



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Canine Master on Pet Life Radio - Episode #11 The Dangers of Tethering Dogs & Fight or Flight Instincts

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Welcome to the Canine Master Radio Show on Pet Life Radio. Today on the show, we're going to talk about why it's never a good idea to tie or tether your dog up, and why it actually can be dangerous. We're also going to explore the role of flight or fight as the response in dogs as it applies to their everyday interactions, including meeting another dog on a leash, when a dog is cornered, and how to best introduce your dog if it's on a leash so that we don't get a reactive dog.

You know, in a recent show we talked about recalls, calling your dog, and how important it is to get your dog to come when called, and it can actually save your dog's life, as we talked about. There are a lot of other ways we can keep our dogs safe in our home, in our backyards. But tying a dog up and tethering them is never a good idea, and it's not one of the best ways to contain a dog. People that tie or tether dog up really are not doing their dog justice and can create a lot of behavioral problems.

You know, tethered dogs tend to have little socialization or interaction with other people. They tend to become lonely, and then they start to bark, and they become a nuisance in the neighborhood. There's a dog four houses down from my farm, and I can hear this dog barking all summer long. And you know, I go over to go see, and the dog's been tied up. I put three notes in the mailbox telling them that I'd help them find a solution and not to tie the dog up, but this dog has really become a nuisance in my neighborhood.

The lack of socialization and the interaction, this lack of interaction actually can lead to many behavioral problems. By nature, as we know, dogs are social animals and they thrive on that interaction they have with humans and with other dogs, of course. Unfortunately about 200,000 dogs in America are left tethered outside by themselves every single day. 200,000 dogs in the USA are tethered every day. That's crazy. This is inhumane treatment that causes otherwise friendly and happy dogs to become bored and lonely. And you know what? It many times leads to the development of aggressive behaviors.

Tethering dogs creates a cornered response, and this is that a dog can't run away, this fight or flight. You know, every dog has fight or flight, every animal is fight or flight. But when you

tie a dog up, what are we eliminating folks? We're eliminating the ability to flee whether that's just moving to cross the room, going across the yard. But when you tie a dog up, you're having that dog depend on the defense drive of fight, and the dog quickly relearns that barking and lunging at the supposed threat makes most people go away, because they can't run away themselves. Tying a dog up many times leads to aggression, and I see it over, and over, and over again.

I'm going to tell you a trick that we've done in Schutzhund. This is where we do police work, and I years ago was very, very active in the sport of Schutzhund. I knew many trainers that would get these dogs that didn't have a high enough fight drive. And you know what they do with these dogs when they bring them in? They tie them up. And these trainers will say, "You want to make your dog stronger, you want to make your dog more assertive, tie the dog up for a period of time and that flight's going to go away."

Well, gosh, can you imagine doing this to your own dog? You're making your dog aggressive, in many instances. That tethering creates a cornered response. The dog quickly learns that lunging and barking makes the threat go away. Thus, that behavior is reinforced. If my dog barks and he lunges, and the kid on the bicycle rides down the street, and he rides away, that dog just won.

A dog that leans against his tether is actually being put into an aggressive and threatening posture. You know, it's interesting when a dog is leaning forward, we know that forward bracing, when a dog braces forward, it is actually becoming dominant and threatening. So when you have a dog on a tether, what will happen is, he's going to lean against that tether, and any dog that is walking by him is going to interpret that response as aggressive, and he'll become aggressive back. Thus, we are actually enforcing and continuing this aggressive response. The dog that's tethered up is being aggressive and looking aggressive, and now the dog that's walking by is seeing that dog as aggressive. And because he's leaning against the tether, his body language says, "I want to rip you up," and now he starts being aggressive back. So we actually can create an aggressive dog in that way.

So when threatened, all dogs have the natural instinct to fight or flee, as I said. This defense reaction is common, as I said, to all animals. So whether you tether or chain a dog up outside, you are eliminating that ability to flee. And so bad idea, folks. We're going to talk a little bit more about fight or flight later in this show, but I just want to talk about tying your dog up and how dangerous it can be.

