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Good communication skills with canine key

Dear Gus,

We have adopted a dog, which is a Brussels Griffon mix, named Buddy. He gets along with our Lhasa Apso, Furphy, and our four cats, but when we go walking, trouble starts. When Buddy sees another dog, or hears a neighbor's dog bark, he begins barking and jumping, which then gets Furphy upset too. Then Furphy rushes forward to protect Buddy and gets involved in the noise and commotion. Even dogs that were Furphy's friends are now being barked at and feeling threatened. Furphy doesn't get aggressive but becomes a problem pulling on his leash and barking. Buddy also chases squirrels and chipmunks in our yard but they can out run him. Buddy is sweet in the house and a warm and loving companion with an incredible appetite otherwise. Any suggestions?

Bernie S., Woodbridge

Dear Bernie,

I see two different problems here—the dogs are both unclear as to who is the leader of the pack, or Alpha, and Buddy's prey drive. The addition of a second male dog (Buddy) into your house-hold has upset the pack dynamics of Gus your home and Furphy is responding by trying to retake control. Typically, two male dogs in the same household will have some problems with sorting out their place in the pack, so this is not unusual. It is also likely that Buddy is trying to protect not just Furphy, but you as well. The biggest concern here is that the behavior while out on leash could escalate into a fight between the two dogs as they try to determine which one of them is the alpha of the pack. It's good to hear that the dogs and cats live together peacefully, and does show that dogs and cats are not natural enemies.

The solution to this part of the problem is obedience training with you becoming the Alpha to both dogs. This will end their competition for "top dog". Once everyone knows his or her position in the pack, the home situation should calm down. The goal of obedience training will be to support you as Alpha and make it very clear to both dogs that certain behaviors (such as pulling on the leash and barking) are not acceptable. I would continue to support Furphy since he has been in the household as the single dog. Until you take the role of Alpha, the dogs will remain confused and try to protect you.

The second problem is that Buddy seems to have a strongly developed prey drive, as evidenced by his chasing of squirrels and chipmunks. Again you must use obedience training to show Buddy that his behavior is not acceptable, since continuing this will only reinforce the prey drive which you are now seeing directed toward other dogs

You'll be amazed at what some formal education will do for Furphy, Buddy, and you.

Improving your communication skills with your canine companions will not only keep things running smoothly and strengthen the pack bonds, but also enhance your mutual love.

I hope this helps.

Gus

Editor's note: Constantine Gus" Marnel is a Master Trainer and graduate of the United States K-9 Academy, Ltd.

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