

Young dog owners tend to cope well when their beloved pooch misbehaves, new study reveals

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A new study published in the journal *Human-Animal Interactions* reveals that young dog owners tend to cope well when their beloved pooch

misbehaves.

Past studies suggest that around 90% of dogs display undesired behaviors such as aggression and disobedience, but little is known about the impact of this on young people's experiences and accompanying emotions.

A team of scientists interviewed young dog owners in Canada, aged 17 to 26 years, to determine their experiences with their pets and their [coping strategies](#) in response to bad behavior. This included barking, occasional and persistent barking, and in extreme cases, being aggressive towards other dogs and people.

Renata Roma, lead author and Research Assistant at Brock University, Ontario, Canada, and her colleagues found that on the whole, young people prefer proactive coping styles when dealing with undesired behavior in their dogs.

They discovered that the severity of their dogs' behavioral issues was associated with the strength of their emotions in response. For example, more severe behavioral issues seemed to elicit more intense emotions.

The researchers argue that increasing our understanding of coping mechanisms in response to pets' perceived misbehavior is important for a number of reasons. These include exploring how young people handle [stressful situations](#) with their dogs might help to clarify whether any of the coping styles adopted by young people can decrease the likelihood of experiencing continued stress in their interactions with their dogs.

One respondent accepted their dog's bad behavior and tried to live with it while another gave up trying to change their pet after three trainers and a variety of strategies that aimed to solve aggressive behavioral issues.

Roma and her colleagues said, "There is a lack of qualitative studies

about potential applications of coping styles theories in the context of dog ownership. A question that has yet to be answered is whether there is a continuum in people's coping styles while engaging with humans to whom they are emotionally close and their dogs.

"This study addresses the gap in the literature by examining links and similarities between young people's coping styles towards their dogs and towards people emotionally close to them. Using a qualitative lens, this study also aimed to understand how young people cope with problematic and stressful situations involving interactions with their dogs."

Roma and her colleagues further found that young people varied in their [emotional reactions](#) and perceptions about the severity of their dog's behavioral issues. No participants in the study described dog behavioral issues that were displayed towards them, but they did note that their dogs showed severe behavioral issues towards other people or dogs.

While most dog owners indicated moderate discomfort with their dog's behavioral issues, only one highlighted severe discomfort and in this case the dog exhibited severe behavioral issues including persistent aggressive behavior.

The researchers added, "It is possible that none of the participants in this study revealed severe discomfort with their dog's behavioral issues because they learned new strategies over time. Therefore, future studies could explore whether the amount of time living with a dog influences [young people's](#) ability to handle challenging situations with their [dogs](#)."

More information: My 'perfect' dog: Undesired dog behaviours and owners' coping styles, *Human-Animal Interactions* (2023). [DOI: 10.1079/hai.2023.0011](https://doi.org/10.1079/hai.2023.0011)

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