Of the approximately 42 fatalities caused by dogs annually in the United States, most of these are caused by dogs that have been tethered or isolated outside. Almost half of these fatalities were children under the age of 12. So it's that kid riding the bicycle, running in your neighborhood, and these kids are many times the targeted victims of dogs that are tethered. The kid runs by the dog that's tethered, he's barking, maybe the kid's been teasing him a little bit. I will tell you it's really natural, and we've got to teach our children not to do this, but you got a nine year old boy who's running by the dog that's barking, how many times is that kid going to turn around and go, "Ruff, ruff, ruff," and go right back to him because he knows the dog can't hurt him, right? So kids naturally do this to a dog that's tied up, and that dog's barking, and then the kid runs away, and the dog won.

I can't tell you how many times we see these dogs start targeting small children as they scream and yell during the play. Then the dogs get all loaded up on these kids. And then what happens is it takes one time for that lunge line to break, or the stake gets pulled out of the ground, and as that kid starts to run away, that dog has been so built up to get to this kid, and what does he do? He grabs that kid and terrible things happen. And the child is usually the first target.

So sometimes, as I said, people will use tethering as a means to protect their property. Reasoning, that the dog will bark to alert them if a visitor goes by. But it's always a bad idea. Inside dogs who have been bonded with their human pack are actually more likely to protect their home and family by barking than dogs that are banished to their backyards, and therefore have little or no connection to the family inside the house. So if we're really looking for a protective dog, keep your dog inside, have them hang out with you. But if you're tethering him outside, he's all by himself, it's going to become more about the yard and protecting that than it is about protecting the people inside the home.

I'll tell you another thing, is tethering a dog many times will bring physical harm to the dog. If the chain or the collar is too tight, and becomes embedded on the neck, I've seen this. I've seen dogs have been tethered for so long, and the collar is on it, that the dog actually has physical disabilities. Their legs become entangled in the chain. I've seen collars be tight or the chain wraps around the dog's neck and they strangle. I actually saw that one time as a kid where a German shepherd was tied up, and he jumped over a branch on the tree, and he hung himself. So if tethering seems a humane treatment for your dog, you're absolutely wrong because many dogs strangle when they're tethered.

Not only that, when a dog is tethered, I heard of a woman who had a little sort of, it was a Standard Schnauzer, and it was tethered outside, and a coyote came and grabbed the dog and killed it. The Standard Schnauzer couldn't get away, and the coyote killed it because the dog was tied up. They can't escape, and there they're exposed to all these elements. They can't get out of the rain, in many instances. They're tied up outside, they're exposed to the elements, and there's no shelter. So there's many things that for tying up a dog is just a really bad idea. And I will tell you, if I'm a dog thief, and I'm going to go steal a dog. If one's tied up, boy, that's easy to get. I'll just walk right over him, he can't get away from me, and I got him. We know that dogs are being stolen every day, so that's a really bad idea. Either way, a dog that is tethered and not supervised is inviting a target of dog thieves.

Some people also tether the dogs inside the house to limit their freedom inside. This is a little bit different, but tethering inside the house should only be done very supervised, should not be done leaving your dog tethered because this can be a bad idea as well. Dogs can be strangled as well inside the house. And it also, depending, can cause a dog to become more reactive, eliminating the ability to flee. I know a lot of dogs that will, what we call station, or tether their dogs. If you're going to do this, you better be in the same room with your dog, you better be supervising your dog, and making sure that the dog is tethered with a non-constricting collar. You would never tether your dog with a choke collar. You would never tether your dog with a slip collar. This is a terrible idea., And it actually, again, tethering a dog many times makes a dog more reactive, and it's just a really bad idea.

Okay. Some people run out of time or patience for their pet, and rather than address inappropriate behaviors such as jumping or eliminating in the house, they'll deal with a problem by banishing their pet to the backyard and tethering them. If you don't have time for your dog, don't sentence him to a life on a chain. Find a home where the pet will get the attention and the care that he or she needs.

