



Pheobe's new found love of the vets.

Head Veterinary Nurse, Mari Griffith RVN, wanted to share with you Pheobe's story...

This case relates to dog behaviour (fear aggression) - I am by no means an expert when it comes to animal behaviour, I have no qualifications (yet) within this field but I have a huge interest in behaviour and have in the past worked for and alongside a qualified dog trainer and behaviourist so am lucky enough to have picked up a few tips and tricks along the way – I would not recommend you attempt these methods without seeking proper behavioural advice from a qualified dog trainer and behaviourist.

“A fairly new client of ours decided to take on a second dog, Phoebe, to add to their family of two cats and their current older German Shepherd.

Phoebe is a female, adolescent crossbreed (possibly German Shepherd mix but parentage unknown)

Phoebe came from the European country of Bosnia, when she arrived in the UK in September 2016 she was 5 months old (adolescence - a very challenging time for dogs) and very nervous, she came with no previous history but was most nervous around men, however she soon settled into a routine with the family. Unfortunately after only two days it was clear to her owners that Phoebe was not very well, so her new mum brought her along to meet us and to be checked over... here the problems began....Phoebe was so scared around strangers that her 'go-to' behaviour was to bark, very loudly and aggressively at anyone who even glanced at her, not great when we needed to examine her for her ailments.

So...I took it upon myself to try and make a difference....to try and help Phoebe feel more at ease when she came to the vets, to befriend her and try and convince her that nothing dreadful was going to happen to her. Even though Phoebe was barking at me I went and sat on the floor at a short distance away from her, I took some tasty treats and sat and waited. I didn't even look at Phoebe (some dogs find eye contact incredibly threatening and intimidating, this can trigger an even worse response.) Sure enough her puppy inquisitiveness got the better of her and over she came to investigate, I chose not to look at her nor interact with her, I spoke to her mum instead. If I made any sudden movement she reverted back to her barking, to warn me away. After a short while Phoebe's nose found that I had treats. I offered Phoebe a treat, she backed away as my arm stretched out towards her, so I gently threw it in her direction, she wolfed it down, I threw further treats nearer each time until she had to pick it up from directly next to me....Progress!! although touching her to give her a fuss was totally out of the question she simply didn't trust me enough.

I suggested that Phoebe's mum pop up with her on a fairly regular basis and we would continue working on this. Phoebe needed to learn that not all 'strangers' were out to get her.

Phoebe came to visit regularly and each time seemed to get slightly more accepting of me and my colleagues – we continued along the same lines.

Phoebe needed to be hospitalised for a short period of illness and became more and more confident here at the practice, although the vets were still scary boys and she continued to bark and growl at them.

Phoebe and her family moved house just before Christmas and so didn't visit for a while, imagine my happiness when she came to visit yesterday (10/1/17) and threw herself into my lap and gave me lots of kisses. Phoebe has accepted me as her ally. She is also more accepting of my female colleagues. I'm hoping that this continues to progress so that eventually she will learn to love Ian and Mike just as much.....cross fingers.

Early socialisation is so important for puppies, it helps them to learn that people are not scary, introduce your puppies to Men, Women, Children, Older people, people of different races, people wearing hats, carrying umbrellas, wearing glasses etc, the more weird and wonderful the better! Early socialisation is imperative to try and prevent problems when the puppy is older, larger and more capable of causing damage should the aggression develop further.

We actively encourage our clients to bring their dogs in to visit us regularly, just for a social call so that they don't always associate the practice with things they perceive to be bad i.e. veterinary examination etc."