

When Dogs Talk

FALL 2011

TEACHING DOGS AND TRAINING PEOPLE FOR OVER 25 YEARS!

ISSUE THREE



Treat your dog like a part of the family, not just a member of the pack!

The Newsletter for Dog Lovers

Autumn is all about change.

Leaves, schedules, activities...you name it, fall changes it.

All summer long, most dogs enjoy a looser schedule with plenty of outside time. Now, days are shorter, temperatures are cooler and kids are busier, so isolation increases. Frantic back-to-school activity can ratchet up the overall household anxiety level, so dogs may start to act out, hoping for attention in their own dog-like way.

If you're raising dogs and kids together and find yourself in this boat, follow this advice:

The basics. Don't forget to [feed your dog](#), let him out to potty and to check the water bowl.

Exercise, exercise, exercise. [A tired dog makes for a happy family.](#)

Leash walk your dog around the house during morning routines; it's a great way to tire him out and focus his attention on you.

Creative Isolation. When you leave the house, confine your dog to small area that is free from temptations. If your dog is frustrated, fearful or anxious, he will express his discomfort by barking, chewing or eliminating.

If you do come home to destruction, do not yell at your dog — you will make the situation worse by increasing his fear of isolation. If the destruction cycle continues, hire a

professional to analyze and help you develop permanent solutions.

And speaking of back to school, fall is a great time to enroll in a group dog training class. Find a class in your area and sign up today!

Excerpted from my column, [Ask The Dog Trainer](#) on [Patch.com/Bedford-Katonah](#)



Special Edition:
Managing Dog Aggression

Recognizing Aggression

Dogs do not become aggressive overnight. There are always signs—sometimes subtle—of a dog's growing use of aggression to control his environment. Loving dog owners often miss the cues until the situation becomes explosive.

A reactive dog is not necessarily “nasty” all of the time. A fearful or under-socialized dog will often use aggression to defend itself when feeling overwhelmed. Assertiveness is simply one of many reactions and aggression is only one the behaviors they may utilize to control others in their environment. Signs that your dog may be developing aggressive tendencies include:

- An over-zealous, pushy greeting ritual with friends or strangers
- Exaggerated, fearful reactions to new people and unfamiliar stimuli
- A pronounced and unyielding demand for affection
- Prolonged stare: used in an attempt to control family members
- Raised hackles
- Growling
- Bared teeth
- Arched body
- Stiff walk
- Tail lifted over the back or tucked under the legs
- Rapid tail wagging: A fast-moving tail can indicate panic (tucked low) or imminent attack (raised high over the back).
- Slow sweep tail wagging: This wag indicates a dog is “reading” a situation.
- Ears pricked forward ears or lowered back

Are these dogs mean? No. A dog who displays assertive or self-activated behavior is trying to manage his environment. If the pack leader (you) is not leading, these dogs will act out. Please [read more about recognizing aggression in dogs](#).



As a dog reaches maturity (8 months to 3 years), puppy passivity is left behind and more assertive behaviors develop. If these behaviors are not curbed or redirected, assertiveness can lead to aggression. Fortunately, only a small percentage of fearful, defensive or reactive dogs become dangerous. Usually, out-of-control aggression can be traced to genetic or physiological sources, inadequate nurturing, lack of socialization or confrontational handling.

Types of Aggression

Dogs become aggressive for different reasons. An injured or sick dog can be forgiven a snap or a growl but a dog who bites the mail carrier or lunges when pushed off the couch is another story. Here are the most [common forms of canine aggression](#):

Dominance—The Control Freak. These dogs use aggression to control other pack members or move up the hierarchical ladder. This type of aggression is sometimes seen in families, especially when the adult/s use dominance to control behavior. These dogs may pick on the more vulnerable pack members, including children. These dogs need a well-orchestrated training program that involves all family members so the dog learns to respect everyone.

Possessive Aggression—Mr. AllMine. Dogs from large litters, those living in or raised in multi-pet environments or dogs who have a personality or breed propensity for hoarding may guard resources like sleeping spots, food or toys.

Territorial Aggression—The Yard Guard. Defenders of home, yard and all points in between, these dogs will bark at every passing stranger. With each successful defense, the behavior is reinforced. When someone enters the house, warnings may escalate. It's important to socialize these dogs and restrict outdoor freedom until they're trained.

Predatory Aggression—The Misplaced Hunter. Most dogs enjoy the thrill of the chase. Dogs with predatory aggression, however, take the chase too far, moving into the capture phase. These dogs may bite bikers, joggers or fast-moving children or animals. Play games that help this dog express his predatory impulses without endangering prey-like pets and kids. Employ a conditioning program to discourage misplaced excitement.

Fear-Based Aggression—The Scaredy Dog. This is the most common source of aggression towards strangers. A lack of early socialization leaves these dogs fearful and stressed. Often, they are not assertive but furtive, using aggression to make others Just-Go-Away. Careful socialization and reward-based obedience can reduce their fears and improve behavior.

A skilled trainer will identify the type of aggression your dog is showing, work with you to identify the triggers and design a multi-faceted plan (often with your veterinarian) to manage and rehabilitate your dog.

Usually, canine aggression can be managed but it cannot always be “cured.” Ultimately, you are responsible for the safety of your dog and the people he comes in contact with.

Aggression Tips

People Permission

Do not approach a person's dog without permission. Use a little species transference here—you wouldn't race up and hug a total stranger or their children so please extend the same courtesy to their dog.

Pooch Permission

Do not approach a dog without the dog's permission. Dogs don't speak in words, but believe me...they've got plenty to say. Look at the eyes, ears and tail. If any or all are stretched to an extreme—either pulled back (indicating caution and emotional stress) or pressed forward (high alert or defensiveness)—do not approach.

