack harmony that you train them. Good verbal control of your dogs raises your status in

your dogs' eyes as benevolent pack leader, and greatly enhances your ability to intervene peacefully and appropriately when necessary.

Nelson lives in a household with seven dogs (three Afghan Hounds, two Whippets, one Standard Poodle and a Shih Tzu), ranging in age from seven months to eleven years. The pack consists of both sterilized and intact animals. Nelson tells us she hasn't had a fight in years in her pack, but she sure used to! Through a combination of training and the judicious use of "negative punishment," she has taught her dogs to coexist in relative peace.

"We have one hard and fast rule," says Nelson. "No fighting in front of us! The second any inappropriate behavior starts I say 'If you are going to do that Go Outside.' I run to the door and send all the offenders out. With my older dogs now I simply say 'Do you need to go out?' and the bad behavior stops! By the way – I also am very generous rewarding appropriate behavior..."

Most people assume that punishment is always a bad thing, because most people are familiar with what behaviorists call "positive punishment." This means that when a dog does something wrong, we jerk on the leash, yell at the dog, or hit him (or worse), to get the behavior to stop. Positive trainers don't generally use physical or harsh verbal punishment, but we do often use what behaviorists call "negative punishment." Negative punishment simply means that the dog's behavior makes a good thing go away.

Dogs do what feels good, or, as behaviorists say, "behavior is reward driven." Nelson reminds us that if your dog is doing something that you want to change, at some

level it is rewarding to him. “Find out what the reward is,” she says. “and you are well on your way to changing the behavior.”

Find out how to remove the reward (negatively punish the behavior), make the good thing go away, and there’s a good chance the behavior will diminish and eventually stop. With jealousy, the good thing is you, or your attention.

“If your dog has a pattern of aggressive behavior toward your other dogs when you are paying attention to them, you are probably reinforcing the aggressive dog with your response,” says Nelson. “Think what it is that you do. Most of us instinctively turn our attention toward the aggressor and yell at him or try to soothe him. Our attention is a huge reinforcer. Even negative attention is better than no attention.”

Deb Jones concurs with Nelson’s feelings about the positive reinforcement power of attention, and the effectiveness of negative punishment. Jones recommends a time-out in mild cases of jealousy. “We use a two-minute isolation in a crate as soon as the behavior starts,” she says. “In many cases both dogs are contributing to the situation, even though one may look like the victim. In these cases, both dogs are isolated and/or ignored for a short time as soon as the unacceptable behavior starts.”

By using a time-out, you negatively punish the behavior. You may be able to accomplish the same result just by walking away from both dogs, closing a door if necessary to prevent them from following. The dog’s behavior – acting jealous – is negatively punished by the removal of the reward that he is trying to win – your attention or your very presence. Time-outs work best when they are short, like Jones’ two-minute example, and should be done with a pleasant body language and tone of voice. We are not

trying to intimidate the dog into behaving, we are simply showing him that the consequence of his misbehavior is that all the good stuff goes away.

Jones also suggests a few other possible approaches for dealing with jealousy, including instituting very clear structure in terms of acceptable behavior; practicing responsible management by keeping the dogs separated as necessary, and using counter conditioning to teach the dogs that they are not a threat to each other, but rather a predictor of good things. For example, the dog only gets treats and attention in the presence of the other dog, and is ignored when the other dog is not present.

When To Get Help

When injuries are occurring to dogs or humans, you are in over your head. Nelson and Jones both agree that there are times when you need the help of a professional. This is one of them.

“In severe cases the owner must work with a qualified trainer and/or behaviorist,” warns Jones. When there are puncture wounds and stitches, things will probably escalate until there is a very serious injury.”

Nelson emphasizes the point, saying, “If your dogs have escalated to serious aggression involving blood and stitches, find yourself a good behaviorist who uses positive reinforcement, not punishment, to modify behavior. This is a serious situation beyond the scope of this article.”

Back to Katie and Tucker

We use a combination of the training tools suggested by Nelson and Jones to deal with our own green-eyed monster. Katie and Tucker are both trained, and can be asked to

go lie down on a verbal cue. We use positive reinforcement for good behaviors, and negative punishment for the undesirable ones. We also use management, by crating Katie or putting her outside when Paul wants to play with Tucker without interruption from the Kelpie shark. We probably will never completely extinguish her jealous behavior – the herding dog compulsive instincts are just too strong. We can, however, keep peace in our pack of four dogs, Katie's behaviors don't prevent us from enjoying our canine companions either individually or as a group, and we have no fear of bloodshed – a reasonable enough goal for us.