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Aggression – bite – behaviour.

Aggression can be taught.

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Understanding and correcting your dog's aggressive behaviour ... especially human aggression ... is of **utmost importance** and what to do when your puppy or dog bites.

The other side of the coin.

Without a doubt you do find dog owners that specifically want an aggressive dog and will go against any principles to train, tease and abuse the dog from puppy stage or the dog to be just that – aggressive for guard dog and some specifically human aggressive to the utmost's creating a "monster dog" – **well know that it is by choice.**

Raising your pup and understanding and correcting aggressive behaviour.

- * The most common concern and then a non-medical problem is that dog owners have ... is about dog to dog aggression and more so toward people.
- * There is enormous variation in aggressiveness or assertiveness among dogs and various dog breeds and also within a specific breed.
- * Experiences in puppyhood will influence aggressiveness as adult dogs, but genetics will also plays a key role in any form of aggression.
- * Owner temperament is also a very important factor – it has been said like owner like dog.
- * The type of breed attributes (specific breed attributes) determines the seriousness of this problem.

The dynamics of dog bites is not well understood by the public.

- * Few people realize that the dogs involved tend to be ordinary family pet dogs and not strays.
- * Also, more than two-thirds of dog bites happen to people who are acquainted with the dog and the specific attributes of the breed.
- * More than half the dog bites occur to the very young and the very old and almost half of all bites to children are on areas of the face – this is the height any APBT can contact with.

* Almost half of the claims made against homeowner's insurance policies are due to dog bites.

* Healthy well socialized mature dogs do not normally become aggressive.

* You can detect predisposition to aggressiveness in puppies as early as seven weeks of age. When picking a puppy "some" want have the most aggressive puppy (then dog aggressiveness is what they see at 6 – 8 weeks old).

* When you do detect signs that a puppy will be an aggressive biter or a fear biter (not visible at 6 – 8 weeks of age) knows that this particular puppy will need special TLC care, training and socializing from day one.

The early window of socialization – your responsibility as new owner of the puppy – not the breeder.

* To understand canine dysfunctional aggression you need to understand factors in play from when the dog was a puppy.

* Beginning at three weeks, when their eyes open, and this window lasting until fourteen weeks of age and of utmost importance after weaning from 8 – 18 weeks when the puppy is in the hands of the new owner.

* Puppies develop bonds and sensitivity to the people (early human interaction) and also to other animals in their life.

* 3 – 8 weeks at the breeder is the foundation of a good breeder and the most important time to socialize the puppies while eating playing interacting and early interaction with the breeder and those in contact with the 3 – 8 week old puppy ... humans littermates and other animals alike – this on-going from 6 – 18 week old.

* If a puppy is not exposed to positive interaction with humans, littermates other dogs and animals during this period (especially after weaning and in the hands of the new owner) they may (usually do) grow up without the skills they need to deal with them and aggressiveness will be the natural and only way out.

* If they are not exposed to people in a positive way (no teasing puppies just to see what they can do) during this period they may never be comfortable with people.

* The middle of this learning window (8 weeks) is the best time to purchase a puppy – then the new owner can still have a major input in the shaping of the puppies temperament and behavior when separated from their mother and other litter mates – usually not needing to fight for position of place at the feed pan.

* Puppies brought to their new home at ten to twelve weeks of age may be more fearful and slower to bond with their new family – especially if they lacked solid socializing from the breeder and was raised with the littermates.

If the socialization process is delayed until the puppy is twelve weeks old or older and not specifically socialized on a one to one basis after 8 weeks, the dog may never be relaxed or fully interactive with people or other dogs.

* This is particularly true if the puppy has a natural (or genetic) shyness and fearfulness or if it is very aggressive (generic) by nature.

If you do accept a puppy of this age be sure that you and your children handle it frequently and gently (no rough play) and not scold or speak to it harshly to it in the beginning when the puppy don't know you. Holding the puppy firmly and resisting the temptation to let go of it when it squirms to be released minimizes later aggression and dominant behaviour.

* A puppy's teenage years begin with it is sixteen weeks old and end when the pup is twelve to eighteen months old.

* Near the end of this period a hormonal surge causes male dogs become protective and territorial, they lift their leg to urinate and will challenge or probe to be dominant for position in the rank order and will be ready and dog aggressive ... especially with same sex other dogs.

* Midway during this time (+- 6 months old) females enter their first heat period.

* This will be the time that a normal dog begins to bark at strangers and guard the family and your property.

