

Being Aware and Prepared

With any breed, owners need to be aware of unique behavioral, physical and mental characteristics. All dogs need responsible, active and caring owners. Pit Bulls are strong and energetic, so we recommend that owners take them to obedience classes as soon as they are up to date on shots.

Pit Bulls suffer from prejudice and misunderstanding, so ownership requires a willingness to consider your neighbors' concerns and educate them. Never leave your dog alone in a yard or chained outdoors. Owners must protect their dogs from teasing, injury and theft.

How to Avoid Fights Between Dogs

- The best situation for many terriers is to be the only pet. The next best situation is to have a neutered male and a spayed female. Having two same-sex dogs, or two unneutered dogs, increases chances of dominance and territoriality problems.
- Don't leave Pit Bulls unsupervised with other pets. When you leave the house, the dogs should be safely crated or in separate rooms. Never trust them not to fight with another dog.
- Monitor dogs while they play. Avoid rough play, and don't let things escalate.
- Never leave out food, bones, toys, or anything that could trigger a fight between animals. Feed pets in separate places.
- ALWAYS have your dog on leash when you go on walks and whenever you're not within a fully, securely fenced yard.
- Off-leash dog parks can be risky for any breed of dog, and we advise avoiding them. Remember, even if another dog starts the fight, your dog may finish it and get blamed.
- Your dog should always wear a strong, snugly fitted collar, to which is attached an ID tag listing your address and phone number. Good choices are leather or heavy-duty nylon collars. This will allow you to get a good grip on the dogs before or immediately after a fight erupts, so you can pull them apart as soon as the hold is broken.
- For details about stopping a fight between dogs, click [here](#).

Fights Between Dogs -- How to Avoid and Stop Them

1. From "Ready to Rumble" by Cherie Langlois in the February 2003 issue of PetLife:

While some breeds developed for fighting or protection may be more inclined to quarrel, dogs of any breed can get into fights. "It depends more on the dog's temperament, training and socialization," said trainer Adam Katz of Austin, Texas, owner of www.Dogproblems.com. A dog who is not well-socialized might have dominant body language and stare other dogs right in the eyes, which is perceived as a direct challenge.

It's a mistake to assume your dog won't fight. "The issue isn't whether your dog is or isn't nice; it's how the two dogs' temperaments interrelate," Katz said.

Said Trish King, animal behavior and training director for the Marin (California) Humane Society: "These dogs aren't necessarily aggressive when they're off leash, but tend to lunge, bark and posture when they are on leash."

Avoid scary conflicts by staying alert and keeping your dog under a short leash and voice control at all times. Some owners take the additional step of not allowing their dog to look or sniff at another dog.

Teaching a dog early on that he can't visit with every canine he meets is one good way owners can prevent leash aggression. Teach the dog not to pull on the leash, and to sit and wait for permission before greeting another

dog. Basic obedience training and behavior modification with positive reinforcement can help prevent fights. Katz said, "If the dog is looking at me and paying attention, he can't engage another dog."

Along with leashing and good training, owners can avoid conflicts by keeping their pets from roaming, neutering young dogs before one year of age, and socializing their dogs during the critical puppyhood stage between six to eight weeks of age.

Some fights occur with little warning, but often you can spot behaviors that signal trouble ahead, so use that opportunity to keep a fight from breaking out.

Watch for these behavioral cues to see if a fight is imminent:

- * A hard, unwavering, targeted stare.
- * Dominance posturing, such as mounting.
- * Stiff body movements.
- * Extreme body language: the tail held stiffly up or down, lips pulled tight against the teeth.

When facing an oncoming aggressive dog, you might shout "NO!" to repel him. If the dog continues to approach, drastic measures may be needed. Katz suggests owners carry a stun gun, which they should aim into the air, not at the dog. The stun gun hits sound frequencies that dogs hear, which can stop a dog from fighting. Another technique is to spray cayenne pepper at the dog's nose and eyes (however, pepper spray can cause injury and further anger an aggressive dog). King prefers a harmless citronella spray repellent called Direct Stop.

If a fight ensues, keep in mind that dogs tend to establish a social hierarchy soon after they meet. Scuffles to determine top dog can involve heavy barking and growling. However, real fights can take place, in which a dog latches onto another dog or otherwise injures him. Intense fights can be silent.

If you intervene, do not put your hands anywhere near the dogs' heads or get between them to avoid getting bitten yourself. If another person is available, King recommends each person picks a dog and grabs its tail or hind legs, pulling back and up until the dog loosens its grip. The grabber should then move away quickly. There is some risk, since dogs will sometimes turn and bite whoever is hanging on to them.

Prevention, of course, is the best approach. "Prevention -- keeping your dog safe and providing good leadership -- is the most important job a dog owner has," said King.

2. From Dr. Dunbar's Video "Dog Aggression: Fighting":

Dogs react fast, and sometimes get angry toward each other, just like people. The difference is that dogs respond immediately then, typically, forget about it once the disagreement is resolved.

Some 90% of a puppy's time is spent biting other puppies. This is part of developing bite inhibition, in which young dogs learn how to control their jaws. The optimal time for dogs to develop bite inhibition is between two and four and a half months of age. Dogs need free play as puppies with puppies and mother dog to develop their bite inhibition. (See last week's Tip on Bite Inhibition, which is posted on the PAW website under Pet Tips.)

Dunbar cites some general principles:

- * Dogs initiate fighting when they do not feel secure around other dogs.