Control Your Dog

If your dog is on a leash, don't let her run up to another dog uninvited. The strain of a leash can pull her body into an unintentionally defensive pose, inviting a similar reaction in other dogs. Your happy, friendly dog, rushing forward with her head high may send the wrong message. Keep your dog by your side unless you've gotten permission to approach from the other dog's owner and you're sure the dog is safe.

Unknown, Unleashed Dogs

Do not approach an off-leash dog. If the dog appears lost or frightened or you are concerned that it may be hit by a car, call the police. If you can safely slow traffic, do so, then make the call.

Don't Butt In

Never interrupt someone else's dog while he is eating, sleeping or chewing a bone. While this dog may be safe with his own family, he may not tolerate your interruption.

The Bottom Line

Think of a dog like a pre-verbal child who lives in the moment and is forever curious but a bit unpredictable. Be patient and respectful, offering affection only if they are receptive and responsive to you. Learn more about dog aggression at WhenDogsTalk.com.

Finding Help



I approach Rusty with a cup of treats. After patiently exchanging treats for the bone, Rusty begins to welcome my approach.

If your dog is showing aggression, a [well-planned program of obedience training and behavior modification](#) can help.

It's important to take action when assertive behaviors appear. Look for defensive, fearful or reactive responses. A dog may stare, growl or show teeth. A stiff body posture, raised hackles and a raised, slow tail sweep are warning signs, too. Dogs may be protective of food or objects, snap or growl when pushed or handled or chase fast-moving objects.

Contact a qualified trainer or behaviorist if your dog is showing any of these signs. Ask the following questions before making your decision:

- How much experience do you have dealing with aggression?
- What techniques do you use?
- Have you written or lectured on the subject?

- Do you have client or veterinary references?

Some forms of aggression respond well to medication. Find an experienced trainer willing to work with your veterinarian.

There are many ways to handle aggression. A reputable trainer should never promise a sure-fire "cure" for your dog's condition. There are no guaranteed, permanent fixes but many dogs can be safely managed and controlled.

Avoid trainers who use dominance to control aggression. While a highly skilled handler may be able to restrain an aggressive dog, few dog owners can do so safely.



Find a trainer who will identify the type of aggression your dog is showing, work with you to identify the triggers and design a multi-faceted plan to manage and rehabilitate your dog.

Prevent Dog Aggression

Early Intervention is Key

Don't panic if your puppy occasionally growls at you in play, barks at the mailman or protects her food bowl. These are very common behavioral problems. But left unchecked, these behaviors can escalate.

For young dogs and puppies, an ounce of prevention—in the form of a puppy training program—is worth a pound of cure. Use the following exercises to help your puppy redirect frustration and look to you for direction. Learn more at WhenDogsTalk.com.

- **Play Good Games.** Games should focus your dog's attention on you. Play [interactive games](#) to encourage your dog to look to and follow you. Avoid confrontational activities like tug-of-war, chasing and wrestling.
- **Teach Basic Manners.** "Sit" is the canine equivalent of "please." Your dog should make butt-to-floor contact before getting dinner, treats or a pat on the head.
- **Be the One to Watch.** Exercise authority at all passageways. Teach your dog to "Wait" before going outside and stand "Back" when the door is opening. Use a [Teaching Lead](#) to reinforce door manners.
- **Encourage Sharing.** Dogs are not natural-born sharers. Teach this skill by exchanging toys or food for treats.
- **People First!** Create a house rule: dogs yield to people. Your dog should stand aside when you pass and sit at the edge of interactions—not smack in the middle. To reinforce this rule, create [stations](#) in every room you share with your dog.
- **Go to School.** Enroll your dog in a basic training class to learn simple-but-important directions like "stay," "off" and "come." Dogs that attend obedience class are less likely to bite.
- **Bite Proofing Lecture.** Reduce the likelihood of dog bites by attending a "bite proofing" class.

Learn With Sarah

Group classes at Sun Meadow Farm. I offer [small group classes to puppies, dogs and people of all ages](#). Classes for every age and ability, including puppy kindergarten, beginner level, advanced off-leash, pet therapy preparation and intro to agility. For more information, visit WhenDogsTalk-Lessons.com. Sign up online or phone!

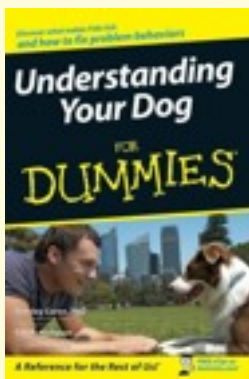


One-on-One Consultations. I offer a variety of [private instruction packages for dogs and puppies of all ages](#). Ninety-minute sessions can be paired with one-hour follow-up sessions and money-saving, training packages are available too.

Phone Consultations. It's the [canine help hotline: fast, phone-based answers](#) to common behavior problems and questions.



Lectures. I am available for [lectures, talks and interactive presentations](#) for your school, group, company or service organization.



Sarah has written 9 bestselling dog training books including [Understanding Your Dog For Dummies](#).

About Sarah

When dogs talk, dog trainer Sarah Hodgson listens. An internationally known canine behavior expert, Sarah Hodgson has been New York and Connecticut's favorite dog trainer for over 25 years.

Sarah teaches you and your dog to communicate. Her unique methods have helped thousand of dogs and people figure each other out—quickly, easily and painlessly—without shock collars, isolation or intimidation.

Author of nine best-selling dog-training manuals, Sarah has worked closely with and co-written a book with world renowned dog behaviorist and author Stanley Coren, PhD. His extensive knowledge has helped shape her understanding of aggressive dog behavior.

For Westchester and Fairfield county pet owners, Sarah offers private dog training lessons, group dog training classes and dog care lectures.