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### **Should I Give My Dog Prozac?**

In present-day society, it is becoming more and more prevalent for people to humanize their dogs. Movies and commercials frequently depict dogs as though they were capable of human thoughts and behaviors, such as understanding language, talking, and even driving cars. The humanization of our dogs has created many emotionally-based problem behaviors. Some veterinarians have started to prescribe Prozac for these problem behaviors.

When considering medication for your dog's behavioral issues, we must first ask ourselves what caused these issues in the first place. Second, we must ask what the drug, Prozac, is going to do and how is it going to help the problem behavior? The most common issues that Prozac (Fluoxetine) is prescribed for are aggression, separation anxiety or fearfulness. The question remains, will this medication help with these issues, make them worse, or not be effective at all.

Prozac (Fluoxetine) is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor, used to treat depression in humans, by decreasing levels of serotonin in the human brain. Serotonin is a chemical messenger that carries signals between brain cells in the outer cortex of the human brain. It is selective because it is believed to only affect the serotonin transmitters and not any other neurotransmitters in the human brain. Serotonin is believed to be a contributor to feelings of well-being and overall happiness. Due to the numerous undesirable side effects caused by using Prozac, it is rarely being prescribed by physicians for their patients. Prescribing this drug for dogs is, at best, treating the dog with a mild sedative to mask the behaviors, not actually treating the cause of the behaviors. At worst, you are giving the dog a drug with numerous side effects. You cannot ask the dog if it is feeling happier or if it is experiencing thoughts of self-destruction, so there is no way that you can study any effects the medication may have in dogs. Without any feedback from the dog we cannot determine what the dog is feeling or experiencing. In addition, the outer cortex of the dog brain is not developed to the same level as the human brain. There has been no research done on how this drug would interact in the outer cortex of the dog's brain.

When dealing with aggression there are a variety of reasons the dog may be exhibiting these behaviors. The main reason that a dog can be aggressive is the genetics of the dog. Many dogs have a genetic predisposition for aggressive behavior, and the continued breeding of these dogs for looks, and not for temperament, will increase the likelihood for these behaviors in that genetic line. People have also bred these aggressive traits in different dog breeds for personal protection, property protection, or in the hunting of animals. In these cases, the proper training and handling of the dog can control aggressive behavior and harness the aggression for use in specific jobs.

When it comes to anxiety or separation anxiety in dogs, it is also important to understand how anxiety is created. Again, some breeds of dogs have a genetic predisposition towards anxiety. If the mother or father of a puppy were particularly over-excited or overly emotional, these traits can make the puppy more susceptible to anxiety. Additionally, how the breeder interacts with the puppy at a young age, can contribute to anxiety if they make the puppy overemotional during feeding. Owners can also contribute to anxious behavior by making the dog overemotional, especially when leaving and coming home. When talking to the dog, especially in an overexcited manner, at these specific moments, we as people assume that we are making the dog happy, when we are really making the dog emotional. Dogs are emotional creatures like humans, but dogs do not have the ability to define emotions like humans. So, if at these moments we stimulate the dog's emotions, and even reward these emotional outbursts with petting and treats, we are gradually making the emotional spike worse over time. Now the dog is on an emotional rollercoaster of spikes and valleys, and the owner has created an unstable emotional mindset that is unhealthy for the dog and can create destructive behavior, excessive barking, and even the inability to control its bowels.

Ultimately, solving these behavioral problems revolve around training the human on how to better understand their dog as a dog, and not trying to humanize the dog. Giving the dog Prozac will not help.