* This is also the time that some dogs begin to show objectionable aggressive behaviour.

Factors influencing aggression.

* Besides age at socialization, individual genetics and breed characteristics are major factors in determining any type of aggression.

* Guard dog types are bred to be more aggressive than the hunting and companion breeds.

* Terriers are bred as ratters and hunters of small animals (earth dogs) - and still retain their urge to snap.

* Bull dogs are bred as hunt and grab dogs.

* APBT's are bred to be game fighting dogs with strong athletic abilities and a placid human temperament and a huge prey drive.

* Hormones at play in intact male dogs and in females nursing puppies both increase aggressive behaviour.

* Excessive punishment, teasing, chaining and or allowed fighting can all contribute to problem behaviour.

* Realize that learned behaviour become part of your dog's future behavior – if that is what you want ... that is what you will create.

* Too much undeserved praise also confuses dogs and lead to frustration and aggression.

Types of aggression.

There are a number of types of aggression.

The most common forms are dominant and territorial aggression.

Some dogs show fearful, possessive or intra-sexual (male to male and female to female) aggression while others have a predatory form of this trait.

Some dogs have more than one type of aggression.

Dominance aggression.

The problem... Dominant aggressive dogs are overly protective of their possessions and status.

This is the most common form of aggression.

These dogs tend to snarl and growl or snap when a family member approaches them near their food bowl and their thought of personal possessions.

They will attack other dogs as well as cats and farm yard animals.

They often attempt to sexually mount people's legs.

When petted, groomed or detained in any way they will might growl and snap if not socialized to be handled from small.

They will often chase any moving thing – animals, cars, bicycles and humans – high prey drive driven.

They love to wander and escape and will ignore commands that they return or heel.

The first warning you will have that you have a dog prone to dominant aggression is when, as a small puppy, it growls when you approach it at its food dish or toy or approached by other littermates.

This is the earliest sign of dominance.

As this type of dog later on personality grows it will attempt to take charge of the house and the decision making process.

Dogs that have dominant type aggression are very confident in new situations.

Dominant aggressive dogs have very distinctive body language.

They stand with their heads erect and their ears pointed – ready for anything.

They carry their tails proudly and stare intently at strange people, animals, birds, pets – postman and unknown visitors.

They stand still facing the new individual and emit a low steady growl while they could also curl their lips and expose their teeth.

These dogs will mount other dogs until the second dog assumes a submissive posture, react or as in game bred dogs start a fight.

They demand to be the center of attention in all situations and must make the decision as to who does what and when.

They are oblivious to commands from their owner and never heel or look to their owner for advice or reassurance but conscious of you if you are the master or Alpha.

They often urine mark new areas.

Especially if still unneutered males.

* Dogs as part of the family see their humans as members of their pack and attempt to establish their place in the social hierarchy and might challenge more submissive family members, especially children.

* When dogs show dominant gestures like growling while guarding their food dish, and they aren't scolded for this behaviour, they inch up in dominance surpassing certain family members.

Subtle signs of dominance can go unnoticed.

Because we love them we explained these faults away until the dog finally bites a human who infringed on its alpha position.

Owners often do not realize what occurred and think the dog bit for **no reason.**

These dogs are often surrendered to animal shelters and are killed because their owners did not understand how aggressive behaviour comes about.

The solution:

* Passive, submissive family members often have insurmountable problems correcting aloud developed aggressive dogs.

* Obedience school might be very helpful with this form of aggression but you must be willing and able **to dominate the dog in question and might have to work with this dog during these sessions.**

* The first thing to do when trying to correct this problem is to change the peck order of the pack – in this case the hierarchy within your family.

* Dogs are always happier not to have to be pack leaders.

- * The domesticated house dog needs to be at the bottom of the pack.
- * **You** must become the pack leader / the master.
- * Husbands are often more assertive than their wives ***that is why many dogs obey the husband and not the wife.***

(Sometime the wives' personality and dominance ... supersede – I know some real dog-women.)

- * To gain control of your dog you need to dominate every aspect of the dog's life.

When you play tug of war with the pup or dog - do not let it end up with the ball or rope when you are finished.

- * Only let the dog feed/ eat if you give or allow the dog to eat.

- * Do not let dominant-prone dogs sleep in your bed or in the bedroom or sit on the lounge seat.

(That is the place for **you** not for the dog in question) reserve that space for your family (this your dog must understand).

- * Purchase a muzzle.

Put it on just after you feed dog and take it off and give treats.

