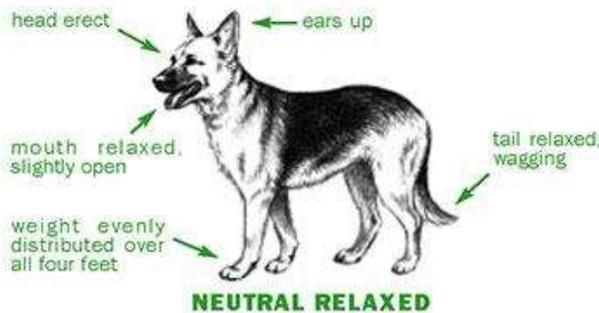




Dog Aggression

Aggression is one of the most common behavioral problems in dogs. It can range from growling to snapping to biting. Most dogs give warnings before biting, though it may be only a second or two before.

Learning to read dog body language and warning signs are an important part of dealing with aggressive dogs. If you ignore the warning signs, either intentionally or by accident, eventually the dog will bite.



A Trip to the Vet

There are medical reasons your dog may be aggressive. Pain can turn a normally calm dog into a dog that bites. Some diseases, such as a low thyroid level, can cause a dog to be aggressive. It's important to have your veterinarian examine your dog first to rule out any medical problems before you try to fix a behavioral one.



Determining the Cause

Try to evaluate any aggressive behavior to determine the cause or trigger. Try to look at the situation from the dog's point of view. Where did the incident occur? What was going on around your dog at the time? Whom was the dog growling at or biting? Who was in the area at the time?

Were there any possessions, such as toys or beds, or was there food or treats involved? What was the behavior of the other pet or person? These are all important questions to answer to determine the reason behind your dog's aggression. This will give you a better chance of improving the situation.



Dog Body Language

Dogs will use their body position, eyes, tails, ears, and mouth to communicate. Dogs that have had their ears or tails altered can be at a disadvantage for humans and other dogs to read.

It's important that you pay close attention to your dog's body language in order to get the correct message.



PASSIVE SUBMISSION

Dogs are very sensitive to human body language. Make sure you are giving the correct signal back. If a dog is fearful, try to make your body small, avoid direct eye contact, speak softly, and move slowly.



AGGRESSIVE ATTACK

Types of Aggression

Territorial: Dogs have a natural desire to protect their area. Some dogs tend to become over protective of their territory leading to aggression issues directed at other pets or people. Try to block your dog's view of others. This may mean putting up a privacy fence or being placed in another room when visitors come.

Some dogs are only territorial when on a leash. If this is the case, make your dog sit and give treats while another person or dog walks by. This will distract him and teach him that people walking by means a good thing (treats!).

Fear: Fear aggression occurs when a dog feels threatened. Initially they use body language to express their fear but if they feel trapped, they will become aggressive. The fearful dog would prefer to be left alone but will defend himself as a last resort.

With these dogs, be careful not to corner them. Back away and give the dog space. To help the dog overcome fear, give treats and speak with a calm, soft voice. Avoid loud noises and sudden movements as these will only startle the dog and may cause him to bite.

Defensive: A dog that is displaying defensive aggression is fearful and feels threatened. However, rather than backing away, this dog will go on the offense. His body language will be confusing because he will be showing fear as well as aggression. The dog may charge you barking and growling.

In their words, rather than begging you to back away (as a fear aggressive dog would), a defensive aggressive dog is ordering you to back away. It's still based on fear. Often, the best course of action is to back away and give the dog his space. In this case, if you freeze or move forward, you risk being bitten. Like with a fear aggressive dog, use a calm, soft voice.



DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION

Possessive: Dogs that guard something that is important to them are displaying possessive aggression. These items can be food, toys, sleeping areas, or even humans. Some possessive aggression is easy to avoid by removing the guarded item. Usually, if the dog is possessive over one thing, it is likely to find a new item to "own".



Train your dog to accept your handling of his possessions. He needs to learn that it is yours first and that you let him have it.

For example, teach a dog that is possessive over a toy to “wait” until you tell him it’s ok to play with. Then, teach

the dog to “drop it” so that he will release the toy from his possession when told. Give him a treat every time he drops the toy so that he associates you taking the toy as a positive thing.

It is important that you never try to grab something from an aggressive dog’s mouth. If he continues to growl, wait until he drops the toy and then remove it. He can only have the toy if he behaves.

If your dog is possessive over the bed or couch, don’t allow him on the furniture. If that is not an option, start training him to get off the area on command. Use treats as a reward.

Dominance: This aggression is a result of your dog wanting to be the top dog in the pack. They may display this behavior only to certain people. A variety of activities can trigger it. Usually, it is anything that the dog views as an attempt to control him.

Training will help solidify the fact that you are the pack leader. This type of aggression can be very dangerous, however. We advise you work with an animal behavior specialist instead of trying to treat it on your own.

Puppies

Most puppies act aggressive because they are afraid. If he feels cornered, he may snap. Boost your puppy’s confidence by using a lot of praise and treats.

Some puppies haven’t learned that biting is not acceptable yet. Simple training can help teach a young puppy that biting is never allowed.

If your puppy bites at your hands, simply yell “Ouch!” and take your hands away. If he continues to try to bite, remove yourself from the situation. Your puppy will soon

learn that biting means the end of playtime.



Dogs reach “social maturity” between one and three years of age. As your dog becomes more confident and sure of himself, you may first notice problems at this time. People are often confused when their well-behaved dog is “suddenly” having problems. If this happens, correct him as soon as possible. The longer a behavior goes on, the harder it is to correct.

Summary

Learn to read your dog’s behavior. If you see any signs of aggression, correct it as soon as possible. Be cautious, however. It is usually safest to work with your veterinarian and an animal behavioral specialist when dealing with aggression.

Unfortunately, you can never assume a dog is cured. Never let your guard down with a previously aggressive dog.