



# Early Behavior Training: An Underestimated Antidote to Crowded Animal Shelters & High Euthanasia Rates

By Sindy Scalfi, CPDT



Sindy Scalfi, CPDT

Last year, I was reading a pet journal and came across an article that addressed the issue of pet behavior problems as an overlooked, major contributor to crowded animal shelters and high euthanasia numbers; a contributor equal to pet overpopulation. It was the first time I truly began to understand the depth and

breadth of early behavior training, not strictly from a family dog trainer’s view, but from an advocate’s heart and eye—one who is always trying to “get a grip on the problem” of overcrowded shelters and deplorable euthanasia numbers.

I recently contacted Julie Morris, Senior Vice-President of Community Outreach for the ASPCA, to find out what she could tell me about this. She told me about a survey done a few years ago by the (NCPSP) National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy. Their data suggests that, while not directly mentioned by pet owners as a reason for pet relinquishment, behavior issues lay just beneath the surface of most of the top ten reasons.

For instance, two reasons people say they relinquish pets to shelters are “moving” and “landlord issues”. Julie proffered that most people who have easily manageable animals without serious behavior problems are not likely to leave their pets behind when they move, while people who have pets with seemingly unmanageable behavior problems are likely to relinquish them. As for “landlord issues”, she suggested these issues are likely due to barking and/or unruly dogs



of renters/leasers whose neighbors have filed complaints.

Reading between the lines is a needed skill at animal shelters. Many owners are “scared” to say outright their pet has a behavior problem. They don’t want to be the reason the animal doesn’t get adopted. They certainly don’t want to be a contributor to euthanizing the dog or cat. The truth is, they may very well have been, if they didn’t offer their pet the attention it needed and early behavior training.

## What Can We Do To Help?

We can start by making sure our own pets, and all the pets belonging to family and friends, will never see the inside of a shelter. We can do this by being proactive and beginning to train our pets the minute we bring them home, especially housetraining! If we need help, there are training books, videos, classes, and private or semi-private training classes available. We can go to the library, the bookstore or get on the internet\* to find the material we need. If our pet develops a behavior issue, confront it right away by using the previously mentioned resources. **Remember, being proactive saves lives.**

Along with early behavior training, we should all practice a few other life and death strategies when it comes to innocent dogs and cats.

1. **Spay/neuter** at the earliest appropriate time
2. **Practice intentional pet keeping:** (Rescue, buy or take-in a dog or cat with forethought and knowledge about the needs of the animal and a commitment to provide it a forever home.
3. **Socialization** (See the last issue PFA article on Socialization)

\*For cutting-edge training books and videos go to [www.dogwise.com](http://www.dogwise.com)

\*To find a trainer in your area go to [www.APDT.com](http://www.APDT.com)