Never feed these dogs from the table. Instead, crate / kennel or separate them during meals times and feed them after you have eaten.

General rules for preventing aggression.

Puppies:

Aggression ceases to be a problem when the pup becomes the lowest ranking member of the family.

Once a dog accepts this social status they are well on their way to becoming a welcome addition to the family.

The first step goes back to before you purchase or accept a pup.

Be sure that the breed and the individual puppy you choose are the right for your family and if it is an APBT it will be your responsibility and accountability.

Sit alone in a room / or yard with the entire litter and observe them for a while.

The more dominant pups will soon take charge of play activities and seek out strangers in the room.

The fearful pups will be the ones that sit by themselves in the corner looking downcast.

If you want a well behaved APBT as pet, do not choose the most dominant or the most fearful puppy.

Breeds such as German Shepherds, Akitas and Rottweilers are not good breeds for timid owners.

They need a family in which all members are willing to exert their authority.

Lap dogs are wonderful pets but they do not like rowdy active children. If you choose a shy puppy you must be willing to spend extra time coaxing its courage in new situations. Realize that it will never become a confident dog.

All puppies need to be handled gently, firmly and frequently between the ages of six and eighteen weeks.

They should be hand-fed by all members of the family and taught to accept food slowly and daintily without snapping or lunging.

They should be verbally scolded or affection denied when they jump up on people, chase running joggers and children or other animals, ride legs or growl for any reason.

Aggression-prone dogs should not be rough housed with, wrestled with or engaged in tug of war.

Instead of physically punishing them one should speak to with a sharp "No" when they break the rules and then deny them affection and interaction for ten minutes.

Only when they begin to understand what you consider objectionable actions reward them with a food treat.

Puppies learn good behaviour from other dogs.

It is good to expose them to well trained, people-friendly, non-aggressive dogs as playmates.

It is amazing how quickly good behaviour rubs off on misbehaving APBT dogs.

Adult dogs:

Once a dog has assumed a dominance aggressive temperament it can be very difficult and sometimes impossible to change his outlook – realize **you** have created your dog.

Through fear, the dog may allow one or two members of the family to dominate them but it may never be fully trustworthy around lower ranking members of the family and children.

Then it will be accepted that this type of dogs are unhappy in their roles and long to have more assertive owners.

Adult dogs should always receive rewards for good behaviour and be denied rewards for bad behaviour.

Normal dogs love to be petted and have their heads patted.

If you have a dog that is prone to aggression or bad behaviour of any kind always have your dog sit and heel before petting, going outside, or entering and exiting the car.

Dogs should be taught to sit calmly when you snap on their leash.

These may not seem like important things but they help define the rules that apply to all activities that you and your dog will share.

They also teach the dog that you set the rules.
You must be totally consistent in your praise or criticisms.

The dog will quickly learn that a given behaviour always predicts a given positive or negative response from you.

Never let the dog win a showdown or take charge. If you give an inch they will take a mile.

Praising and loving a dog spontaneously out of the blue confuses the dog.

It also elevates the dog's social status and can lead to dominance aggression.

It is much better to have the dog shake hands, sit or fetch and then give him all the praise you want.

You can try to alter triggers in your home that lead to outbursts of dominance aggression.

For instance, if a dog growls when you approach it on the sofa make the sofa off limits to the dog with no uncertain terms.

Rather than limit the amount of contact that the family member(s) who are having the biggest problem with the dog have, make that person(s) the primary care giver for the dog.

During this period have other family members ignore the dog.

Dogs do not dominate people on whom they must rely.
Always reward these dogs when they show signs of submission.
These signs include laying their ears back on their heads, licking their lips, rolling over, sitting, avoiding eye contact and curling in their tails.
Once a dog is displaying some of these activities begin slowly counter conditioning the dog to submission.
This is done by getting the dog to allow you to handle its paws, hold it in a sitting or lying position and holding its head still.
Make the dog lay down before it is allowed to fetch.
Praise the dog and give them a food treat when he cooperates and gradually increase the length of their lessons.

Dogs that are severely dominant aggressive often stubbornly resist change to their status in the family.

There are professional dog trainers who will attempt to modify your behaviour toward the dog and the dog's behaviour toward you.
But they are not always successful or they may only be moderately successful.

Rather than martyr you and your family to a long term, unhappy situation it is suggested that families in this situation find another home for this dog.

It is amazing how much better a dog's behaviour can be in a new home.

Fear biting dog aggression.

