Socialization and Conspecific Play: Links to behavior problems?

November 2008
IFC
Pittsburgh, PA

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- CABT
  - Animal behavior and training
- Working on Masters in Animal Behavior
- 3 accidental litters
  - England – 1 kit
  - DMK ferrets – 6
  - Post vasectomy - 7

Socialization and Conspecific Play

- Importance of play and interaction with other ferrets as well as interactions with other species

What is Socialization?

- Socialization
  - Culturally relevant process that prepares us to function in life
  - Species specific social skills are learned
  - impulse control
What is Socialization?

• Socialization
  – role preparation and performance
  – What is important, valued, and to be lived for

Socialization

• Secondary Socialization
  – After 10 or 12 weeks and through life
  – Harder
  – Still relevant

Socialization

• Primary Socialization
  – Young
    • In dogs and cats from 3-12 weeks
    • Fear around 8 weeks
    • Physically wean around 8-10 weeks, still nurse until 3-4 months if able
    • Weaning is only partly about milk, also life lessons for survival on their own

Benefits of Socialization

• Learn
  • How to behave
  • How hard to bite
  • How rough to interact
  • Conflict resolution
  – Bite inhibition
  – Litter box use
  – Communication
  – Accept discipline
Socialization

- Also helps to learn about differences with other species
- Ability to interact with a dog or cat, appropriately

Problems with lack of Socialization

- Poor litter use
- Aggressive to newcomers or during play
- Inability to cope or deal with frustration
- Easily bored or frightened
- Aggression to humans

Conspecific Play

- Conspecific
  - Conspecific – within own species
  - Play – Activity of rehearsing life events without profit to form social groups

Conspecific Play?

- Actually practice for real life
Conspecific Play

• Impact of weaning
  • Rules of play with mom and litter mates
  • Limits in play – life skills
  • Weaning age – ability to cope
  • Early weaning – not use litter box

Black-footed Ferret Play?

• 8-12 weeks
  – Neck biting behavior
  – New motor patterns

Conspecific Play?

Black-footed Ferret Play?

• 8-12 weeks
  – Maximum growth
  – Food preference
Black-footed Ferret Play?

- 12-16 weeks
  - Scent marking behaviors
  - [http://www.springerlink.com/content/5kl171k71032wl76/](http://www.springerlink.com/content/5kl171k71032wl76/)

Play fighting

- Seen in the young of many mammal species, dropping off in frequency after sexual maturity is attained
- Structural similarity to those of adult attack and defense
- Species-typical attack pattern is used to approach and make contact with a specific site on the body of the opponent, while the defender utilizes species-typical behaviors to make that body site unavailable to the attacker.

Play fighting

For males, may be more linked to adult sexual behavior than to adult fighting.
For females, fighting defenses may involve some of the responses that later become useful in fending off the sexual advances of males.

Heterospecific Play?

- Heterospecific
  - Other species
Stereotypic and Displacement Behavior

- Stereotypic
  - Behavior that is invariant, repeated, and without function.
  - Compulsive, out of context, difficult to interrupt

Stereotypies

- Cat
  - Indoor spraying
  - Pica
  - Salivating when pet
  - Licking

- Dog
  - Anxiety
  - Flank sucking
  - Aggression
  - 6 week old puppy yelp 1400x/min when placed in strange pen

Ferret

- Stereotypies
  - Cage biting
  - Fabric chewing
  - Ear/fur sucking
  - Cage running/pacing
  - Digging

- Stereotypies

Stereotypies

- Mink
  - Repeated scanning
  - Head turning

- Lambs
  - Suck on each other
Stereotypic and Displacement Behavior

- Displacement behaviors
  - Normal behavior shown out of context in time of stress
    - Digging

Displacement

- Cat
  - Suck on fingers
  - Purr
  - Kneading, rubbing
  - Inability to cope with conspecifics
    - Increase stress and nervousness
- Dog
  - Licking
  - Spinning
  - Anxiety
  - Resource guarding

Ferret

- Displacement
  - Digging
  - Nesting in furniture
  - Litter behaviors
  - Biting people
    - Prolonged fighting
    - Exaggerated caching

Stereotypic and Displacement Behavior

- Due to lack of early play and interaction with other ferrets
- Early weaning
- Lack of socialization
Other behavior issues

- Not only stereotypies, but also other behavior issues
  - Nervous
  - Anxiety
  - Stress/illness
  - Hyperactivity
  - Poor reversal of learned tasks
- Poor spatial memory
- Litter box issues
- Aggression/biting

Our help

- Encourage play
  - Train
  - Enrichment
- Benefits of play
  - Long term
  - Health
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Social

Any Questions?