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Aggression:

Aggression is the most serious and dangerous behavioral problem that many dog owners need to deal with. In my opinion, there is no place for any type aggression in our society. It is unacceptable behavior which should be eradicated as soon as possible. Aggression cannot be handled by reading a book, a trained professional is needed to diagnosis the type of aggression the dog has so to educate the owner and make him aware of situations that may provoke the dog. The trained professional can also determine the prognosis and develop a cause of action. In some cases medical conditions can contribute to aggression, therefore a complete physical examination and a set up blood tests to rule out organ dysfunction should be the first course of action.

Once the dog has received a clean bill of health, aggression must be dealt with quickly and immediately and that includes spaying and neutering. Spaying and neutering will reduce the hormones in the dog, many of which will make the dog more aggressive. I have seen females fight only when in season and I have seen dog aggressive males become like lambs after neutering.

Many times, aggression is perpetuated because no one wants to make an impression when the dog becomes aggressive, either because the dog is young (a puppy) or a smaller breed. I deal with all forms of aggression the same way: I make an impression strong enough so the dog is motivated to respond to my command instead of becoming aggressive. Many people allow aggression to continue because they are waiting for a perfect time or age to correct the dog for the behavior. By that time, the dog is really doing harm and there is no alternative but euthanasia. Usually, this behavior begins when the dog is a puppy, there are signs that you as the owner might not see or refuse to recognize but the signs are there. Many people don't like hard corrections at all but these are the same people who complain about no control off leash or if the dog takes off on them. My theory is: **One correction, make an impression and don't deal with the problem again.** Pick your poison; a hard correction to eradicate the behavior or small corrections time after time without an end or perhaps the light corrections makes the situation worse. It is important that people are safe from your dog and if that means euthanasia than that must be what happens. You must be constantly aware of your dog and know what he is going to do and if you cannot completely focus on your dog put him somewhere so people and children and other dogs are safe. **DO NOT TRUST HIM BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN GOOD.** The potential to be aggressive is always there; it is not gone because you have controlled it.

Your Role as the Alpha Dog:

It is important for your dog to know and understand that you are the Alpha dog; you are his leader, his mentor, the person he looks to before he makes a decision to act in a certain way. But, you must prove to your dog that you deserve that position and that you will punish him for challenging your role. It is most important that your dog understands this, especially if you are having aggression problems.

The Alpha dog (or pack leader) is dominant to all other dogs in the pack. The Alpha position is a position that has a number of privileges, such as eating first without being disturbed and being able to go anywhere unchallenged, as well as the right to restrict the movement of lesser-ranking members of the pack. The Alpha dog protects the pack, is the leader in hunting expeditions and controls arguments and activities of all pack members. The Alpha dog earned this position by being the toughest dog in the pack and by being firm and consistent in how he handles and reprimands others in the pack. There is no doubt to the pack members that they will be punished for stepping over their bounds. It is very important for the Alpha dog to immediately reprimand a subordinate who challenges him and such correction should make a strong impression on the 'challenging dog' so as to not have the challenge happen again. A subordinate must always respond to the Alpha by lying down on the ground; it is a sign of submission and respect to the Alpha. The correction is also a warning to other dogs in the pack, as they become older and sexually mature, that they should not challenge the Alpha and that he deserves this respected position. They too learn to down and stay to show respect to the Alpha.

If your dog has confidence in your ability as "Alpha" he will always obey your commands because doing so shows respect to the "Alpha". Once your dog has confidence in your ability to be "Alpha" then he will trust your judgment under any situation. An Alpha is only challenged if the dog feels that he might win or that the Alpha does not deserve the leadership position. Your dog must never feel he can win, if he wins once, he will challenge again

All aggression involves some form of stress; stress because a stranger is at his home, stress due to fear, stress due to dominance, etc. Through training, you are establishing your Alpha position and relieving your dog of this unnecessary stress. He does not have to decide who is friend or foe; as Alpha, you will do that for him; he only has to follow your commands. Once trained, your aggressive dog will be happy because he has an Alpha to provide him with firm, fair and consistent leadership .

