



Your Border Collie

Allow me to re-introduce you...

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**Contact
Information**

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BORDER COLLIE (HERDING DOG):

To understand the behaviour problems you are seeing, first you need to see your dog as the dog they were bred to be, through thousands of years of artificial selection (human interference in the breeding process):

A HERDING DOG

Herding dogs, as a breed, date as far back at circa 55BC. That's almost 2,100 years! When humans began making a living from livestock, such as cattle and sheep, we began to need help to move them, in a controlled and stable manner. Enter, the herding dog (early dogs were called Drovers). The key goals:

- Work closely with a shepherd to achieve movement of the flock, ensuring the least amount of stress to the animals.
- Control and, where necessary, inhibit the movement of the flock, to keep them within the prescribed boundaries, and not trigger them to flee.
- Keep the flock alive (no biting or killing)
- Do all of the above while only using the strength of their 'eye' or 'force' of their body positioning, but without touching the flock.

Through the centuries, humans have continued to select which dogs to breed, based on key traits, including:

- **Social co-operation:** ability to work closely with their human, but not so sociable that they'd run off to greet the neighbours when there's work to be done.

What you may see: Farms are relatively quiet places, and it wasn't common to have many visitors, whereas now, there is an expectation that all dogs should be people friendly and get on with everyone. That's not even possible in humans, so how can we expect it of our Border Collies (or any dog!)?

As a result of this, and also just because all living beings are created with an ability to choose, in our 'pet' homes, we can sometimes see our Border Collies struggle with busy households, or streets, and especially **the dog park** where humans seem to be under the belief that it's okay to walk up to any dog and pet him, whether he wants it, or not. This is less about being 'aloof',

'aggressive' or 'reactive' and more about the fact that these are loyal, protective, and sensitive dogs, who, very often, just prefer the company of their well-known humans, and would like the opportunity to take themselves away, if things get too busy.

Most often, what I see, is behaviour that results from the dog feeling 'trapped' or attempting to protect their boundaries (personal and physical) rather than the dog being completely unfriendly.

It usually takes the shape of barking, lunging, (most commonly lunging forward, then jumping back – this is a defensive reaction asking the other thing to 'go away please') and straining on the lead.

Some dogs are simply over-excited and MANY Border Collies bark when they are excited, so it can be difficult for the untrained eye to understand the difference between the friendly dog, desperate to run and play, and the fearful or anxious dog, asking for space. Appropriate education (both human and dog) may never result in the dog who likes to meet everyone, but rather a dog who can treat the backdrop of human busy-ness like white noise.

- **Predation:** herding dogs have a shortened predatory cycle. It is highlighted below. Note that shortened does not mean the rest is missing, only that we have highlighted and strengthened specific aspects. Grab-bite is in blue because there are some working dogs, in whom the grab-bite does seem quite strong, and this makes for requirements to adjust the training:

Orient – Eye – Stalk – Chase – Grab-bite – Kill-bite – Dissection

What you may see: Because of their primary function, which is to be acutely sensitive to movement, their desire to stop and direct other animals may also spill over into attempts to control the movement of humans, cats, and even non-living things, too, especially things that move suddenly such as cars, bikes, joggers, children etc.

This can look like bumping the side of you, circling things, or even a lunge and nip at ankles, trousers, or sleeves. It may also escalate, to attempts to lunge towards the object of interest, barking usually happens due to the frustration at not being able to get to it, whatever it may be.

I have travelled the route from living room, to kitchen a thousand times, over the years, but one of my dogs, Zac still thinks it's his job to 'help' me get there quicker as that's where the door to the garden is.

He zigs and zags behind me, sometimes offering an excited 'yip!' UNLESS I've got a cup in my hand. If I have my cup, that means to him that I'm going to the kitchen to put the kettle on...no herding needed for that, so he's off-duty (he still follows me though, just in case something fun might happen).

While this doesn't bother me and is at a level where there is no danger to myself, or my dog, it may not suit all households.

So, instead of telling the dog off (which achieves nothing) we can work on skills and learning to help the dog respond to our direction. Working on relationship building, bonding, and emotional regulation offers significant relief in these areas, together with cementing the foundation skills needed to enable our dogs to respond to us, no matter the environment.

- **Sudden environmental changes:** Border Collies are often extremely sensitive to sudden environmental changes (sudden to the dog, not to us). What this means is that they may show signs of stress, or excitement, when the 'picture' changes (without prior authorisation!)

