

Is your dog aggressive??

Article by Dee C. Hoult, CPDT

How to Identify, manage, and prevent aggression

As dog owners it's important to realize that not every dog with a bite history is aggressive.

Aggression is an expression of how a dog is feeling. Growls, lunges and dog bites occur because the right circumstances were present to trigger an aggressive response.

Most dogs provide warning signals for a long time prior to a bite. Some common warning signals in dogs are avoidance of eye contact, stiff muscles or growling directed at other animals including humans.

Most severe behavior problems surface between 1-2 years of age due to chemical changes in the brain. This is why a dog that seemingly has been fine "snaps" to the untrained eye. Additionally, if aggressive displays are punished in an attempt to correct behavior, a dog's level of aggressiveness can increase. In 2008, the American Society of Veterinary Behaviorists released a position statement which discussed

“Aggression is an expression of how a dog is feeling.

advances in behavior research continue to show that dogs subjected to threats or force may react with aggression, not because they are trying to be dominant, but because the human threatening them makes them afraid. Fear is the root of almost all dog aggression and under socialization is usually the culprit.

Puppies must ideally complete socialization by 12 weeks of age. The best time to acquire a puppy is at 8 weeks, giving you at least one month to socialize. Puppies should meet

“Most severe behavior problems surface between 1-2 years of age due to chemical changes in the brain.

at least 100 people before the 12th week. Denying puppies early socialization is extremely detrimental, yet fear of disease prevents many puppy owners from the process. However, there are many safe ways to socialize an unvaccinated puppy. My favorite is an outside patio at a coffee shop or restaurant.

BECAUSE WE DON'T ALWAYS KNOW THE HISTORY OF AN ADULT DOG, ALWAYS:

- ▶ TEACH CHILDREN TO LEAVE AN UNFAMILIAR DOG ALONE
- ▶ CALL YOUR DOGS' NAME IF YOU RISK WAKING HIM FROM SLEEP
- ▶ DEMAND NEW HOUSE GUESTS TO STAND STILL UNTIL YOUR DOGS GREET THEM POLITELY FIRST
- ▶ TRADE WHEN YOU TAKE AWAY A VALUED TOY OR BONE
- ▶ HAND FEED FROM TIME-TO-TIME
- ▶ ENCOURAGE "DROP" DURING A TUG-O-WAR GAME



Photo by petstudiousa.com

If you need help with your dog, find qualified professionals who use positive reinforcement methods to modify behavior like: **the Association of Pet Dog Trainers** (www.apdt.com), **the International Association of Canine Professionals** (www.canineprofessionals.com) and **the Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists** (www.animalbehavior.org). With positive training, dogs learn to make choices that are rewarded with food, affection, play or anything else the dog enjoys. Over time, your dog can change his emotional response from "that is really scary I should aggress" to "that is wonderful I feel great!"

“Puppies must ideally complete socialization by 12 weeks of age. The best time to acquire a puppy is at 8 weeks, giving you at least one month to socialize.