Not only is tethering dangerous, it's oftentimes illegal. Ha ha, it's illegal in many states. Tethering or chaining a dog, under most state laws, means that a person ties a dog with a rope or a line to a stationary object. While the law themselves vary from state to state, they do have several consistent features. Some laws that address tethering allow a dog to be tethered only for a reasonable period of time. Now, I can see that you're going out, you're in the yard with the dog, you tie him as you free your hands. That's not a problem. But states that do allow some form of tethering usually require that the tethering must be done in a manner that does not endanger the dog's welfare. So those states that do allow it, I still think it's a bad idea. For more information on specific state laws on tethering, visit our website, caninemaster.com, and we'll tell you which states allow it, and where it's legal, and what you need to do, if you are going to be tethering your dog, what is acceptable.

So what can you do if you need to keep your dog in a confined space, but do not tether him? Inside, use your crates, your gates, or an x-pen to keep them safely contained. Outside, you can use a traditional fence. That's the best thing. That actually keeps other dogs and wild animals out, and keeps your dogs safe. If you have a small dog, a real fence is your only real option besides walking that dog several times a day. Or you can use a those underground electric fences, they can work. But again, they don't protect your dog from coyotes and other animals out there that may bring harm to your pet, and also another dog. But the electric fence can work if a dog is trained appropriately to that fence.

I also will tell you that some people will use that pulley system, where it's a pulley where basically a dog can run up and down between two trees. This is probably, maybe mildly better than tethering your dog. The dog does have a little bit of an ability to flee. But you know what? I don't like those pulley systems either, because again, your dog is becoming loaded up and protective of one area of your yard, and it is kind of like being tethered up.

All right, next we're going to talk more about that fight or flight response in dogs, and how that may affect their behavior on and off a leash.

So back to fight or flight. Do I stand my ground and fight? Or should I flee? Dogs, and animals in general, have this defensive instinct: when posed with a threat, they can either stand their ground and fight, or high tail it out of there and run away. And this fight or flight instinct varies from dog to dog. Some dogs are much more assertive, and some dogs are much more fearful. So within one breed of dog, I can see some dogs, or within one litter of dogs, I can see some dogs have a higher fight or flight. And you know, many times when we go to evaluate a dog for a behavioral issue, we look at this fight or flight instinct.

A dog that has a high fight and a low flight isn't necessarily a dog that is aggressive, but it might be a dog that's more assertive and may challenge you a little bit more. But because a dog has a high fight drive doesn't mean that it's aggression. I want to be clear on that. Some

dogs are more confident, and some dogs are just more fearful in general. This is why I always recommend not to put a dog who is fearful in a corner or under a table, unless you're being dominant, sort of what I say dominant, I hate that word, but being more assertive in the space. We always want them to feel that ability to flee is an option. Dogs need the ability to get out of the way. When you are cornered, and when a dog is cornered, there's only one thing left to do, and that's fight.

Have you ever heard someone say, "My dog tends to be aggressive towards other dogs on a leash. However, off-leash, he's just fine"? I hear this all the time. This is a very common scenario, and there are quite a few factors that go into play here that can create this situation of a dog being more aggressive on a leash. There are also things we can do as dog owners to help stop this kind of leash aggression when the dog is on the leash. I'm going to show you a couple of ways to do that.

When we have a dog with a higher flight drive, or the dog is more fearful, and we put them on a leash, we're eliminating that dog's ability to flee. Right? So basically, you're getting a cornered response from the dog. It's sort of like going to reach into a crate. The dog has nowhere to go. The dog is going to rely on its defense drives, which is fight, and it's going to become kind of aggressive. Introducing a dog that has a high fight instinct on leash is always a risky endeavor, especially a dog that tends to be a bit defensive on a leash.

