

Introducing Anatolians to Birthing and Young Kids

By Erick Conard

Anatolian Shepherd Guardian Dogs with superior guardian ability possess a complex mixture of behavioral drives that are genetically competitive. An easily understood pair of these contradictory behaviors, both of which are strongly expressed in all effective working flock guardians, is the desire to **nurture** newborns with the utmost gentleness and the compulsion to **protect** them uncompromisingly. This balanced combination interweaves a strongly nurturing disposition with a fiercely protective nature, creating behaviors beautifully geared toward safeguarding the young.

In guardians with strong working instincts, the birth of newborns accelerates both of these powerful drives into high gear. Experienced for the first time, this intense rush of conflicting emotions can sometimes confuse an untested Anatolian. Without guidance and confused by the passion these emotions create, the inexperienced Anatolian may engage in unwanted behaviors. A young Anatolian's owner is responsible for providing that guidance during this stressful time. **Guidance producing the best behavior is achieved by maintaining the young Anatolian in an appropriate environment, one that consistently facilitates the emergence of the desired behaviors and automatically extinguishes unwanted behaviors.**



Lucky Hit's Shadow Tokat, pictured here at 1 1/2 years of age, demonstrates his deeply nurturing personality with this two week old Saanen kid. Nurturing is a behavior influenced more by genetic behavioral traits than by environment factors. Safe and effective flock guardian one must select an Anatolian Shepherd that is tolerant and nurturing with newborns.

Owner Mindset Prior to Placement with Young Kids and Birthing

When one obtains an Anatolian pup, one accepts responsibility for providing guidance to direct its strong genetic/behavioral drives, especially those paired behaviors which are in conflict with each other but are equally necessary in good flock guardians. **No excuse an owner may concoct removes his/her responsibility for providing this guidance.**

This responsibility includes guiding a young Anatolian through appropriate behaviors during its initial contact with newborns. With skillful guidance the Anatolian will succeed; without guidance there may be less than complete success. Because the responsibility for proper guidance rests solely with a pup's owner, I know that any behavioral problem I

discover in one my pups stems from my failure to provide the proper guidance and environment for that pup. **I do not blame my pup for my failure.**



Young Lucky Hit Anatolians are checking out a newly introduced show lamb. Before trusting an Anatolian with young kids and in birthing situations, young Anatolians need to experience a wide variety of flock guardian situations with adult animals. The Anatolian's owner is responsible for assessing his/her pup's level of development and for designing future interactions based upon that pup's individual needs

Training Required Prior to Placement with Young Kids and Birthing

A proper flock guardian environment for puppy training is one in which **incorrect puppy behaviors are automatically addressed and immediately corrected and extinguished by conditions found in that environment.** For example, if a young dog plays too aggressively with a newborn in his training flock, he will be immediately punished, usually with a strong head butt, by the newborn's dam. An environment that is designed to immediately correct any misbehavior will **automatically extinguish those unwanted behaviors,** guiding a pup's development toward only desirable flock guardian behaviors.

*(Please note. Above I qualify the resulting behaviors achieved as "desirable flock guardian behaviors." I DO NOT SAY the resulting behavior achieved will be "any type of behavior the owner wishes the dog to display!" Those who desire to eliminate flock guardian behaviors in well bred Anatolians with superior flock guardian ability will most likely find that **no amount of behavioral modification leads to complete success – especially when the behaviors they desire to eliminate are crucial flock guardian behaviors.** If essential flock guardian behaviors can be permanently eliminated from an Anatolian pup's responses, that pup is poorly bred.)*

In addition to being raised in a correct flock guardian working environment, the Anatolian pup must demonstrate:

1. The proper submissive responses during an owner's **alpha respect training** sessions (best obtained using the "juicy bone" technique),
2. A backward movement to the "**back off**" command, and
3. The correct responses to all **basic goat/dog interactions** (such as pup "head bow" in response to goat "head tilt," no play/chase even with kids that run, etc.)

