

HOW TO BE THE LEADER YOUR DOG IS LOOKING FOR ... NATURALLY

Why dogs attack and the part you play ...

Hello, my name is Sharon Bolt and I am the founder of "Good Dogs!"

Welcome to this video today.

During the video I am going to talk about how to integrate dogs that are dog aggressive.

We hear so much about dog aggression today and I know if you are an owner who has a dog that is aggressive then going out it is a time of fear and dread.

I will cover lots of different areas about this today and I have got videos to back up the points that I will make in order to help you with this.

With dog aggression there are two sections: there are the dogs that are aggressive and there is the part the owners play!

You might be thinking, "What do you mean 'the part I play'?" My dog is aggressive not me!" I am going to go into that. There is a part that we play where we can add fuel to the fire, so I am going to cover that.

There are actually three types of dog aggression with other dogs. One is dominant aggression: these are the dogs that charge at other dogs, these dogs are dominant and often have an intention to do damage. There is also fear aggression, these are the dogs that if you get too close they growl or snap and move backwards. It is very much the 'attack before being attacked syndrome'. There is also the type of dog that gives the 'get off' warning, which is often seen as aggression. These are dogs that snap in a way that tells the other dogs to get away and get off.

Bear in mind, dogs do not speak in the same way that we do, their communication is growling and barking. If you have a dog that does this then they are saying to other dogs, "No. Get off. I do not like that."

Let us go on to see why aggression happens and why most dogs only attack some dogs and not others.

Many dog owners say, "It is not every dog that my dog attacks, why is that?" The reason is that when two dogs come together or as they approach, they are non-verbally communicating to each other. It is all about body language, it is all about 'eye balling', it is all about the submissive signals and the dominant signals that they are giving each other. In most instances that will determine if there will be a fight or not.

Size can also be a factor here. Some small dogs can become defensive when other dogs are too big. Also, some bigger dogs can assert their dominance because of their height, as height can be seen as dominant and superior in the world of dogs. Also, it could be that a big dog has been attacked by a small dog before or vice versa, so we have association to consider here too.

Also, if you have two equally confident dogs giving off really strong challenging signals such as 'eye balling' and upright body language, where their heads are held high without one looking away and submitting, then we are very likely going to have some problems. If on the other hand one dog gives calming signals then the meeting is unlikely to end in a fight.

There is another reason why some dogs only attack certain dogs.

It can be that some dogs only attack 'entire' males, these are the dogs that have not been castrated so they have got plenty of testosterone and can sometimes (but not always) give off strong challenging signals because of this.

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However, there is a bit more that I am going to add to the mix here. We, the owners, can have 'past history association'. This happens when a particular breed of dog has attacked our dog and we start to create an association around that particular breed and expect that all dogs of that breed are aggressive.

The other reason why some dogs are 'picked on' and others are not is that some dogs are so submissive that some more wilful dogs take advantage of that, because it can be seen as weakness. Also, as eye 'language' is so important, if you have a dog that has hair that covers their eyes it is important that you have their hair cut, or put it back in a band or something so that other dogs can see their eyes.

It does not matter as long as their eyes are visible, because dogs that do not show their eyes can cause tension in other dogs and consequently become a target. It is important that other dogs can see their eyes.

This is the reason why some dogs pick on black dogs because their eyes are not clearly visible. If you have a dog that has a black head or is completely black then their eyes blend in with their head and/or body and other dogs are not clear what your dog is communicating. That is the reason why some dogs only pick on black dogs because of the tension that is created when the eyes are not visibly seen.

To help you recognize what is going on, I am going to go through what submissive and dominant signals look like. By dominant, I mean the strong challenging signals.

Let us start with the submissive signals first.

These can be identified by a lowered body posture, which could also mean sitting or lying down. The ears are back and the eyes are small. The tail is low but not tucked under, because that indicates fear rather than just submissive signals, and they will be looking away. Looking away could mean with their eyes, sometimes they look away with their whole head and sometimes they use their whole body. These signals communicate, "I do not want any trouble. I am submitting here. I am not challenging".

On the other hand, the more dominant signal is the large confident body posture. It is the raised head and raised ears, large staring eyes, there is a real glare and fixation in the eyes. They have curled raised lips and the tail is upright, the whole body language is upright. These are the more dominant signals for you to look out for.

Should your dog be giving off these signals or you see another dog coming towards you in this manner then you know that there are some challenging signals that are being communicated between the two dogs.

People ask me, "Should I muzzle my dog? What are the benefits of muzzling? Is this the right thing to do?"

There are two parts to my answer; one part is that in most instances muzzling a dog causes them to submit more. It causes them to calm down because the option to bite is no longer there. I am not suggesting this as a long term solution, but initially while you are training your dog it can be beneficial.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is that when you muzzle your dog it causes YOU to relax. If muzzling causes you to feel more confident when you are out and when other dogs approach, if it causes you to feel that your walk is much better and you are not dreading what might go wrong, then absolutely the muzzle is worth its weight in gold.