Your dog will challenge you subtly or the Alpha position, for example, your dog will not sit on the first command when you are preparing his food. Be aware of any disobedience and correct him firmly for it not matter where you are or what you are doing . The subtle challenge is your dog's way of deciding whether you are deserving of the Alpha role and if he can get away with disobedience. This may not be very important for sit but it will be very important for aggression. The habit you want to create within your dog is a habit of always responding to your commands no matter what the situation is so that he will never doubt that you are Alpha and in control of him and the situation.

Types of Aggression:

There are many types of aggression:

1. Human: Aggression that is directed to strangers or family members;
2. Dominance: Aggression that is directed toward strangers, family members or other dogs because the dog needs to establish an Alpha position;
3. Animal: Aggression that is directed to other dogs or animals. This aggression can be dominance or fear.
4. Fear: Aggression that is directed because of a fear of humans or other animals. This can resemble Dominance. This is a hard aggression to break.
5. Pain related: Aggression that is directed to the person or thing that is causing the dog pain or the fear of pain by a dog. It is extremely hard to break this type of aggression because of each dog's sensitivity.

Within all of the above mentioned types of aggression, you can see other types of aggression, territory aggression, male-female aggression, female aggression during menstruation, parent-sibling aggression, etc.

Training:

Training is not going to change the temperament of your dog; "Cujo" is not going to turn into "Lassie". Training will teach your dog to control his behavior and respond to your commands. *Under no circumstances is your dog going to be trustworthy to act alone without you controlling his behavior.* Training is going to teach your dog to follow your commands, your orders, and to disregard his innate behavior or urge to behave aggressively.

I train all clients with aggression, no matter the type, the same way: stay one step ahead of your dog, realize what is going to set him off and give a preemptive command before the aggression begins. Your dog will be easier to control if you have not allowed him to begin his aggressive act and kept him calm. Through training you are teaching your dog that you are in charge; if your dog does not believe that you deserve the Alpha position or that you are in charge or control of the situation, he will always attempt the first move.

The key exercise to establish your Alpha position is the *Down Stay*. The *Down Stay* is a command that shows leadership. The *Down Stay* is also a calming exercise and will teach him to be calm. Remember, the Alpha dog will correct a pack member and the subordinate will lie down on the ground to show submission. By placing your dog in a *Down Stay* command, you are re-establishing your Alpha role and physically demonstrating to your dog that he is the subordinate. In the world of dogs, respect needs to be earned and you will constantly be challenged for that leadership position, that is why it is very important to always practice a *Down Stay* exercise.

There is only one way to prevent a bite:

Be Prepared: *teach obedience commands to demonstrate your Alpha position and use the commands to distract the dog from the behavior.*

PLEASE CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO TRAIN AN AGGRESSIVE DOG BY YOURSELF. HAVE A FULL BATTERY OF BLOOD TESTS AND A COMPLETE MEDICAL SCREENING TO INSURE YOUR DOG DOES NOT HAVE A HORMONAL IMBALANCE OR A MEDICAL PROBLEM THAT MAY BE CONTRIBUTING TO THE AGGRESSION.

Training Tips for Aggressive Dogs:

No matter what type of aggression I am dealing with, I train each form of aggression the same way, maybe with some minor alterations. Before I use a “guinea pig” to train an aggressive dog, I make sure the dog has had some initial training and understands some basic commands; i.e. sit, down, stay, come, and heel. This way I have established my Alpha position through obedience. I also recommend some changes in the house so the dog understands that he is NOT Alpha and to knock him down a peg or two in the social hierarchy of the household. These are my requirements for aggressive dogs.

