

To avoid problems at these times a puppy or kitten should be exposed to sufficient experiences to encourage flexibility and confidence throughout its life. If not then problems will certainly arise.

For example a puppy that experiences a quiet indoor environment until 12-14 weeks of age will be overwhelmed and fearful when taken on a walk for the first time. Anything nasty that happens at this time can cause a long lasting fear that can be hard to change.

A good way to avoid these problems in dogs is to run puppy parties starting as young as possible (8 weeks) and to expose the pup to many of the things he or she will experience as an adult (children, travel, noises etc).

Disease risks must still be considered and made clear to the owners.

Early vaccination can minimise this (first vaccinations can be given as early as six weeks).

Puppies can also be taken out in their owner's arms or in cars where the risks of encountering disease are negligible.

Puppy parties should present the pups with a variety of people, sounds, and experiences whilst always trying to keep the situation under control so that a pup never becomes fearful.

Using familiar toys and food treats will help them to associate the party with reward and fun.

Puppy parties can be an excellent way to educate owners on the importance of early experience, as well as being a way to provide advice on basic care and simple training. However a badly run puppy party can do more harm than good, actually causing rather than preventing behaviour problems! Therefore it is essential that you prepare well and are sufficiently well educated yourself in how to correctly run puppy parties before you start. (*See recommended reading list for books and booklets on running puppy classes.*)

Also think seriously about the practicalities before starting up. Do you have the space, the time and the available staff to run a class or puppy parties safely, effectively and regularly? If not it may be better to concentrate on simply advising owners and handing out booklets when they come for their puppies first vaccination. Also you should be able to recommend a good local puppy class that they can attend. However great care must be made when making a recommendation, do not just recommend the local dog club or point to a poster on the waiting room notice board unless you are certain that the classes are run correctly.

Also never underestimate the importance of good, gentle basic training in the prevention of problem behaviour.

Problem behaviour

Early problems seen during development:

Play-biting

It is normal for puppies to mouth and bite, and it is necessary for them to learn how to moderate the strength of their bite.

Try not to play rough games that encourage mouthing, and instead use toys as props for play.

If the pup does mouth and bite too hard, make a loud shriek as if you are hurt, look away fold your arms and stop the game; walk away if necessary.

Regularly stopping play because a puppy is becoming rough or 'bitey' is a good way to teach them to be gentle.

Do not wave your arms around or attempt to tap the puppy on the nose, as this just increases 'the fun' and encourages the pup to bite harder.

Kittens will also bite and scratch in play and like pups this is normal behaviour, but they should learn that hands (or any other part of the human body) are not toys.

Kittens are attracted by movement and should be encouraged to play with toys such as ping-pong balls, foam rubber balls or cat fishing toys. Even tiny kittens should never be encouraged to play with human hands.

When a kitten starts to bite or claw at your hands, if he is on your lap put him down onto the floor or fold your arms and walk away and ignore him for about 30 seconds, then redirect the play onto something more suitable.

Activity

Young dogs have a very different level, range and frequency of activity than mature ones. They need to have outlets for many types of behaviour such as digging, chewing and play. One or two walks a day may not be enough for a young exuberant dog; it is much better to also provide many short games and training exercises throughout the day. It is also critical to avoid the dog developing control through attention seeking. The owner needs to be the one who starts and ends all games and other interactions; rather than letting the puppy come and pester for them.

Young dogs are often mislabelled as hyperactive or dominant. These are specific terms relating to behavioural disorders.

A dog that has not reached sexual or social maturity may well be 'pushy' or aggressive but has not achieved the age where it could be 'dominant'.

Many dogs are over-active, but only a tiny minority are truly hyperactive.

There are a few common problems that young dogs will manifest:

Misdirected sexual behaviour

Even tiny puppies may begin to do this. It is a normal part of development.

If too much is made of it then a dog may start to use mounting as a way of getting attention.

The best way to discourage mounting is to turn your back on the dog and walk away. Give the puppy a minute or two of social isolation before you come back.

Repeat this each time and the mounting should decline and stop.

In older dogs where the behaviour is hormonally controlled, neutering or treatment with anti-androgens (Tardak) can help.

Food related aggression

This often starts at about 6 months of age, and the owner's first reaction is to take the food away as a punishment.

This is wrong; the dog is growling because he is worried you are going to take the food away. If you then you smack him or remove his food he has been proved right and is likely to become more aggressive in the future.

It is far better to teach the dog that you are *not* going to take away his food, but that you are more likely to provide extra food. This can be done by dropping extra tasty morsels into the dog's dish while he is eating. Start at an early age so that your approach is associated with something nice.