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As I said earlier, this is for an interim period, I will be going through more things that you can do to help your dog integrate with other dogs, but while you do the training a muzzle can be extremely beneficial.

Most dogs do not like wearing a muzzle, in this case do some frequent repetitions at home so they do not associate that the muzzle means they have been naughty. When you put the muzzle on, you give some affection. You take it off and you give affection and a treat and keep repeating. That is a good way of getting your dog use to the muzzle.

I have uploaded some videos for you to watch where I talk about muzzling a dog and different methods that you can use if your dog is aggressive.

The vital thing to get right first when dealing with dog aggression is to get your dog to walk by your side.

All the time your dog is walking in front or ahead of you they are leading the walk and you are the follower. They are out in front doing what they think they should do, protecting you, protecting and keeping other dogs away. So until you have established your higher ranking position when you are outside, which you do by getting your dog to walk by your side first, until you have done that, it is likely to be an uphill struggle for you.

You must get the lead work right first. When you have achieved that then you go onto the next step.

You will see this in the video that I have uploaded; you must use one or more dogs that are submissive. You do not want dogs that are going to give challenging signals, if you have got a dog there that is giving those signals then this is not a good training session.

It needs to be with dogs that are giving submissive signals and you will see from the videos that I have uploaded that they are very submissive dogs, who are giving all the right signals. They are looking away, they are not 'eye balling', they are turning their backs away and they are turning their heads away. These are the types of dogs that you need in order to help your dog integrate.

You need an open space in order to do the training such as a park. You lead your dog gradually towards the other dog(s) rather than your dog pulling you. Again, you have got to establish a position where you are the one that is in charge. You are leading your dog, your dog is not pulling you towards the other dog(s).

The moment that your dog starts to pull or lunge towards the dog(s) you turn and walk in the other direction or you give a quick jerk of the lead to get their attention and then walk away. You will only come close to the other dog(s) when your dog is calm and not when they are giving signals that they may attack.

As I said earlier, do watch the videos because I show you what to do in order to put this in place and how to walk dogs next to each other as a pack. This starts off with two humans in the inside and two dogs on the outside, so your dog starts to get used to being around other dogs and being in a calm state of mind.

I am sure there is no need to say that you would only allow your dog to smell the other dog when your dog is calm and always curve from the side and never let them greet head on. If you watch dogs that are off the lead when down the park, they curve to greet and they smell at the rear end, they do not go head to head. When you are at a stage where you feel confident that your dog is okay to greet, then you need to create a curve in order for your dog to do so.

If you meet another dog where it is quite narrow, if it is possible cross over so that you are creating a wide curve which is important, curve as much as you can. If you are on a footpath and no car is coming, then curve into the road and walk past.

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Do not try and walk your dog along a walkway that is really narrow because you are potentially setting up a confrontational situation with a head to head greeting and 'eye balling', you need somewhere that has space.

If it is not possible for you to cross over then the very least you need to do is stand back and let the other dog pass with your dog to the side of you. Let the other dog pass and then start walking as soon as they do so.

If I can give you any word of advice when working with dog aggression it would be to not go down any narrow lanes where there is no room for you to manoeuvre if another dog comes towards you.

Do not go to places where you are fearful that 'out of the blue' someone may just suddenly appear and there is nothing that you can do. It is not a good situation to set up, you have got to give yourself space and you have got to feel comfortable. If you are dreading what could go wrong by walking down a particular pathway, then what we fear and dread usually happens. I really would not do that. Go the long way round or find somewhere else where you can walk.

There are three things to remember about the part that you play; one is that dogs read us by what we think and feel and not so much about our words.

Secondly dogs live in the present moment, which means they will move on very quickly, so we need to be a strong presence and give them the right communication.

And thirdly what we fear and dread might happen, usually does. It is really important that we give the right messages as this is the part that we play, if we have tension then it is picked up by our dogs. If we fear a situation going wrong, that is usually our experience, so it is really worth taking the time to change our mind-sets.

Now, I am going to talk about what happens if your dog is attacked.

If you have been out for a walk and your dog was attacked by another dog this is what happens for them; because they live in the present moment they do not sit there and plot revenge, they do not go out there thinking, "I am going to get my own back on that dog", they do not call dog owners irresponsible and they do not tell their family and friends! They just do not relive the incident winding themselves up and feeling sorry for themselves, they move on straight away.

It is a bit different for us, isn't it? As dog owners, we relive the situation, we feel sorry for our dog. Feeling sorry for our dog is weakness from their perspective, they think, "What is that all about?" They do not really get it, it makes them feel very uncomfortable. The more distressed we feel, the more they think that something is wrong, but they do not think it was because they were attacked earlier. We do that, they do not have that type of mind-set.

If our dog has been attacked it is very easy for us to start playing out a story about how there are so many irresponsible dog owners out there. Please remember, what we fear and dread and what we focus on usually happens, so we start to attract more irresponsible dog owners. Are they out there? Yes, there are people that just do not know what to do and they are in a situation where they have no control with their dogs and are out of their depth. Yes, these people are out there, so what I am saying is to not start a story about irresponsible dog owners as what we fear and dread usually happens and we will attract more of them!