- The dog must stay off all furniture (only humans and leaders are allowed up)
- He cannot sleep in your bed. He is not your equal and has not earned the privilege of sleeping next to you
- He eats last. The dog eats after the family has eaten (even if it is later than usual). The Alpha always eats first and allows the rest of the pack to eat when he is done
- He must respond to a command (i.e sit or down) before he receives any affection or petting. He is not allowed to demand attention or affection. Do not approach him to give affection, call him to you and then give affection.
- As Alpha, you are the one to initiate playtime. A subordinate is not allowed to control the Alpha and demand playtime or interaction
- Talk to him only when training. Ignore him other times so he understands your life doesn't surround him. Obeying your commands then becomes important to your dog and he will enjoy and desire direction in the form of commands

- Playtime is outdoors only. Inside the home is a place for quiet and non-excitement. If he tries to run around or is constantly pacing, place him in a *Down Stay* command. This way you have taught him to always be calm indoors so when you have visitors he will understand that his behavior should be always be calm and reserved
- Your dog should Down/stay for 30 – 45 minutes a session. Always do a Down/stay when you eating, watching TV or reading the paper.
- For the first month of training the dog has no privileges and you are to be firm and tough. This is important. Teach him when to play and when to work. Do not allow him to doubt your Alpha position or challenge you as leader
- Each command must be followed up with a correction; if your dog doesn't respond to the command the first time. Don't let him think that you will allow him to subtly challenge your authority by making you repeat a command
- Your correction should be strong enough to stop the behavior for that training session. If your dog repeats the action, the correction was not strong enough and the respect has not been given to you. If your dog thinks that he is only going to receive as light correction he will attempt to get away with the misbehavior again.
- NEVER ALLOW YOUR DOG TO MEET ANYTHING HE IS AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS. He doesn't have to like anyone, he only has to ignore them and obey your commands. If your dog is people aggressive, tell your guests to ignore him, always keep him on a leash and under a command and NEVER TRUST HIM. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT A DOG IS GOING TO DO. He may be part of your family but he is a dog. Treat him like a dog and he'll know what is expected from him. Without strict leadership and dominance the training will not work
- Remember that this is not basic obedience. Your dog has the potential to cause big problems. Nip the problem in the bud. Think of this training as boot camp. YOU MUST FOLLOW THROUGH AND BE TOUGH NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE. YOUR DOG BELIEVES HE IS THE LEADER OF HIS PACK. YOU MUST PROVE TO HIM THAT YOU ARE HIS LEADER. EXTREME TRAINING IS NEEDED AT THIS POINT.
- Your dog may initially be depressed because he is no longer the Alpha in his head or in the social hierarchy he developed in his head. He must realize he is the dog and that you are Alpha.

Through obedience (and major repetition) you should be able to teach your dog that you are Alpha and that he must follow your rules. Training will make your dog understand that he is not the leader, you are. This is not a 5-week training program. For some dogs it takes months for them to have confidence in you as their "Alpha". Your dog will gladly allow you to become his "Alpha" if you show initiative and tell him what he should be doing.

Never let an aggressive or dominant dog on the furniture, bed or other. This tells him that he is your equal. Treat him like a dog so he doesn't get confused and believe he can take liberties. Teach him to release or drop bones or toys from his mouth on your command. Never let him pull in front on a walk (the Alpha dog always leads the pack). Train your dog every day to show leadership. Basic dog obedience teaches the dog he must listen to his Alpha. If you have children, work the dog with them so he realizes he must also listen to them also (**all humans in the family should be Alpha**).

Practice with your dog in as many new environments as you can. Pick a new area each time you train. This builds reliability in training and teaches your dog he must listen to his Alpha no matter where he is. If you only train your dog in your yard, your dog is only going to listen in your yard. Train at your Veterinarian's office parking lot, at the supermarket, the park, etc. Pick a new location; once your dog is responding consistently in that area go to another area. In a couple of weeks you will have 4-5 different areas where your dog is training and listening to your commands.

