

is your cat contemplating therapy?

Animal behaviorists are here to help shy, stressed-out or psychotic pets.

As we entered the elegant pre-war high-rise on Central Park West, a male wheaten terrier began to growl and jump wildly. His owner sprayed his mouth with bitter-apple repellent and tried to restrain him. The case, Dr. Peter Borchelt assured me, was typical: Scruffy was exhibiting aggressive behavior due to a dominance disorder.

another dog." But since he was adopted from the Humane Society's shelter, it was impossible to know for sure. The doctor then prescribed a behavior-modification process, employing a special kind of mouth halter that the Turners could use to gently close his mouth and coerce him into socially acceptable behavior. The psychologist's ultimate objective was to get Scruffy to socialize with other dogs.

"Once he's not allowed to growl, he'll learn to make other choices to handle his fear. But it's not going to be easy," said Dr. Borchelt. Even so, as Mrs. Turner led the dog around by his new harness, her relief was palpable.

According to Dr. Borchelt, more and more people are investing time and money into improving all of their domestic relationships, even those with their cats and dogs, gerbils and birds. "People have always valued pets, but now they are spending money on improving their lives,"

he says. The growth in his own business shows this evolution: "When I first started, people said, 'What are you going to do, put the dog on the couch?'" Now, he is invited to speak all over the country and can barely manage his caseload of 30 clients a month.

In Brooklyn there are a host of other services that also reflect the growing recognition that pets are more than peripheral players on the domestic scene—they're part of the family.

Some services are concerned with the beloved pet's well-being and quality of life. Woofs 'n Whiskers, a Carroll Gardens pet-care facility that boards up to 24 dogs and 10 cats at a time, will make provisions (and charge more) to provide "extra TLC for dogs in need of special attention." Even for dogs who don't need group hugs, however, life there is pretty cushy. As owner Betsy Mangan explains, the dogs' lives at the kennel are "structured around play groups," to ensure they live each day to the fullest. She also started the Doggie Day Care Center, where, for \$13 a day, dogs can socialize with others at the kennel.

Sometimes owners are out of touch with their pets' needs. Gail De Sciose, a Manhattan-based interspecies telepathic communicator, can help by channeling an animal's thoughts and feelings. If a pet is ill, for example, she can sometimes pinpoint the problem: "This one parakeet I spoke to had been ill for one and a half years, and [veterinarians] didn't know what it was. But when I was talking to it, my throat got constricted, and I felt pressure in my chest. When they finally X-rayed him, they found a goiter in his throat and growths in his chest."

In addition, she can also help pet and owner work through unresolved disputes: "One woman had seven ferrets, and many were dirtying the carpet. She asked me to contact the ferret who seemed to be in charge. I asked him to get the others in line. The owner said at that point he went over to their box and peed in agreement."

In addition to focusing on quality-of-life issues, people are honoring their relationships with their pets on an increasingly sophisticated level. No area is a better example than the cottage industry that has sprouted up around pet death.

Instead of disposing of the poor pussy, parrot or pooch through a backyard burial, or worse—the garbage—for \$75 to \$300 you can have your pet cremated at Pet Crematory Agency, which has offices in Bath Beach and a cremation facility in West Babylon, Long Island. At the cremation center owners can watch the process from a private room. The facility also sells urns made of pewter, bronze, marble and wood.

"One guy brought his other dogs here to



LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR KITTYHOOD: De Sciose attempts interspecies telepathic communication with a crazy cat.

Around other dogs, his owner explained, Scruffy was completely uncontrollable. More troubling to Dr. Borchelt, a leading Brooklyn pet psychologist, was the dog's unpredictability: Though he was usually affectionate with his owners, old Scruffy had bitten Mrs. Turner four times. "He just doesn't seem to trust anyone," she said in a strained, tired voice.

The problem, Dr. Borchelt explained, could possibly be traced to a troubled past—"he could have been 'mugged' by

watch and say good-bye to the deceased one," says Dean Lissauer, vice president, who adds that the business cremates everything from cats and dogs to gerbils, snakes and sea turtles. "Horses will take a while," he warns.

If you choose to honor the pet with a proper burial, you can get a gray, pink or black granite tombstone from Fasolino Memorials in Queens, starting at \$225. For just a little more, you can also get a photo of the pet laminated onto a porcelain plaque, as well as an engraving of one of Fasolino's suggested epitaphs, such as "We Will Always Love You," "Our Baby," or "He Ran Out of Life But Not Out of Love." "For some people it's like losing a child," explains Elsa Fasolino, who owns the business with her brother and has already selected cemetery plots for her three cats.

As of last year, it's also possible to provide for a pet if the owner moves on to greener pastures first. Thanks to a new state law, an owner can set up an honorary trust for a pet. The money is left to a trustee who is required to use the funds to care for the pet, for up to 21 years. "This need has been around for years, but people are becoming more enlightened now," says Eleanor Moldegott, an animal-issues lawyer, who does volunteer work for Legal Action for Animals in Manhattan.

There are also grief counselors to help owners get over the loss of their pets. "Animal-related grief is unusual, because we don't have a social and cultural environment in which it is a respected loss. Society actually ridicules it," says Barbara Meyers, a certified grief therapist who recently relocated her Mill Basin practice to Staten Island. For a fee, she helps patients who've lost pets or who own pets with chronic illnesses "work through their pain and move to a place where they can rediscover their feelings." One of her goals, she explains, is for the bereaved to be able to have a healthy relationship with another pet, whether it's a dog, cat, horse, iguana or bunny.

For former owners, the end of a pet's life can often be just the beginning of a new series of relationships with animals, therapists and, eventually, the therapists for their new pets. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there, but counselors are available. ■



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