What you may see: What this can look like varies from dog to dog. Most commonly I see 'problems' for families with things, such as getting up from the sofa (with, or without a cup!), sneezing, bin day, those shoes being picked up, a different car being parked outside, triggering a refusal to go any further. This can also occur because of new or different sounds, even if we cannot hear them etc

A Border Collies response to sudden environmental change will not always be, what we would perceive as, negative but they certainly notice when things are different. It may be something as simple as a new dog bed. I've seen countless frustrated guardians, reporting that they bought a brand-new bed for their Border Collie, and he wouldn't entertain it, while others take the new thing and love it immediately!

Often, working on confidence in your dog, can help hugely with these things. What we mustn't fall into the trap of doing is getting cross or trying to force the dog into a situation they are telling us they're uncomfortable with. As with humans, some Border Collies are naturally more cautious than others, so instead of getting frustrated, we work on skills and games that build confidence and teach the dog to 'report-in' to us, anything they find worrisome. Then we, as the strong, confident guardian, can offer direction and guidance as to what to do next.

- **Hazard avoidance/self-preservation:** with a strong selection for guarding and preservation of self, social members and social order, protection against intruders, predators and other threats.

To be honest, this one applies to most, if not all, breeds and, in fact, all species!

What you may see: While protecting their home, family, and 'territory' comes naturally to all dogs, there may be times when these instincts spill over into other, less 'appropriate' areas. Keep in mind, the previous selections we have bred our Border Collies to have, though, and we can begin to understand why these behaviours may occur.

Examples of, what I'd term, mis-placed behaviour can include resource guarding against other dogs, or humans, territorial defensiveness (not the same as 'I want to do you serious harm' aggression) barking and lunging at things in the environment (much like the details above) and attempts to send off strangers or potential threats.

This behaviour isn't always the 'in-your-face' kind of aggressive behaviour. For some dogs it can look much less fierce. What we, as humans, might call passive aggressive. That doesn't mean it isn't there, only that it hasn't gotten any worse. Many argue that resource guarding comes from a place of fear. What I tend to see I'd suggest comes more from a place of insecurity (which, admittedly, is fear based). If your dog feels threatened, or insecure about his resources e.g. you, his toys, food, sleeping places etc, then this behaviour is much more likely to occur.

Working on ways to help your dog feel better about these things through voluntary sharing, swapping, and other exercises brings relief to all concerned.

I learned so much, myself, about the true, evolutionary. nature of our Border Collies, through the wonderful L.E.G.S Family Dog Mediation course, by Kim Brophey, and have pleasure in sharing this knowledge with you, to help you better understand what makes your dog tick.

The impact of artificial selection

As a result of these, artificially selected, behaviour traits, we can often see some of the following pop up as 'behaviour problems' in our Border Collies:

- Territorial behaviour (protecting their property boundary lines)
- Protectiveness (protecting their family)
- Stranger-directed reactivity (applies to unfamiliar humans, and dogs)
- Chasing inappropriate things e.g. cars, bikes, kids, and other moving things
- Excessive barking at the environment (sudden environmental changes) e.g. the wind, rain, thunderstorms, 'apparently nothing'
- Sensitivity to lights, sounds, even movement of people
- May appear 'neurotic' e.g. shadow, light, water chasing, digging excessively etc.
- Can become extremely upset at being left alone

That might look like a whole lot of doom and gloom but it's important to understand that, while WE view these things as problems, these are all natural behaviours in our Border Collies, occurring because of the centuries of breeding for very specific traits. Not every Border Collie will display all of these behaviours, and for some, they don't have any issues at all, but if that were the case, I reckon you wouldn't need me.

The Best Bits

You've also got a dog who, generally speaking, is:

- Extremely loyal
- Devoted to you and their family
- Protective
- A lover of training and play though can get over-excited sometimes and nip
- Your wingman, your partner, and your most loyal friend.
- Can learn to do all sorts of games, tricks, and skills
- The dog you never knew you needed, right when you need him most

All they ask of us, in return, is the commitment and time to understand them, and give them what they need.

Most, though not all, Border Collies want to be near you all the time, and even when they're sleeping will be up and ready for action, the second your feet move to get up from the sofa! For a lucky few, they seem to have that built-in off switch (oh how lucky you are to have one of those Border Collies!)

Most Border Collies need some help, learning to settle down and just **be**, without being in the thick of the action. That's where I come in!

Border Collies are, in my opinion, a truly special breed. They ask a lot of us, however, in return they will give 1000 times more. They need a lot of input through training, enrichment, appropriate play, and physical exercise.

Are you up for the challenge?



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