When our dog has been attacked we start being tense on the walk, we dread what might go wrong. We create an association with that breed of dog or an 'entire' dog, if that was the type of dog who attacked. Dogs can associate with a breed of dog too but we also play a part in a very big way. We want to be a strong presence for our dogs and to create an environment where they can move on. In order to do this we need to let go of our association first.

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Let us go to a scenario where your dog has attacked another dog.

I know it is most dog owners' worst nightmare because it is shocking and embarrassing. We feel stressed, we feel very responsible, however, your dog is not sitting there thinking, "I should not have done that". People say, "My dog knows that they did wrong", they know that you are really upset, that is what they are picking up on. They do not think, "I bit or attacked that dog and I now feel bad about that". No, they move on straight away, it is not a problem for them.

Dogs feel quite confused that they are being told off. It is really an indication to us as the dog owner that we need to do some work with them, we need to do some training with them.

If our dog has attacked we start to dread going out. We fear that they will do some real damage next time and we feel anxious and out of control. We no longer enjoy our walks and we feel nervous when approaching other dogs or when other dogs come close.

The point to remember here is that when we are nervous or anxious it transmits down the lead like an electric current, which causes your dog to become tense and will further fuel his aggressive manner. As I keep saying, when we dread something happening, it usually does and more frequently.

So what can you do? Let us go through some solutions.

The most important point to remember is to never do anything that you believe will have a potential detrimental outcome. Never put yourself in situation where you are hoping for the best and that it might turn out okay.

First of all spend time building your confidence and give yourself time to tell a different story. By that I mean, before you go out think about the good walks you have had, start focusing on the good points about your dog, rather than focusing on the times that have gone wrong. There are usually one or two things that we would like to change with our dogs and that is what we focus on, that is what we talk about, that is what our whole conversation is about.

There will often be eight or nine things that are really good about our dog that we do not give any attention to. What I am encouraging you do is to focus more on what is going right. You are already taking responsibility by doing the training with your dog regarding the aggression, do not add more fuel to the fire by condemning them and fearing that things will go dreadfully wrong.

Spend time first of all telling yourself a different story. What this means, as I have said before, is that you do not let your dog off hoping that they will not attack. If there is another dog that is in the vicinity you keep your dog on the lead. Also, when a dog comes towards you avoid nervously saying, "Be nice, be nice, be nice".

When I am walking my two dogs on the lead and another dog owner says to their dog, "Be nice, be nice, be nice", I move on really quickly! Because the "be nice" is said with a lot of tension, they are usually dreading that their dog might attack, so I am out of there!

Let us go on to what you can do to help integrate your dog with other dogs.

One way is to walk with other dog walkers who have submissive dogs. There may be other dog walkers who are happy for you to walk with them in order to help you and your dog, as long as you keep your dog on the lead. As I said earlier, you do need to find submissive dogs and not people with dogs that are going to retaliate.

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Also, what you could do is to find a professional dog walker who walks other dogs that are submissive, you could ask if you could join them on the walk. You will keep your dog on the lead, so you are being accountable for what is taking place, but that is an option if you can find a professional dog walker that could offer that to you.

You could also employ the services of a good dog walker to socialize your dog without you. The great thing with dog walkers, providing they are good at what they do, is that they do not have the 'aggression story', they do not have the emotional upset about what has happened in the past. They have no experience of the attacks that have happened, they are able to detach from the situation and expect better from your dog.

It is amazing how many people that I go to see who have dogs that are dog aggressive that say when their dog is with the dog walker they are not aggressive at all. This is the reason why, they are able to detach from the situation, they are able to expect differently from the dog and that is what I am encouraging you to do.

It is not an overnight change but keep going and keep practising as this will put you in the right direction. Socialize your dog with as many calm and subservient dogs as possible, because they will help balance them so much better than any of us can as humans.

Of course, if you are concerned about your dog and aggression, please do employ the services of a good dog behaviour expert.

Just as a reminder, please do not put your dog in a situation too soon where they might attack and disappoint you. You need to spend time building your confidence first. Initially do not go to places where they have previously attacked or they are likely to attack. You need to spend time doing some training and integrating first. Give you and your dog time to act and think differently and wait until you feel more confident and not so apprehensive.

Please remember that your tension and uncertainty will add fuel to the fire, so do spend time making the changes and doing the training.

I want to conclude by talking about why some dogs are aggressive on the lead and not off the lead. It is because when dogs are in a situation they are not quite sure of, their first choice is flight, they choose to run. Their second choice is to freeze, which can sometimes include growling and the last option they usually choose is to fight.

The point is, when your dog is on the lead and they want to run because they do not feel confident or happy in a situation they cannot do so because the lead is stopping them, therefore their remaining options are to freeze or fight.

Please do watch the videos that I have uploaded because I show you how to integrate dogs that are aggressive and demonstrate what to do.

Thank you very much for joining me on this video and I look forward to speaking to you again soon.

Goodbye

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