I reinforce these basic lessons on an ongoing basis throughout the dog's lifetime. I am flexible and willing to modify these techniques to match each pup's particular situation and needs. I make time to carefully observe every pup's behavior every day and make necessary adjustments **immediately** when I see

a problem developing. Most importantly, when things go awry, rather than blaming the dog for its unwanted behaviors, I determine how **the environment I created led to those unwanted behaviors** and immediately make appropriate corrections.

Properly Supervised Introduction to Birthing

Leaving a young guardian pup unsupervised with a doe that's almost ready to kid is asking for trouble. This bad situation becomes even worse if the doe is young and/or a first time mother. A guardian pup that is placed with a pregnant doe and is not supervised is an example of an owner created birthing problem. Without the owner's guidance, when the doe kids the pup may become confused and respond inappropriately. If so, the pup now requires corrective training – training most likely unnecessary if the owner had kept the pup's environment appropriate.

A circumstance in which a working pup is not housed with goats, sheep, or other flock animals should be short term, lasting only until several training does or bucks can be procured. When an owner has only goats that are near birthing, the owner can temporarily keep the pup in a pen adjacent to the goat shed when the pup is unsupervised. The pup can be allowed in the goat pen during the day under the owner's close supervision. It's important to maintain a working Anatolian pup with training goats continuously – goats who demand respect without being vicious. Owners who make excuses for failing to obtain proper training goats, claiming it's difficult to obtain or house the appropriate goats, are unwilling to assume their responsibility for training and developing their pup's working skills. Later, when that pup's behavior is inappropriate, rather than blaming the poor environment this type of owner created for his/her dog, he/she tends to incorrectly blame the pup.



Lucky Hit Shadow Tokat, shown here at four months with his goats, was raised with goats, lambs, geese, llamas, and other Anatolians from birth. Bonding is strongest with animals a pup lives with during the pup's first sixteen weeks of life.

It's also helpful in birthing situations if the young Anatolian has been properly raised with a variety of other animals -- animals the owner wants the pup to bond with and be protective of as an adult. In my case, this includes llamas, geese, and cats. Unless I'm present to directly supervise, I keep the geese and cats in pens adjacent to but separate from the pup, as I never allow my pups to physically interact with

animals who can't demand the pup's respect. I DON'T put a young pup in a pen with horses or cows until the pup is three months old. From three to six months of age I directly supervise the pup with horses or cows. At about six months, the pup is mentally ready to interact with horses and cows without my assistance. Proper working Anatolian responses are geared for herd animals like sheep or goats, NOT for horses or cows. Anatolians younger than six months of age may not be safe around horses and cows. However, waiting until the Anatolian is six months old for the initial introductions decreases the Anatolian's ability to bond and accept larger stock.

It is best to introduce the young Anatolian to kidding, with direct supervision, at a year of age or more. I evaluate each pup's response to birthing individually, introducing only one pup at a time to the newborn area. I watch every interaction the pup has with both the doe and the kids. I provide immediate feedback to the pup, both positive and negative, with my voice and sometimes with body posture. The amount of training each pup requires depends on that pup's behavior. The less pleased I am with the pup's actions, the more direct supervision I provide the pup. However, in most cases I find my young Anatolians need very little supervision. Three factors that help make my pups reliable are that, prior to their initial introduction to birthing; they received consistent early training and experience, were allowed to mature mentally, and received excellent working genetics from their parents.

During birthing, I provide guidance to the pup. The most important lesson I want the pup to learn is that newborns are precious and requires gentle handling. I teach this lesson by insisting that the pup keeps back from the doe and kids. My adult dogs' behavior assists me by demonstrating good behavior – they lay down about 10 to 30 feet and watch. By this point the pup is well acquainted with goat postures. When the doe tilts her head in a warning posture, if the pup doesn't either move back or fall to the ground and be still, I immediately say the pup's name and then "Back off." (**That is a pattern I ALWAYS follow when giving directions – the pup's name followed by a command.**) If the pup doesn't instantly comply, I move forward. Walking into the pup's body as I repeat the command, I use my legs to physically enforce my request (DO NOT KICK), causing the pup to back away. **Whether the pup moves back by himself or because I walked into his body, I enthusiastically praise the pup for moving.** I repeat this process each time the doe signals for the pup to back off using a head tilt.

