

## When Your Dog Becomes Aggressive

### Dog Aggression: What is it; What Causes it; and How to Fix it

A lunging, barking, growling, biting dog can be difficult to deal with, at best; a liability at worst.

#### What is Dog Aggression?

Dog aggression can take many forms. It is used as a natural form of communication for dogs. Genetics and environment both help to mold aggression in dogs.

Here are a few of the more typical ways aggression expresses itself:

**Resource Guarding:** This is when a dog has something that it would like to keep, such as a bone, toy, items that are not his, or even a person.

**Territorial Aggression:** This is the dog that barks to protect property that is perceived as his.

**Prey Aggression:** This becomes a problem when a dog views another dog or animal as prey. Smaller dogs, cats, and handheld animals often fall victim. The only abnormal version of prey aggression is when a dog mistakenly views a child or person as prey, but this is rare, thankfully.

**Dog Aggression:** Sometimes this is related to status or resources and causes dog fighting within a pack. More commonly, dogs use aggression towards unknown dogs.

**People Aggression:** This is aggression directed towards strangers or other people.

**Defense Aggression:** Aggression is also used to defend a dog from those perceived as threatening. (This can include owner directed aggression at times)

**Irritation Aggression:** Sensitive dogs will sometimes growl or respond aggressively to feeling irritated. An example is over-handling of a dog.

**Pain Aggression:** This is a dog that experiences pain and reacts with aggression.

**Fear Aggression:** Although fear and anxiety is the root of many kinds of aggression, this is when a dog bites out of fear.

#### What Causes Dog Aggression?

There are a few things that help to encourage aggression:

**Genetics:** Some dogs are simply predisposed to aggression through poor breeding. Only dogs with sound temperaments should produce puppies, but this is not always the case.

**Environment:** Lack of early and on-going socialization can be devastating for a dog. The majority of aggression comes from dogs that have never been given the necessary exposure to things. If your dog has never been around another dog since leaving his litter, certainly don't be surprised if he isn't friendly with every dog he meets.

**Training:** Lack of training is a huge culprit in a lot of cases. If dogs are not given consistent boundaries, they do not know what you expect from them. They must receive the proper training early on.

**Misinformation:** Sadly, many aggression cases are worsened by misinformation that owners receive from the internet, television, or people trying to be helpful. In the vast majority of cases, aggression is not an expression of dominance problems, and by using punitive or highly corrective training methods, you can increase a dog's aggression towards a handler. It has been proven that most dogs respond best to a primarily highly positive methodology.

### How to Fix an Aggressive Dog?

It's always better to try and prevent the onset of aggression, but this is not always possible. If your dog is already using aggression, there are a few things that must happen:

Schedule a medical evaluation, especially if the aggression has suddenly begun occurring. There are physical or medical reasons for a lot of aggression cases including arthritis, joint pain, hormonal imbalances (like low or low average thyroids), reactions to medications (like used for seizures), and other chemical imbalances in the brain.

Never go it alone with aggression, unless you are experienced. Any time a dog demonstrates he is willing to use aggression to solve a problem, immediately get assistance from a qualified professional. The Association of Pet Dog Trainers is a good starting point for your search.

Never correct a dog for his aggressive barking and growling. If you correct these vocalizations, your dog will learn to become silent, but he will still have the problem. What you will create is a silent biter, which is far more dangerous.

Don't turn to television for assistance. They are not a substitute for hands-on training. Aggression not handled correctly and swiftly can turn into a much larger problem. A good book for a better understanding is *Aggression in Dogs: Practical Management, Prevention, and Behaviour Modification* by Brenda Aloff.

Remember, aggression doesn't usually start overnight, and it takes patience, consistency, and understanding to work with it. It is not always possible to fully correct aggression, depending on its severity, but there is always room for improvement.