

How Tellington TTouch taught our old dog new tricks!

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Grace is our 10 year old Maremma. She is young for her age, loyal and very loving to those she knows. But since she was about 4 months old she has been very nervous of strangers and strange situations. Not unusual for a Maremma to be wary of course, but for Grace the world and most things in it were a trial – she would bark manically at anyone she didn't know, at plastic bags in the hedge, at a pair of shoes that had been moved in a room. And she would keep barking – not just a warning woof but a full on panic. Once she got to know someone she was fine – her memory is excellent and once a friend she is a friend for life. But the “getting to know” stage was only endured by a few understanding dog-loving friends. We managed Grace's fearfulness quite successfully but it did curtail her full enjoyment of life – she often had to be kept shut away when visitors came and had to be walked in quiet places where we wouldn't meet many people – so no big days out for Grace.

A couple of years ago, however, we had a breakthrough - I started to learn Tellington TTouch. TTouch is a training technique which focuses on improving the confidence



Grace enjoying TTouch with Elaine, whom she had only just met. She is wearing a face wrap which has a calming effect. As you can see it works!

and balance of animals in order to influence their behaviour. Often animals with “issues” such as fear or aggression (the two are commonly linked) are physically tense in their bodies and this reinforces their behaviour. If you can change their posture and release the tension in their bodies, their behaviour will change as well. This was certainly the case with Grace. She was very tense in her hindquarters, her tail was tight and even her coat on her rear end was curly!

Developed by Linda Tellington-Jones over 30 years ago, TTouch has three components: body work, ground exercises and wraps. All give the animal increased awareness of themselves through movement and action that is non-habitual. Like us, animals are creatures of habit. They move and hold themselves in particular ways.

Breaking these habitual movements gives them a new experience and offers new possibilities for behaviour. We all have a lot of unused neural capability and non-habitual actions and movements have been shown to stimulate these unused neural

pathways into action. Learning is therefore facilitated through non-habitual movement and animals are able to think rather than simply react.

The beauty of this approach is that anyone can do it - and the basic touches are very quick to learn. The basic TTouch is a one and a quarter circle with the pads of the fingers repeated over the body. It is different to massage in that the intention is not to physically release muscle tension but simply to move the skin. The circle and a quarter is important: studies of brain wave activity show that the circle and a quarter has a different effect than either a single circle or two circles. It certainly feels different: to me a single circle feels incomplete, whereas a circle and a quarter feels like a completed circle – try it and see for yourself!

I have used TTouch with Grace, and taken her with me on TTouch trainings, and she is a now different dog. In the past couple of years she has had a go at agility and enjoyed it – even the dog walk and the A-Frame which in the past she has been too scared to even approach. She has met new people and made friends in minutes rather than hours. She can now go for a walk in a busy park and ignore people walking, jogging and cycling. She even passed her KC Good Citizen Bronze Award at the age of 9 – and is now training for her Silver! It is not that she is suddenly without any fears – I think she will always have a “nervous disposition” and she still finds new situations difficult. What has changed is how she responds to them – she is no longer panicked and reactive – and even when she does get frightened, she recovers much more quickly. Who says you can’t teach an old dog new tricks?

I would thoroughly recommend TTouch to help with any issues like nervousness and fear, aggression, excessive barking, pulling and handling problems as well as to improve overall balance and help older dogs and those recovering from injury. The best way to learn is to attend a workshop – practitioners run these all over the country. There are also very useful books and videos by Linda Tellington Jones and articles on the web by Sarah Fisher and others. For more information on all of these see the UK TTouch Website: www.ttouchteam.co.uk.



Grace was particularly afraid of men until she discovered TTouch. Making friends with Anthony Head while visiting the UK TTouch Centre at Tilley Farm near Bath helped change her mind about them too!