Once your dog is responding in different areas use different distractions. Begin with minimum distractions (i.e. training late at night when not many people are around) and then work your way up to more and more distractions. (Read the Section in this book on Desensitizing and Counter Conditioning.)

DOMINANCE: TOWARDS THE OWNERS, OTHER DOGS AND STRANGERS

Sometimes dominant dogs are born dominant and sometimes owners unknowingly teach their dogs to be dominant. I see many dominant puppies but instead of nipping the problem in the bud when they are young, their owners wait until they are older to correct. I would rather see a young puppy receive a harsh correction for dominating their owner at a young age than wait until the puppy is 4, 5 or 6 months old. Dominance needs to be addressed immediately when it happens, not when no one is looking, not you're you get home, not when the puppy is older but IMMEDIATELY. If you do not dominate your young puppy it will bite you, its owner, when it gets older to show his dominance over you. Dominant dogs need to be taught their place in your family and need to be taught that you (the human) are the leader and the dog is a pack member. Also, the dominant dog needs to be taught that it must listen to your commands no matter what the distraction or where it is.

AGGRESSION: HUMAN OR DOG

Sometimes shy dogs act aggressively to scare off the object that is frightening them but they don't really want to harm the object, other times there is a bite. Aggressive dogs, on the other hand, hold a certain 'prejudice' towards strangers (animal or human). In my

opinion, no dog that is shy can be taught to be outgoing, nor can an aggressive dog be taught to be friendly. BUT, a dog can be taught to ignore the fear or the object (human or animal) that it wants to be aggressive towards and again, this is done through obedience.

NEVER ALLOW YOUR DOG TO MEET ANYTHING HE IS AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS. He doesn't have to like anyone he only has to ignore them and obey your commands. Tell your guests to ignore him, always keep him on a leash and under a command and NEVER TRUST HIM. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT ANY DOG IS GOING TO DO. He may be part of your family but he is a dog. Treat him like a dog and he'll know what is expected from him. Without strict leadership the training will not work

Remember that this is not basic obedience; you are making him control his aggression not become 'Lassie'. Your dog has the potential to hurt someone. HE BELIEVES HE IS THE LEADER OF HIS PACK and that he is doing his job. You are going to have to be tough and make him realize it is not his job to protect you and that you are not flattered by this behavior.

FEAR AGGRESSION

Many shy puppies growl or raise their hair when meeting stranger or other dogs; the owners then try to reassure the pup but the puppy takes the reassurance as praise for doing a good job and reacting. Fear is irrational so you are not going to be able to correct your dog for his fear but you can correct him for disobeying your commands. Your dog must realize you are going to protect him so it is important that you keep strangers and other dogs away from your dog when they are initially meeting them. Your dog should feel that you are in control of this person and can that you would not allow this person to hurt him. If you allow the stranger to approach your dog, he will think you are allowing harm to come to him and then not trust you.

Place your dog under a command, preferably down, and ask the person to ignore your dog. Once your dog is more comfortable with the person being in his presence, allow your dog to greet the person (i.e. smell their leg) but the person should still ignore him. If your dog is still comfortable then the person can offer your dog a treat, something special he only gets when stranger visit. When offering the treat, the person should not attempt to pet the dog or make eye contact. You will know when your dog is ready to be petted by this person, if he ever is ready for such.

With other dogs, it is important to first allow your dog to be around other dogs that could care less if he is there, dogs that are going to ignore your dog. Dogs that show too much interest or play rough will only frighten your dog even more and then he will lose faith in you as his Alpha and protector.

PAIN RELATED AGGRESSION

Fear of pain cannot be trained out of any being but it can be controlled if you are aware and one step ahead of them. Some dogs have a low threshold for pain, which can make them snap if you grab them, correct them or scare them by reaching for them. I would not correct for this behavior because a correction will make the fear worse and the snapping can then turn into serious bites. It is up to you to know what frightens your dog and be prepared to muzzle it if you must! If you cannot muzzle or do not want to muzzle it, command him to come or heel and put him in a safe place where he can relax and not be frightened. These dogs will bite if injured and they will bite you and your family.