This exercise helps the pup understand it must back away from a doe signaling her discomfort with the pup's distance, even though the pup's instincts draw it strongly to protect the newborn kid. As the pup sits quietly at a distance I talk softly to the doe and help the newborn kid nurse for the first time. Watching this interaction, the young pup learns that the doe, even when demonstrating aggressive posturing, is not going to harm the newborn. **Young Anatolians sometimes separate a kid from its aggressive mother because the confused young dog mistakenly believes the aggressive doe extends that aggression to the helpless kid.**



Lucky Hit Shadow Major at eight weeks respectfully watches a goat birthing twins. Note that Major maintains a very respectful distance from the birthing mother even though he is very interested in the whole process.



Note the horns on this mature doe. This doe, using her horns as striking sticks, will not tolerate any puppy misbehavior. Therefore, Major is supervised with the kids even when I'm not present! This type of appropriate goat supervision allows my pups a great deal of time with goats, even young kids, in a situation in which any lack of respect toward goats or kids is automatically corrected.

I sometimes let a pup who demonstrates excellent behavior get close to a newborn kid, but only for a moment and only a pup with excellent behavior. Excellent behavior is a loving fascination expressed toward the kid (which I encourage) combined with very submissive behavior toward the doe (which I help reinforce). This submissive behavior toward the doe is demonstrated when the pup falls on the ground and crawls on its side toward the kid, gently licking toward the kid with extreme tenderness and joy. However, to ensure proper respect for the bonding necessary between the doe and her kid, I soon make the pup move away, even if the mother doesn't "tell" the pup to get back with a head tilt. I generally have my pup sit no closer than 10 feet from newborns (even when I'm right there with the doe and kids). Over time, especially if the kids are born in the pasture in the afternoon sun, the pup will go as far as 50 feet away to sit in the shade and watch.

I leave a young Anatolian overnight with a doe and kids only if the pup already proved it is safe around young kids and the doe is a calm, older doe that is both strong willed and dominant. If anything goes awry during the pup's initial introduction to birthing, the pup needs additional direct supervision and cannot be trusted with the doe or her kids. I

simply move the pup's training back a few months and continue. I work diligently on training areas I've identified that strengthen the pup's weaknesses.

As I gain confidence in the pup's behavior, I begin to allow the pup to spend the night with the mother and newborns. At night all my dogs usually stay about 10 feet from the kids, surrounding the mother and newborns that first night. I allow all my dogs, including a pup, to clean up all the afterbirth after the doe and kids move away from the area she kidded. However, the first time the pups are exposed to afterbirth I have it wrapped around my hand. If the pups are anything other than extremely gentle, I yell and jerk my hand, popping their mouth if their teeth have grabbed or pricked my wrapped hand. This method shows the pups that something delicate may be wrapped inside the delicious afterbirth and that they need to handle it with great care. Only a reminder to be cautious is necessary after this "afterbirth" lesson, if even that. Many Anatolians seem to be genetically programmed to use the utmost caution with afterbirth. This is another trait I look for in superior working Anatolians.



Lucky Hit Shadow Sahara (at four months) feels secure surrounded by her yearling goats. This type of early exposure intensifies bonding and facilitates proper responses with young kids and when introduced to birthing

Properly Supervised Introduction to Young Kids

Unless my circumstances make it impossible to do so, **I don't like to let the younger dogs be with young kids unsupervised** until they are at least 14 months old and they previously have been through at least one supervised kidding season with me and I've given them the step by step trust test. That being said, my best pups have proven themselves by being with young kids from four to six months on without incident, something I don't recommend as a standard practice. Instead I recommend allowing a young dog be allowed in the kidding pasture with young kids and other animals during the day when they can be under careful and constant supervision.