However, not all dogs introduced on leash are going to be aggressive because they have a high flight instinct. Many times, confident dogs may feel falsely challenged during an introduction. When people are walking their dogs on a leash, they see another dog, many times they feel almost obligated to let that dog go and greet the other dog. They go, "Oh, is your dog friendly?" Or you know, "Oh, I want to bring my dog over." Yesterday, I was doing a training session downtown with a dog that was getting reactive. We were working around other dogs and people and this woman walks by, and she just walks her dog right up to the dog that we're training. I said, "No, no, no, this dog is dog sensitive. Please stay away." But she felt almost obligated to do that. You know, at first, people will always be cautious to see if the other dog is friendly, so they might approach sort of slowly and tentatively. But you know what? What generally happens when people do this? So let's talk about how I introduce a dog and why many times dogs introduced on leash will start to fight.

All right, so let's check this out. I am walking up to a dog with another dog that's on a leash, and both dogs are kind of pulling to get to each other. And as they lean against that leash, they start to get face to face. Well, two dogs challenging each other, generally will challenge each other with direct eye contact, head-to-head. That's where a lot of dog fights happen. So if I'm walking my dog up to another dog, and they're going head-to-head as they try to get to each other, they're doing two things. They're pulling against the leash, so now their body pressure is forward, which is a threat. And the other thing they're doing is they're getting direct eye contact.

So now, where that dog would normally want to go and do a butt sniff or a play bow, they can't even do that because they're bracing up against that leash or that harness, and they're looking eye-to-eye, and they're actually threatening each other. At first people will see this cautious approach as friendly, but very quickly, it can turn bad. So then the next thing we

start to do, is you start pulling against the dog, and then the dog starts to think that you're getting nervous and that we want to get away, and it goes so much against their instinct to do a friendly greeting, which might be a look-away where the dog looks in the other direction and says, "I'm no threat." It might be a play bow, where, "I'm going to put my rear end up, and my front of my body down, and show you that I just want to play."

But when a dog is being introduced on the leash, what you want to do, very quickly, is actually put slack in that leash and let them be as natural as they can upon greeting and actually encourage them to get to the rear ends. That is what we call a butt sniff. I know it sounds funny, but that's a friendly greeting. So no wonder the dogs approach each other and get aggressive if they are not introduced correctly. If there's not slack in that leash, and if the person is nervous, and they're putting tension, and they're not letting the dogs approach each other rather quickly rather than cautiously, that cautious approach many times leads to disaster.

So what do I do? When both dogs start to butt sniff, I'm going to do that kind of jolly routine "Oh, what a good boy," and I'm going to start to speak to them in a very sort of enthusiastic way. I'm not going to hold my breath because dogs can hear you holding your breath. Up to 10 feet away, a dog's going to hear you holding your breath. And when you hold your breath when dogs meet, many times what happens is a dog thinks you're nervous, and they think something's wrong, and the dog becomes aggressive. So this is something that you really want to watch out.

If the owner is holding the leash tight when introducing the other dog, I would tell the other, say, "Put some Slack into that leash. We don't want the dogs to start getting head-to-head stuff." Again, when you have a tight leash, the dog may have a hard time rolling over on its back. It may have a hard time doing play bow. So you'll want to have slack in the leash when you're doing it.

You also want to read the dog that you're introducing it to. If the other dog is stiffened up, has hackles, you know the hackles, which is that hair going down the back, if the dog has his tail set high, he's all stiff, maybe that's not a great dog for your dog to go be introduced to. I might say, "Let's go find another dog."

The other thing that I want to tell you, if you do have a reactive dog on a leash, the best thing you can do is to teach that dog to walk behind you. That's not heel position, folks. Heel is next to you, on your left side. So if I have a dog that tends to be reactive on a leash, you basically want to teach that dog to walk behind you. You could do that with a clicker, that's probably the best way. Mark it when the dog's behind you with some treats. Instinctively, tell that dog, "I've got it covered. Stay behind me. I'm in charge. I'll determine who's friendly or foe. Let me check it out first." That's what you're saying to your dog, and your dog will start to desensitize to that dog coming up to him.

If the other dog appears friendly, then you may allow the dogs to greet. But if it's not the right situation, I might say, "Hey, let's go somewhere else." If you, again, are forced to do at leash introduction, and I don't know when you would be forced to do, remember to keep slack in that leash and allow the dogs to do that friendly butt sniff, play bow, or rollover.