Aggression

Aggression is a serious problem.

The consequences of treating an aggressive dog incorrectly can be disastrous.

Please seek professional advice for the treatment of all aggressive dogs rather than attempting to treat them yourself.

The first growl

Every dog will growl at the owner at some point, and the way the owner deals with this is likely to have a strong impact on their future relationship with the dog.

Above all, they mustn't react violently or lose their temper.

They should take a calm look at the situation and try to understand why they are being growled at.

Is it because the dog feels threatened? Is it over food? Has the dog stolen something and won't give it back?

Often it is impossible to come up with a good solution that will instantly resolve the situation.

If the owners retreat, is the dog learning that growling is a good thing to do? If they punish is he learning that people don't listen to warnings and need to be bitten?

The best thing to do is leave the situation, think about why it happened and find a way to train the dog not to do it again, without the use of violence or confrontation.

It is not necessary to react immediately in a decisive manner; that is playing into the dog's hands and is likely to result in 'tit for tat' increases in aggression.

When the dog first growls it may be best to walk away as if you had not even noticed the growl. Then call the dog and give him a food treat for coming (you are rewarding him for obeying a command, not for growling) then seek advice if you cannot think of a way to train the dog.

Aggression can be for a number of reasons and the underlying motivation can often be identified from the dog's body language and posture. This needs experience, but good descriptions of the body postures and facial expressions associated with the different emotional states can be found in many books (see recommended further reading at the end of this chapter.)

An important point to remember is that each time the dog has an opportunity to use aggression it will learn from that experience and will learn that aggression 'works'. Therefore until professional help can be obtained it is best to advise the owner to avoid confrontations and any situations where the dog may become aggressive.

Fear

Fear plays a part in almost all aggression.

Fearful dogs will attempt to avoid a confrontation where possible; they may run away or try to hide.

It is only when it is impossible to avoid conflict that they become aggressive.

The trouble is that experience also plays a part.

If a dog has previously been unable to escape from a similar situation then it is likely to become aggressive more quickly and may choose to abandon methods of escape because these have previously failed.

The most important thing is not to punish or threaten dogs that are fearful and trying to escape because they can become very dangerous.

Territoriality

Territorial behaviour is not uncommon and owners often complain that the dog won't let anyone into the house without barking.

Territorial barking may be suppressed at the earliest stage.

A firm 'NO' may be all that is needed when the puppy or dog begins to bark. Although if the dog or puppy does not respond straight away by being quiet it is best to abandon this method, as repeatedly shouting at the dog is likely to make the problem worse not better. Seek advice!

Territorial aggression can be reduced through training, but a territorial dog should not be trusted to meet people on its territory unsupervised. Also such behaviour is usually much worse at the boundary therefore the dog should not be given the opportunity to meet people at the front door or garden gate.

Inter-dog aggression

a. Male-male.

Initial disputes between male dogs sharing a household are not uncommon, but these often resolve into a stable and non-aggressive relationship.

Worse problems can occur where dogs are of similar size, age, physical strength and have the same desire to attain status.

It is necessary to decide which dog is to be top dog and it is best to choose the one who is already showing the most promise of being 'top dog'.

This dog needs to be shown priority and favour over the other dog; first to go out, first to be greeted by the owner, first to be given and allowed to finish its food etc.

Also and very importantly, non-aggressive and non-confrontational attempts should be made to elevate the owner's status in the household over both dogs.

If the males are entire then the dog selected as subordinate should be neutered.

Neutering the more dominant dog will cause the problem to get worse.

b. Female-female.

Aggression between females can be far more serious. It can be less likely to resolve into a stable hierarchy, especially when one or both bitches are entire.

Aggression may become worse before and during a season, and during pseudopregnancy.

Therefore neutering both bitches can be best policy as this removes the uncertainty associated with hormonal variation.

Owners need to be aware of potential problems when they take on two similarly sized entire bitches. As with male dogs the bitch that is already showing signs of being the more dominant should be given priority and favour by the owner.

One final point about competitiveness.

Owners often try to side with a new puppy against an older dog.

This is dangerous and falsely elevates the new dog's status.

It is better to side with the existing dog so that the pup learns some manners.

Redirected aggression

This can occur whenever a dog or cat is in an aggressive state; the animal shifts its aggression from the main target (e.g. an intruder, or another animal) to another person or animal (e.g. the owner as they try to intercede).

Owners need to be careful when handling these animals at times when they may feel threatened.