For this type of aggression, if a frightened dog were to snap or growl at me, I would simply just command the dog to either sit or down and then reward for responding, correct for not responding to the command but at the same time I am ignoring the snap or growl. This way the correction is for not responding to the command rather than the fear; repeat the command and correction until you get a response. If your dog responds to the command, then the reward is a distraction from whatever they are fearful of. I do not address the snap at all or say "No" but rather show my dominance through obedience. Then I sit or lie down next to the dog and if I feel that I am safe, I will pet the top of the dog's head until it is relaxed.

Possession Aggression

Aggression because your dog has a bone or food or toy in his possession is a dominance behavior. In your dog's mind, he is correcting the owner for going near HIS food or object. This is the correct reaction by an Alpha dog to a subordinate. By growling, your dog is asserting his position in the pack. I break down this training into segments and recommend that you move slowly from each step. It may take you more than the time allotted here to move from each step. I use food as my example but you can train the same way and follow the steps the same way for bones or toys:

1. BEGIN OBEDIENCE TRAINING IMMEDIATELY. Do only obedience for a week, feed your dog alone in a certain spot and do not allow him access to toys or bones.
2. Week 2: Do an obedience session with your dog, keep the prong and leash on and feed your dog out of your hands after training is complete. Do not put the food on the ground. Feed him in the same spot in your kitchen every meal. If your dog doesn't want to eat from your hands, he doesn't eat.
3. After you have done this for about one month, repeat step 2 but feed the dog from his bowl on the ground, in the same spot in the kitchen. Stand next to him, at the end of the six foot leash, the leash is attached to the training collar. Ignore him, no eye contact, no talking or touching. If he growls, give him a leash correction like you never have before and go back to Step 2 for a month.

4. After about a month of Step 3, while you are still six feet away from your dog at the end of your leash. Call your dog to you as soon as he finishes his food in his bowl. Reward him for coming to you with a treat. As your dog willingly comes to you when commanded, call him when his food bowl is almost empty and reward him for coming to you. Correct if he doesn't come to you on command. After he receives his reward for responding to the come command, allow him to go back to his bowl to finish eating.
5. After about a month of Step 4, inch your way closer to the dog while he is on the six foot leash and prong collar. First, five feet from your dog, then four, etc.
6. After about a month of Step 6, keep the collar and leash on and put his bowl on the ground. Keep ½ of the food still in your hand (your dog should know it's in your hand), immediately once you place your dogs food bowl on the ground, throw the food that you have in your hand into his bowl.

For toy or bone possession, follow all of the steps above except for Step 2. Do not hold the bone or toy in your hand, but instead go to Step 3. He may not want to chew the bone or play with his toy while on leash. If he doesn't tell him to Heel and the both of you walk away from the toy or bone. Put your dog outside or in his crate and pick up the toy or bone while your dog is out of sight. Once your dog is chewing his bone or playing on leash, similar to Step 4, command him to 'drop it' and call him to you. Once he comes to you, reward him with a treat and either allow him to go back to the toy or put him out of sight and put the toy or bone away. Never ask him to release the toy or bone with you leaning over the top of him; command him to release it and walk over to you on your command, this way you have established your Alpha position but are in a safe position to correct should your dog growl or snap. It is also less threatening to your dog if you are six feet from him.

Once you have established yourself as Alpha, this problem should fall by the wayside. Do not try and touch or talk to your dog while he is eating or chewing his bone. You might be adding more stress than you need to be to the situation. Just because your dog no longer growls at you doesn't mean he won't growl at someone else in the house. You have established leadership, and everyone in the house must do the same.

Be careful, pick your battles but win the war. If this is your dog's only bad habit, decide if you want to fight. If not, keep everyone safe, feed him in the basement or a secluded room, alone, and shut the door. And keep toys or bones out of your home that will instigate a battle.