* The top dog knows he's boss and usually is able assert rank within 3 seconds. Usually, the top dog does not have to resort to actual fighting to prove his point.

* Middle-ranking order male dogs feel insecure and in need of proving something.

* Females have the potential to engage in fights, and to be as tenacious as males. When females fight with female or male dogs, often it's to gain a possession.

* Dogs perceive neutered dogs as less of a threat. With male dogs, neutering reduces the chances dogs will bite and neutering is linked with a reduction in several kinds of aggression.

* Dogs may also display aggression to dogs who approach them outside, especially when their owner gets tense in the presence of other dogs and yanks on the dog's collar. For example, the dog may be communicating to the other dog: "Go away! When dogs like you appear, my owner gets upset and gives me a punishment."

* Dogs growl at younger dogs in an attempt to put youngsters in their place. By the way, many male dogs have testosterone peaks between 10 months and one year of age, explaining why they seem more hyper. Dogs can smell testosterone.

* When dogs growl at younger dogs, this leads to the development of active appeasement on the part of the lower-ranking dog. The lower-ranking dog learns to show deference, which signals that he understands and respects the hierarchy. So then, typically, the older/more dominant dog will let the youngster play.

* Playing is more than having fun for dogs; it's a way to compete and a way to establish rank.

Positive steps you can take:

* Socialize your pup. You can keep him nearby when you're home by tethering him to you with a leash. Praise the dog whenever he does good, and whenever he stops aggressive look or other undesirable behavior.

* Most people ignore good behavior. But it is important to praise and reward good behavior in order to encourage the dog to repeat it. Solicit and praise good behavior, instead of punishing the bad.

* Dunbar suggests teaching the command, "GENTLY," which can be useful in diverting dogs from a fight. "SIT" and "OFF" are also important commands. It is important to be able to redirect your dog's attention to you -- and thus away from another dog who may be engaging in challenging eye contact and aggressive or otherwise undesirable behaviors.

* Do not tense up with the leash or yell during the approach of another dog. That can make your dog associate the sight of another dog with punishment.

* Remember that timing is everything, and that it is crucial for you to develop the ability to redirect your dog's attention back to you.

By the way, Dunbar cautions against using tranquilizers, which affect bite inhibition (a learned behavior). You want the dog to be able to inhibit his own bite.

Some people attend "growl classes" with their aggressive dogs, at which they work on moderating the dog's reactive behavior. The dogs wear muzzles and the owners keep them on leash until the end of the classes, at which point participants work the dogs off leash. Dunbar's video included footage from a "growl" class.

3. Tips for avoiding fights:

- * Behavior modification work with your dogs is essential. Be sure to watch for next week's tip, "Aggression Between Dogs in the Same Household."
- * Never allow any dog to achieve dominant status over any adult or child. If dogs always know their social ranking and are never allowed to challenge people, they will usually be good family members, advises Gary L. Clemons, DVM.
- * Feed dogs in separate areas, rooms or in their own crates.
- * Do not toss treats out to dogs. Instead, have each dog obey a command, such as sit, individually, and give the treat right after he/she obeys.
- * If any chance dogs will fight over toys, don't give the dogs toys unless they are in separate locations.
- * Do not give dogs toys that fanatically excite them.
- * Carry a small, automatic umbrella. You can pop this open between your dog and an incoming one if you fear a problem. It provides a surprise and a hiding place.
- * Some dog handlers carry water pistols and water cannons.
- * One Great Dane owner uses a cookie sheet to deter dogs from engaging in a fight. She has slipped the pan between the aggressing dogs, as well as banged on it to create a distracting noise.
- * One multiple dog owner always keeps a sturdy buckle collar on the dogs, which provides a sturdy handle if needed.
- * Don't permit tug-of-war or aggressive wrestling. These games can quickly escalate into a fight.
- * Don't give dogs rawhides, pig hooves or other highly coveted goodies. At the very least, don't allow dogs free access to them. The dogs are likely to fight over them.

4. Ideas for breaking up a fight:

The way fighting dogs should be separated depends on the individual dogs as well as their typical breed characteristics. For example, pit bull specialists advise use of a strong "breaking stick" inserted into the mouth of bull-breed dogs, but not for other kinds of dogs.

Be aware that a dog embroiled in a fight might bite someone who grabs him or who comes between the fighting dogs.

- * Try pouring water over fighting dogs. Turning a hose on the dogs works better than dumping a container on them.
- * Some dogs will stop fighting if you squirt them with a water bottle filled with vinegar, which breaks their concentration. Some folks use water cannons, citronella spray, pepper spray (*note: pepper spray, or mace, can cause injury and worsen the situation*), airhorns or even stun guns.

* Avoid putting your hands near the dogs' heads or getting between them to avoid getting bitten yourself. If another person is available, Trish King recommends each person picks a dog and grabs its tail or hind legs, pulling back and up until the dog loosens its grip. The grabber should then move away quickly. There is some risk, since dogs will sometimes turn and bite whoever is hanging on to them.

Another technique for breaking up a fight when two person are available: One person attempts to immobilize he hindquarters of the dog while grasping the collar from behind. For certain breeds such as pit bull breeds, it is recommended to wedge a wedge-shaped breaking stick into the side of the dog's mouth. Before attempting this, study up on the information about breaking up dog fights on www.pbrc.net.

Source: http://www.paw-rescue.org/PAW/PETTIPS/DogTip_FightsBetweenDogs.php