During the day I praise any pup that walks up to a kid, smells it, and then walks away. Under my supervision, I let pups clean the yellow newborn kid poop if they do it very carefully and gently without causing any alarm in the kid. If the kid is shoved in any way or gets nervous or uncomfortable, I immediately correct the pup and have it back off, hopefully extinguishing the improper behavior. A pup with this type of supervision easily learns to be very slow moving, cautious, and careful when around the kids. Luckily, this response is genetically instilled in well bred Anatolians and is easy to establish. However, without an owner's thoughtful guidance, bad behaviors may be reinforced and an otherwise good pup

may increasingly engage in unwanted behaviors, especially play/chase.



Lucky Hit Shadow Case is guarding goats in the big pasture at 14 months of age.

I am frequently asked ***“If I am unable to be present when my pup is with young goats or a kidding doe, how long will I have to keep my dogs separate?”*** The answer to that question depends on how well bred your Anatolian is, how much work you have done with your dog, and how effective you were with your training. Try keeping your dog separated (in an adjacent pen) at night and only move him/her in with the kids during the day when you are present. As I begin trusting my pup’s behaviors, I go about my business as usual but occasionally leave the kid pen at times to do other things. However, I always keep an eye on the pup. Leaving is a test for permanently allowing the pup to remain with the young goats. If I rush back and correct a pup I know more training and/or more maturity are in order. I realize I made an error in my assessment of the dog’s developmental level and accept that responsibility rather than placing blame on the pup.

You may have a young dog that was exposed to kidding and initially behaved beautifully. Later, that same dog may become confused and start stealing newborns. When the doe tries to protect and retrieve her kids, the dog may even punish the doe and drive her off. In the dog’s eagerness to protect the newborn kids, the dog mistakenly imagines the angry mother may injure the helpless and beloved kid. Even though the dog has the best of motives, I’d verbally chastise the dog to immediately extinguish this bad behavior. I would walk into the dog, moving it back from the goat and kids, while speaking harshly. To reinforce my displeasure I’d refuse to forgive for my longest time period (which is about three minutes). After forgiving the dog, I’d return the dog to the doe and her kids. If the goat gave the dog a head tilt, we’d practice the exercise **“head tilt means move back immediately!”** We’d repeat as often as necessary until the dog quickly responded as the goat indicated, no matter how many hours it took to achieve a good response. At this point I accept nothing except correct behavior. Also, I keep placing the dog in the same learning environment over and over until I see the dog understand what I accept as correct behavior.

During this time I also allow the dog to watch the doe and her kids interact and let the dog see that I am well pleased with the kids being with the doe.



Lucky Hit Shadow Case (1 1/2 years) and Lucky Hit Shadow Tokat (4 months) with 70 yearling goats on feed in the corral engage in frequent dog/goat interactions which reinforce an Anatolian's working behavioral responses

One serious word of caution in these and all training situations with Anatolians -- to perform many of the above exercises successfully, you **MUST** be the alpha pack leader (a position you obtain through respect, not brute force – never work with your dog when you feel emotional)! **If you find yourself in any position lower than alpha, focus on achieving alpha position rather than working on ANY OTHER BEHAVIOR.**

Concluding Thoughts

The dual factors that result in a superior working Anatolian are proper environment and exceptional working genetics. In order to select for genetically superior flock guardian ability (superior working genetics), an Anatolian must be observed over time in a flock guardian environment (i.e., living with either goats or sheep). Our breed was developed in Turkey as a consequence of unrelenting selection for flock guardian ability. For this reason I strongly support the development and implementation of a performance test for flock guardians. Testing for superior conformation is already being done on an extensive and well funded scale. Therefore, I believe a performance test for working ability is important in the United States, where many Anatolians making a major genetic impact on the breed do not live in a flock guardian environment.

Our Anatolians are not machines to be turned on after purchase and worked with perfect precision. They have intensely protective and strongly nurturing feelings. They need to grow up in the correct environment and to be provided with the proper guidance in order to understand how to respond to those strong and conflicting feelings. My Anatolians respond to their flock beautifully and understand their role within the flock. With the correct techniques, raising an Anatolian pup seems easy. However, it requires paying close attention to your Anatolian’s behaviors and spending the necessary time with them! Luckily, once your Anatolian becomes an adult, your Anatolian will more than pay you back for all your hard work!

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