The problem:

These dogs are very uncertain and tentative in their actions.
They are sometimes wrongly called defensive - aggressive dogs.
When faced with new situations with people or dogs they avoid direct eye contact and assume a low submissive stance.

They stand with their ears flat against their heads and their tails tucked between their legs.

They bend their head and neck toward any individual that seeks their attention while they lick their lips.

They will often roll on their backs exposing their belly.

Their expression is one of profound worry and anticipation.

They are very fearful about being touched and shy away from being petted stroked or brushed.

At any instant they might snap and bite in fear.

They strike out silently like a snake, never locking their jaws – just snap - on another person or pet to show feelings.

They will often urinate and defecate in fear.

The Solution:

Most fear biting dogs *were genetically born shy.*

It is highly unusual for a shy puppy to be born from gregarious, confident parents.

One needs to do everything possible to build up these dog's sense of confidence.

Do this with verbal praise, petting and treats.

Enlist your family and friend in this activity.

In order not to get bitten, begin this process with a muzzled dog. Just remove the muzzle for the dog to eat.

Only feed the dog from your hands.

You can crate or kennel the dog and let the family or friends feed it when it gets very hungry.

If a shy dog comes to you of its own free will it will not bite unless a sudden movement or loud sound is made.

Sometimes these dogs are so shy that the food treat needs to be put on a long stick at first.

With the dog muzzled take them wherever you go to expose them to new people and situations.

Begin slowly – no more than the mall parking lot.

Try to calm and stroke, and talk to the dog as you go.

Take the dog wherever you go.

Keep the leash short and taut.

Calm and stroke the dog.

Obedience training is very helpful for dogs that are not too shy to go to class.

Consult with your vet ... A small dose of Acepromazine tranquilizer or equivalent is extremely helpful in starting these dogs in their education.

Valium seems to have little effect on dogs.

Some give Acepromazine at 0.38mg/pound.

You can pick it up at your veterinarians and give it in a food treat thirty minutes before lessons.

Territorially dog aggression.

The problem.

Fiercely guarding their home is common characteristic of dogs.

Dogs have an innate need to dominate their own real estate – that's why you have a dog in the first place.

As puppies grow to adult dogs they begin to regard the yard, the home and their car as their personal property.

Territorial aggression is what gets the mailman and the meter reader bitten – ha ha.

Territorial aggression is a prized attribute in guard dog breeds.

If you do not want an aggressive guard dog do not purchase these type of breeds – especially an APBT.

Some dogs readily learn to differentiate between welcome guests and intruders **but others do not.**

They are very good at sensing your attitude toward strangers.

If you are fearful, these dogs know it and will become protective.

The solution:

To control a territorial dog you must first dominate the dog as the MASTER and Alpha in the dogs yard.

In wolf packs an alpha-type individual leads the pack. In domestication you need to be that master and Alpha individual.

Becoming the Alpha is the first step in making the dog obedient to you – what you instruct goes with no uncertain terms.

You set the rules and you decide who is friend and who is foe.

The dog should look at you for advice when a stranger approaches.

Enlist some friends to help you by approaching the house when the dog is hungry and cautiously feeding it some treats.

Let your friends or willing strangers take the dog on short walks on a leash. Fence your yard so the limits of its territory is clear to the dog.

Predatory dog aggression.

The Problem:

Australian shepherds, healers, border collies, other herding dogs and high prey drive dogs like the APBT have an instinctive drive to chase and concur too worry and nip and overcome.

It takes a supreme effort on their part of the APBT not to apply their genetic talents to children of the family, other animals and especially other dogs as well.

The Solution:

Obedience training by every member of the family – especially the children helps correct this problem.

These dogs are basically loving.

They just have a very strong natural urge to boss.

This can be overcome if you make the dog aware that it is a problem.

A sharp reprimand and a “no” is usually sufficient.

You have to occasionally remind them of the rules.

Dogs will usually not express this behaviour when they are on a short leash and in control of the owner.

New developments:

A recent issue of Veterinary Practice News mentions studies on aggression in dogs that responded to supplementation with 5-hydroxytryptophan or 5-HTP as well as to 5-HTP given in conjunction with a low protein diet.

This amino acid derivative of **tryptophan** is important in the production of serotonin in the brain.

Brain serotonin levels have been linked to mood, aggression and obsessive-compulsive behaviour, in humans, dogs and primates.

Nutraceutical grade 5-HTP is available online.

A dose was not given.

You might also consider a trial period on a home cooked, all meat diet similar to this one.