All right, by following these guidelines, you are likely to avoid aggressive introductions next time you are forced, or are not forced to introduce your dog on a leash. The best thing is not to introduce dogs on leash, and I say that over and over again. Find a fenced in yard, get your dog off the leash. But if you find yourself in that situation, slack in the leash.

Jaimee, what questions do we have today?

Jaimee: Our first question is from Jim from Pittsburgh. He says, "Hi Chris. I have a shepherd mix, Bodie, and he is great most of the time with other dogs when he's off leash, but on leash, he's very dog sensitive. I often find myself in a situation where some other dog owner has their dog off leash, and allows their dog to come up to Bodie who's on leash, and I say, 'Can you keep your dog away?' And they say, 'It's okay, he's friendly.' And then I have to say, 'But mine may not be.' What can I do in that situation where I have my dog on leash but another dog approaching him is not?"

Chris: Wow. Let me tell you something, Jim, I totally feel for you here. I see this kind of situation all the time. People go to on leash dog parks, and what happens is people don't obey those on leash rules and they have their dogs wandering around thinking, "My dog is just fine." And then you have a dog that is dog reactive. Couple of things you might try.

There's a new movement out there that is tying a yellow bandana around your dog's neck, and in tying a yellow bandana around your dog's neck. Many people will know that my dog is actually cautious around other dogs. The other thing you might try, Jim, and I do this sometimes, if I have a dog reactive dog on a leash and I'm going to an area where there might be some other dogs, I'll bring a bunch of treats in a treat pouch or in my front pocket. If a dog comes up to me and wants to greet the dog that I'm walking, I'll reach into my, into my pocket, throw about five or six treats on the ground, scatter them around, and then I'll head off in the other direction. Many times that has saved me from having a bad situation.

Again, the other thing is, if you're in an area where people are supposed to have their dogs on leash, I might get a little vocal to that dog owner and say, "Hey, my dog's not okay with other dogs. That's why I'm here, and it's your responsibility to put your dog on a leash." I'd be pretty vocal about that, and not be shy. I mean, you're in the right and they're in the wrong. But again, that treat method of scattering treats all over the ground and then heading in the other direction has worked very, very well for me.

Jaimee: So our next question is about tethering, it's from Lisa in Florida. She says her neighbor tethers their dog most of the time, and she's concerned that this may make the dog dangerous, as well as it being cruel. What could she do if she's concerned for both the wellbeing of the dog and the safety of her children who may wander next door?

Chris: Well, this is a tough situation. The first thing I would do is I would print out my blog post on tethering your dog, and put it in her mailbox, and talk about the fatalities of small children in this country. And I'd have a conversation with her. I might also call animal control if I don't get a reaction. Find out your state rules and your town rules about tethering your dog. My last resort might be to go to a state authority and see if we can't get that dog removed from that situation. This is a very dangerous situation.

And you know, I had a lady recently who had a dog that was tethered up, and their children were just petrified of this dog. What I had them do, these people didn't have enough money to fence in their dog, she had talked to them, and what I told the people to do is have, every time the kids walked by that dog, is to throw the dog treats and try to get a different response than that aggressive response.

But I just think this is really bad. I mean, any dog that is tied up, and your kids are running around the neighborhood, it is not going to be a good situation if that dog breaks free, especially if it's exhibiting some aggressive behavior. So go have a talk with the neighbor first, and then if you don't get the right reaction, go talk to your local authorities.

Okay guys, that's it for today. I really hope you found our show to be interesting. I would love to know your comments and have you join the conversation. You can always email me at chris@caninemaster.com. And be sure to visit caninemaster.com. Click on Ask The Canine Master, and leave your questions for me. And I'm going to do my best to get back to you, and I may even have you call into the show with your questions. Send me your videos and photos, so I can see what's going on with your dog, and help you solve the problem.

Goodbye for now. See you next time on Canine Master Radio, where I will continue to help you master the relationship with your dog.