

South Shore behavioral therapist helps resolve issues with 4-legged family members

By Kathryn Reed

Ignore her. Don't look her in the eye. And, here, put these treats in your pocket.

That's what we are supposed to tell everyone who comes over.

With a desire to keep dogs in their homes, especially rescue dogs, Karin Schuller is all about making canines comfortable in their new homes, with their new people, and with whomever enters the house.



Karin Schuller goes over homework with AJ's people.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

It doesn't take Schuller long to figure out this dog is a bit nervous and overprotective of her people. AJ had been super protective of Joy – especially the last year of her life – so

it's not a surprise she is protective of Sue and me.

And it doesn't take long for Schuller to see why she has been summoned. Sue is on the floor and Schuller reaches down to get the paperwork. AJ doesn't like this and makes it known.

If only dogs could talk – tell us what is going on, what they're thinking, why they feel threatened by an innocent gesture.

Well, that's not going to happen. And that's why we decided to enlist help to figure out how to make our new family member more secure. Joy rescued AJ – so there is a period of her life that is a mystery. The 9-year-old is part yellow Lab, part greyhound, and other stuff.

I've known AJ for several years. Honestly, she is so incredibly sweet and loving. But she has some attitude.

Schuller's business is aptly named – Dogs with Issues.

"Female dogs are a lot more bossy," Schuller says. But she adds, "Old dogs can learn new tricks."

Schuller has been working with dogs for years, having worked for two veterinarians when she lived in San Diego and one in Zephyr Cove. She had her certificate to be a veterinarian technician and has taken classes in animal behavior.

Personal experience has also taught her what works. Schuller has rescued 70 dogs, worked with a malamute rescue association, and had a team of them when she lived at Fallen Leaf Lake.

For the past two years it's been all about working with dogs to create a harmonious environment. Her approach is "less is more."

"Dogs mostly live in the moment, but they do have a long memory," Schuller said. "When people spoil or baby them too

much, it can make them more aggressive.”

Schuller works on making the people have control. She gives us homework. We sign an agreement that says without working on the training daily, we will have failed – not AJ, not Schuller.

We’ve added the phrase “leave it” to our vocabulary. Schuller says there are at least a hundred ways to use it.

We are starting with just a couple. More will come on future visits from Schuller. Next time we’ll all go for a walk together.

We learn that it’s best to have AJ outside (or in a room if the weather is not ideal) when people first come over so the commotion at the door is eliminated. She doesn’t know someone hugging us hello isn’t hurting us.

It’s amazing how much information Schuller gives us in a little more than an hour. She leaves handouts to reinforce the lessons we’ve learned.

Now it’s time to get back to training.

Tips from Schuller:

- People leave the house first, then the dog. Otherwise the dog is in control.
- If the treat is too big, by the time she finishes it, she will have forgotten why she was given it.
- On a leash, keep her close to your side.
- Don’t sleep with dogs. It teaches them they are equals.
- Corn-based dog foods make the animal aggressive.
- Don’t give her rawhide because it would swell in her stomach.

- Bones are bad. The splinters can cause her to bleed out.
- Don't come over the top of the head of a dog. This is threatening; especially for dogs that have been hit.

Notes:

- Phone: (530) 577.0263
- Email: highsierramtdogs.att.net
- Facebook: search Dogs with Issues
- Schuller also works with puppies.