

# AGGRESSION TO DOGS

## REDUCING & MANAGING DOG AGGRESSION TOWARDS OTHER DOGS

The information in this fact sheet is for mild dog-dog aggression only. Serious dog aggression resulting in injury to a person, another dog or companion animal requires the help of a veterinarian, qualified dog trainer or behaviourist.

### RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM

It is important to understand that between the age of 1 and 3 most dogs will play less, become more selective about who they play with and become less tolerant of forward behavior from other dogs.

This is completely normal; as long as the dog is simply snarking off the other dog. Snarking is a dog's way of saying leave me alone or go away.

In addition most dog fights or scuffles result in no injury at all. They can look and sound ferocious but they are completely normal and are more like an argument than an assault.

### The 3 main reasons for dog-dog reactivity are:

- 1) On leash reactivity- due to barrier frustration
- 2) Fear of other dogs
- 3) Resource Guarding

### Warning signs

Are the dog's way of letting another dog know that they are uncomfortable. **Never punish a warning sign.**

- Staring directly at the other animal
- Whining, barking or growling
- Snapping or biting
- Raised hackles
- Ears pointing forwards
- Straining against the leash to reach the other animal
- Freezing
- A stiff tail held up high may be wagging (not always a friendly sign)

### TRAINING OPTIONS

- 1) **On Leash reactivity:** is most often is due to frustration. The dog really wants to say hello to another dog but is not given access to the other dog. The resulting frustration can look alarming as the dog may bark, lunge or even growl when he sees another dog.

The way to determine if this is frustration motivated or actual aggression is to determine if the dog plays well off leash. It's not uncommon for dogs to play fine when they're off leash but bark and lunge at another dog when they're on leash.

These dogs benefit from regular access to off leash play. Train them to sit or watch the handler instead of going off on every dog they see.

If off leash history is unknown or you know your dog is not good with other dogs when off leash then the best thing to do is show the dog that the presence of other dogs predict fantastic things. A qualified trainer who uses positive reinforcement and force free techniques can help with this.

- 2) **Fear of other dogs:** fear of other dogs may happen because of inadequate socialization, genetics or a bad experience with another dog. *Never punish a fearful dog.* Punishing a fearful dog can make the fear worse. Instead, show them that other dogs predict fantastic things for them.

If your dog is fearful of other dogs the way to work on this is to show him that other dogs predict fantastic things (like yummy treats)

**This involves gradually reducing the distance between him and another dogs.**

- Take your dog an area where he will see another dog but they are far enough away that he is completely relaxed.
- Everytime he notices the dog pause for 2 seconds and then feed him a few pieces of treat
- Slowly reduce the distance between your dog and the other dog, make sure that he does not appear worried or anxious. Repeat as above by giving him pieces of his treat a few seconds after he notices the dog.
- The goal is for his emotional state to change from fear to Yippee because other dogs predict treats.
- Feed him treats every time he sees another dog even if he is barking and lunging at the other dog.

- 3) **Resource guarding:** it is perfectly normal for a dog to protect his food, toys, location or even human from other dogs. This can manifest as snarling, growling, and freezing, snapping or biting when another dog approaches him when he is eating, chewing on a toy or laying on the couch. In the majority of cases, there is no injury at all and nothing needs to be done. If resource guarding results in injury to one dog then hire a qualified trainer who uses positive reinforcement and force free techniques to help you.

Management can help to minimize the issue by feeding or giving food toys to each dog in a separate room.

Muzzle training is highly recommended if your dog has caused injury to another dog. This will prevent the possibility of another injury and give you peace of mind.

#### **FEMALE - FEMALE HOUSEMATE AGGRESSION**

Occasionally two females living in a home will have increasingly worse fights with injury as time goes on. This often begins when one of the two female dogs reaches social maturity. In these cases re-homing one of the dogs is often the best solution.

#### **VETERINARY HELP**

Talk to your veterinarian if your dog is fearful as they may feel medication will help and provide you with a behaviour modification plan.

#### **CAUTIONS/REMEMBER**

Dog aggression is a serious problem. It is likely that you will need professional help. Start by speaking with your veterinarian and select a trainer that understands the underlying emotional factors that are often at the source of dog/dog aggression (fear). Never use pain or physical punishment to control aggression as this can worsen both the fear and the aggression.

Never attempt to separate dogs that are fighting by grabbing them as this could result in a redirected bite.