Physical and medical causes of aggression

There are rare instances of aggressive conditions such as 'episodic disinhibition' or 'rage syndrome' where there is a fundamental abnormality within the dog's central nervous system.

Much more common are aggressive behaviours that have an underlying medical cause such as:

Pain (e.g. arthritis in an old dog or an osteodystrophy in a younger one)

Hypo/Hyper-thyroidism

Diabetes or hyperinsulinism

Cushing's syndrome.

Medical causes should always be ruled out by a veterinary surgeon with animals that show sudden change or uncharacteristic behaviour.

Maternal aggression

Whilst it is normal for a bitch to protect her puppies, and owners must not antagonise a bitch in this state, it is important that puppies do not learn aggressive behaviour from their mother.

A bitch that is improperly socialised and has existing problems of aggression is a poor candidate for breeding; she may well teach her puppies to behave in a similar manner.

In any case it will be hard to provide socialisation if the mother constantly guards the pups and will not allow them to interact with strangers.

There is also the potential for genetic transmission of behavioural traits.

It is better not to have another litter from a bitch that has already shown maternal aggression.

Dominance behaviour and aggression

Wolves have clear and separate hierarchies within the male and female parts of the group.

There is an alpha male and female who have the highest rank, with beta animals below them and the rest of the pack below that. Younger animals may have some sort of social order but the relationships are more flexible and dynamic. The hierarchy is largely maintained through acts of submission rather than dominance; these include rolling on the back or hunching down with tail underneath and head down.

Many people have a rather old-fashioned view that dogs have exactly the same social behaviour as wolves. This is not the case and the term 'dominant aggression' is too commonly used.

Dogs have a need for social order, but most are not concerned with whether they are themselves in a dominant rank. There are very many 'pushy' or 'bossy' dogs but very few truly *dominant* ones.

Nobody should deal with true dominant aggression without experienced professional guidance.

In any case it can be very hard to distinguish between a fearful and a dominant dog.

To challenge either a dominant or fearful dog is extremely dangerous.

Competition with the owner can be an early sign of problems concerning status, and the following are potential clues:

Aggression related to possession of objects or occupying places such as on a bed or couch.

Stealing and then guarding objects.

Not tolerating grooming, especially feet.

Not tolerating being disturbed while resting.

Objecting to being pushed or shoved.

Pushy dogs that do not show actual aggression can benefit from a reduction in their status:

- Deny access to places that have high status (on the bed or sofa)
- Do not allow the dog upstairs or into the bedrooms
- Groom the dog every day (Muzzle the dog first if he or she is likely to become aggressive.)
- Do not respond to demands for food, play or contact.
- Always be the one who starts and ends these interactions
- Playing tug and other games should not be a problem, but always put the toys away at the end of the game.
- Don't play wrestling games that allow the dog to assess your strength.
- Feed the dog after everyone else has fed.
- Never share snacks or meals with the dog.
- Once or twice each day send the dog out of the room and keep him out for a few minutes just using the force of your will
- Change directions a lot during walks and teach the dog not to pull.
- Ask the dog get out of the way if you want to go through a door or get past.
- Ask the dog sit and wait for everything it wants.
- Restrict access to important parts of the house (no sleeping in bedrooms etc.)

Note that *none* of this involves physical confrontation or threat.

Fears, phobias and anxiety

Fears and phobias

Many dogs develop minor fears of certain events or experiences.

Treatment of these problems is often lengthy and requires commitment on the part of the owner.

Treatment usually involves gradual exposure to the source of fear in the manner of desensitisation and counterconditioning mentioned above.

Prevention is rarely talked about, but of great importance.

Good socialisation is the number one factor. A dog with a wide range of positive experience will be able to cope with new and potentially scary events much easier.

Owner reaction is also key; a dog can be taught to fear things as a result of inappropriate owner reaction.

For example, a pup that reacts to a loud noise and is given cuddles and sympathy not only learns that people are a fundamental part of their ability to cope with stress, but also that anxious and fearful behaviour can attract attention and rewards.

It is much better to try to cheer the pup by acting happy yourself and redirect the young animal's attention into some playful activity.

If it is clear that a dog has a mild fear of something then it is good to seek advice about this quickly and deal with it before a more serious problem develops. At least make sure that nothing happens that is likely to make the problem much worse.

For example, a dog that has a mild fear of thunderstorms may cope quite well at home, and simply run behind a chair or under a bed. This dog has developed an escape strategy that enables it to feel safe until the storm has gone.

This will not be a problem until that escape route is cut off. If the same dog experiences a storm whilst running in an open field then there is no escape route. Panic ensues and the dog may become fearful of