

Article 27

Dogs missed opportunity to learn socialize

Dear Gus,

I have recently acquired a pair of 2-year-old male dachshunds that have been isolated for their entire lives. They bark at everything and go bananas when other dogs or cats walk by. They even show aggression towards each other when other animals are visible to them.

What type of training program do you recommend for this behavior?

Burton S., Orange

Burton, this is going to be a difficult behavior to change due to the length of time that they were isolated. It sounds as though they completely missed the optimal time for them to become socialized, which is generally around 12-18 weeks old. I'm not sure from your questions whether the dogs had been kenneled or locked away for the two years, but you need to keep in mind that your dogs are now the equivalent of 15-year-old boys. Think about taking two 15-year-olds that were raised alone, and then somehow dropping them in the middle of New York City—they would be completely overwhelmed. Not only do your two dogs lack life skills, but, since they are both males, they may be a volatile mix due to that as well.

At this point, they need to have a very clear, fair, and consistent owner to show them what is appropriate behavior. I suggest that you work with them individually before you try to work with them together. They need to follow your direction as their leader. Obedience training is a must in this situation. The issues you are facing are much deeper than just heel, sit, down, and come, and will take time to resolve. Once your dogs have mastered the basic commands in situations without any distractions, you should gradually add distractions. Work with your dogs individually until they are completely reliable on following commands in your home, then move outside in your yard or driveway.

When they are completely reliable outside, again without distractions, have a friend with an obedience trained dog walk by with his or her dog while you have your dog in a sit position.

You should ignore the upcoming distraction and remain calm and focused on your dog so that he does not pick up a message that there is anything to be alarmed about.

As long as your dog remains calm and in the sit position, praise him. Watch closely for the early signs that his is going from calm and alert to aggressive, such as his ears and tail going from down to "up".

At the very first sign that your dog is not staying focused on you, and starts to focus on the approaching dog, give him another command such as heel or down to distract him from the other dog, and refocus him on you.

If your dog begins to bark or show any signs of aggression, remove him from the situation. Don't force the issue by keeping him in a situation where you are not able to keep him calm and in control.

I hope this helps!

BACK