



# Stop Dog Aggression Toward Other Dogs

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It is always a bit strange to me that we expect our dogs to be social butterflies. People often get very embarrassed when their dog barks at another dog, growls, or vocalizes in any way.

Indeed it is more natural for dogs to be wary of other dogs. After all, when a wolf pack sees a new wolf in their territory, they will chase him away. In fact, wolves are very protective of their territory, and dogs can be as well, unless they are trained otherwise.

Even then, we should not expect our dogs to like all other dogs.

Some dogs just do not get along. Other dogs may get along when they are young and start showing dog to dog aggression once they have matured. Just like us, dogs grow up and change based on their experiences, training, relationships with others, and their natural temperaments.

Even dogs that live together and seem to get along very well may sometimes exhibit aggression with each other.

## **Why does a dog show aggression to another dog?**

- **Is this something that we can help our dog with?**
- **How do we stop dog to dog aggression?**

## **Where?**

Often, it seems like dog to dog aggression comes out of nowhere.

One day our dog is best friends with the neighbor's dog, and the next day they are in a no-holds-barred fight.

Where does the aggression come from? How can best friends suddenly turn into bitter enemies?

Although it may seem to us that our dogs start fighting for apparently no reason, that is frequently not the case. There is usually a reason or a trigger event that sets off the aggression. In addition, dogs don't usually launch into an all-out

aggressive attack of another dog without some initial warning signals.

In fact, dogs usually start communicating with each other from afar through body language and some vocalizations.

## **The Butt Sniff**

My Shiba Inu can sometimes get aggressive with other dogs. In particular, he does not like new dogs coming over to sniff his butt. Butt sniffing requires a fair amount of trust because the dog is allowing someone he does not know to put their teeth very near to his sensitive areas, and far away from his own teeth. The dog doing the sniffing could easily attack and seriously wound the other dog before he could even respond.

When meeting another dog, my Shiba usually has loose body posture until the other dog starts to approach his butt region. Then ...

He starts tensing up and shows the other dog that he is uncomfortable with that butt action.

If the other dog does not back-off, Shiba will usually lift his lip and start a soft growl.

If the other dog still does not back-off, Shiba will quickly turn around and air snap.

If the other dog still does not back-off, a fight may occur.

Since we do not speak dog, we often miss all of this useful information. Instead, all we hear is the bark or the growl. We interpret this as dog aggression, get embarrassed, and start punishing our dog for actually doing all the right things.

My Shiba gave many warnings to both me and the other dog, and it is only after we ignored all of his warnings that he contemplated using his teeth.

If we keep correcting our dog for giving warning signals and properly communicating his unease, he may decide to skip

all the middle steps and go straight into an attack the next time he meets another dog.

## Why?

Dog to dog aggression can be triggered by a wide variety of stimuli. Furthermore, whether a particular trigger causes an escalation into aggression also depends on the current mood of the dogs, energy levels, and other surrounding context.

### Two common triggers:

- **Competition over resources.**
- **Self-defense from a perceived threat.**

Dog fights frequently occur over food, toys, territory, or reproductive rights. That is why it is against the rules to bring a bitch in heat to a public dog park. This can very easily start a fight among the male dogs as they compete for rights over the female. Dogs may also fight to claim food and territory.

For example, both my dogs get along very well. They even have their meals together. However, when I give them a high priority item, like a bully stick, I separate them. This lets them work on their bully sticks in peace, without having to worry about it getting stolen. My Shiba Inu is a big time scamp and he really likes stealing things just for the hell of it. If he tries to steal my Siberian Husky's bully stick, that might trigger a fight.

**Note—what causes an aggressive episode is highly contextual.** For example, my dogs can eat together without any problems because to them, the regular food is not worth fighting over. However, if they were both really hungry, then it may be a totally different situation.

In the butt-sniff case, my dog was trying to protect himself from a perceived threat, i.e., the other dog placing his teeth close to my dog's sensitive parts. What is perceived as a threat will be different for each individual dog. Therefore, it is important to carefully observe our dog and listen to what he has to say. If we can identify his aggression triggers, then we can start to help him get over them.

## Aggression and Dominance

A trigger event causes conflict between two dogs. This does not necessarily mean that the conflict will escalate into a fight. If one of the dogs is willing to submit to the other, then that is usually sufficient to resolve the conflict.

For example, my Siberian Husky is a more submissive dog. Whenever there are any real conflicts, she will usually submit to Shiba Inu by rolling onto her back and exposing her tummy. Dog fights usually only arise when both dogs are unwilling to submit. In this case, they resolve the conflict with their teeth. This is why dogs with more dominant personalities are more of a challenge to live with because they will stick to their guns and not back down. Others must acquiesce to their position. The same is also true for people with more dominant personalities.

When I got a second dog, I made sure to get a dog with a more submissive personality. My Shiba Inu has a dominant temperament, and gets along better with more relaxed, playful, and submissive dogs.

## How?

In cases of dog to dog aggression, it is usually very helpful to hire a professional trainer. A professional trainer can observe our dog in real-time and catch body language that we may miss. This allows us to effectively interpret our dog's interactions with other dogs and identify the source of his aggression.

Some things that have helped me deal with my Shiba Inu's dog to dog aggression issues:

- Always stay calm and always have a plan. If we become angry, fearful, or frustrated, our dog will pick up on that energy and become even more stressed.
- Create as many neutral experiences as possible. If nothing happens every time we see another dog, our dog will learn to be more relaxed in the presence of other dogs.
- Do not let a dog practice aggressive behavior. The more he practices aggression toward another dog, the more likely he will repeat that behavior in the future.
- Set our dog up for success. Only let him greet friendly and relaxed dogs that we are absolutely sure he can handle. This helps to build our dog's confidence, and helps him better handle greetings with other dogs in the future. It will also help us build our own confidence.
- Desensitize our dog toward other dogs in a controlled training environment.

## Dog Socialization

Dog socialization has recently become the new it thing. Dogs are often forced into social situations that they are uncomfortable with. However, if a dog keeps having negative experiences with other dogs, he will ultimately resort to using aggression to protect himself.

Successful greetings condition a dog to enjoy the company of other dogs, negative greetings teach him to be anxious or fearful of his own kind.

If we continue to force our dog to meet unbalanced dogs or dogs with conflicting temperaments, we will only worsen his dog to dog aggression issues.

If we help our dog by carefully choosing his play-mates and respecting his social boundaries, he will grow up to be a more balanced, confident, happy, and relaxed dog.

*This article is accurate and true to the best of the author's knowledge. It is not meant to substitute for diagnosis, prognosis, treatment, prescription, or formal and individualized advice from a veterinary medical professional. Animals exhibiting signs and symptoms of distress should be seen by a veterinarian immediately.*