

Reactive Dog Canine Compulsive Behaviour



Compulsive behaviours are repetitive, stereotypic motor, locomotor, grooming, ingestive or hallucinogenic behaviours that occur out of context or with such a high frequency or duration that it is "in excess of that required to accomplish the ostensible goal". As the condition progresses, it can develop to where it interferes with the dog's daily living and when fully developed, it becomes impossible to interrupt the behaviour.

The most commonly noted behaviours include:

- chasing and/or biting at things that do not exist and/or associated indirect signs (e.g. shadows, reflections of light, non-existent flies, etc.);
- licking, chewing, plucking, barbering or sucking at or on body parts, often the same one all the time;
- repetitive vocalizations;
- ritualistic behaviours, such as spinning, circling, pacing, tail chasing, etc.;
- stalking and ingestion (or licking, or sucking) of non-food items, such as rocks, clothing, tissues, etc.



Photo: http://www.vetbook.org/wiki/dog/index.php?title=Obsessive_compulsive_disorder

Compulsive behaviours have a genetic component and certain breeds are more susceptible than others in that they require less stress for the condition to be triggered, or in that it occurs more often. Certain forms of the condition (expressed as particular behaviours) are more common in certain breeds than others, for example spinning in bull terriers and flank sucking in Dobermans.

As a trainer, I am not qualified to diagnose this condition; only a veterinarian can do so. You will therefore need to discuss possible diagnosis and medication with your veterinarian. Overall (2013) states that *"Once the condition is diagnosed, lifetime medication is required, although you may be able to decrease or taper it; this depends in part on behavior modification, concomitant/co-morbid conditions, and rate of onset/improvement."*

Management is essential for recovery, in that we need to protect the dog from the things that trigger the behaviour. Behaviour modification consists of reinforcing the dog for alternate, incompatible behaviours, and to NEVER punish the dog for engaging in the compulsive behaviour.

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This information is not a complete program, but only supplemental to class work or a consultation.
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