

Richard was confused. His dog had never refused a simple command before. But now Bear crouched on Richard's favourite chair, baring his teeth, refusing to get down.

The veterinarian suggested that Bear might be showing signs of dominance aggression. With the help of an animal behaviour specialist, Richard started a program of behaviour modification for Bear.

Now, Richard reads in his favourite chair, while Bear lies happily at his feet.

Your dog is your responsibility. Take proper precautions to protect others from your dog's aggressive behaviour.

HOW SHOULD I HANDLE A DOMINANT DOG?

Follow the same guidelines outlined above. Additionally:

- Sign up for an obedience course — it can help your dog to see you as the dominant member of the pack.
- Don't play tug of war or any other game that your dog may see as a contest.
- Don't allow your dog up on your furniture or bed, unless invited and unless you have the dominance issue under control. If necessary, block access with crates or closed doors.
- Don't feed your dog from the table or allow begging.
- Don't physically confront your dog. If your dog is behaving aggressively, back off, using a calm, happy tone of voice.
- Reward appropriate behaviour.
- Make the dog sit before feeding her or allowing her outdoors.

I HAVE MORE THAN ONE DOG AND THEY FIGHT WITH EACH OTHER. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Dogs have a complex, hierarchical social structure. Try to avoid interfering in your dogs' social interactions while maintaining your position at the top of the hierarchy. Of course, if one animal is harming another, you must get involved. If your dogs' pack behaviour has escalated into aggression, seek the help of an animal behaviour specialist. When your dogs fight, break it up by squirting them with water or making a loud noise. Never try to physically separate two dogs.

ARE SOME BREEDS MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN OTHERS?

Some breeds are frequently cited as being naturally aggressive. While it is true that some breeds naturally exhibit more guarding, protective or reactive behaviour, aggressive tendencies vary from dog to dog, even within breed. Whether a dog readily engages in aggressive behaviour is influenced by several factors, both genetic (for example, breed, gender, age) and environmental (for example, how the dog is trained and treated). The Ottawa Humane Society believes that with responsible breeding, rearing and training of dogs, the incidence of aggressive behaviour in dogs can be greatly reduced.

Don't ignore the problem — aggressive behaviour won't just go away.

WHAT IF, DESPITE ALL EFFORTS, I CAN'T RESOLVE THE PROBLEM?

Giving up an animal is never easy for the owner or the pet. If, after consulting with your veterinarian and working with an animal behaviour specialist, you feel your dog will continue to be a threat to people or animals, contact the Ottawa Humane Society's temperament assessor (613-725-3166, ext. 245), or talk to your veterinarian about other options, including euthanasia. If you try to find your pet a new home, you must be honest with any potential new owners about the problems that led you to this decision.

DEALING WITH AGGRESSION IN DOGS

Aggressive behaviour in your dog can be disturbing, but, with the help of professionals, it can often be managed.



Programs and services provided by the Ottawa Humane Society are made possible thanks to your financial support.

Please support the animals in our community.



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WHAT IS CONSIDERED AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN A DOG?

Any behaviour meant to intimidate or harm a person or another animal is aggressive behaviour. Aggressive behaviour can include, but is in no way limited to, biting, snapping, growling or baring of teeth.

WHY IS MY DOG BEHAVING AGGRESSIVELY?

Dogs display aggressive behaviour for several reasons, and from the dog's perspective, there is always a specific reason. While you may consider a pat on the head friendly, a dog may interpret the action as threatening. The dog's perception of the situation determines his reaction. While unacceptable, aggressive behaviour is one of the few communication tools available to a dog. Dogs may display aggressive behaviour because of:

- **Dominance issues:** Dogs are social animals and view their human families as their packs. When dogs perceive a challenge to their status, aggressive behaviour may result. Dogs may behave aggressively toward any person or dog believed to be lower in the pack.
- **Fear:** Aggression can be a defensive reaction when dogs believe they are at risk of being harmed.
- **Territorial, protective and possessive concerns:** Dogs sometimes react aggressively to a perceived threat to their territory, pack or possessions. Dogs are territorial and may view their territory as extending well beyond the borders of their yards, often considering the entire loop of their daily walk to be theirs.

- **Redirected aggression:** When dogs are provoked and are unable to respond to the right target, they may redirect their aggression elsewhere. For instance, two family dogs, watching from a window, may become excited by another dog crossing their yard, and turn to attack each other.

While a dog may behave aggressively for no apparent reason, from the dog's perspective, there is always a reason.

MY DOG HAS BEEN BEHAVING AGGRESSIVELY. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Don't try to correct the situation by yourself. Learn about the problem first.

Working with aggressive dogs can be potentially dangerous, and you and your dog would benefit from the help of an animal behaviour professional. The first step should be a trip to your veterinarian to rule out a medical cause for the behaviour. If there is no medical cause, then:

- Consult a qualified animal behaviour professional. Aggressive behaviour will not go away on its own.
- Have your dog spayed or neutered. Dominance, territorial and protective aggressive behaviours are all much more common in dogs who have not been spayed or neutered.
- Take appropriate precautions.



WHAT SORT OF PRECAUTIONS SHOULD I TAKE?

Your dog is your responsibility, and you are liable for his or her behaviour. If you know your dog is inclined toward aggression, either toward people or other animals:

- Avoid situations likely to lead to aggression. If your dog behaves possessively toward toys or other objects, deny access to the object. If your dog is territorial in certain locations, avoid them if they are outdoors, or block access indoors through the use of child gates or closed doors.
- Supervise your dog when other animals or children are present. Confine your dog to a separate room or area if necessary.
- Outdoors, use a muzzle to help control your dog and prevent others from being bitten.



Don't try to solve the problem by yourself. When dealing with aggressive behaviour in a dog, consult a qualified animal behaviour professional.

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN?

Because of children's smaller size, dogs sometimes see them as playmates or lower members of the pack. Never leave children alone with any dog without adult supervision. No child, no matter how old or experienced with dogs, should be left alone with a dog who has displayed signs of aggression.

SHOULD I PUNISH MY DOG FOR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR?

No! Rather than helping, punishment may make things worse. Punishing an aggressive, fearful dog leads to more fear and possibly more aggression. A dominant, aggressive dog may view punishment as a challenge. To a dog reacting defensively, punishment will seem a further threat. Consult a reputable animal behaviour specialist to learn how to best deal with your dog's aggressive behaviour.

WHERE CAN I FIND A REPUTABLE ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR SPECIALIST?

Consult your veterinarian or other dog professionals to find the best person to work with you and your dog.



MY DOG REFUSES TO OBEY WELL-KNOWN COMMANDS AND RESISTS MY HANDLING. IS THAT A PROBLEM?

Your dog may be exhibiting *dominance behaviour*. Most dogs assume a submissive role in their human family pack, but some dogs will challenge their owners. While growling and baring teeth are clearly aggressive, dominance problems may begin with less obvious signs such as defending food or toys from family members, resisting previously known commands or refusing to get down from furniture.