

[click here to send this page to your printer](#)

---

## BC SPCA - Reducing and Managing Aggression Towards other Dogs

*The information in this fact sheet is for mild dog-dog aggression only. Dog-dog aggression is a serious condition that often requires the help of a qualified dog trainer or behaviourist.*

### RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM

Dogs react to unfamiliar dogs for two reasons: they are either afraid of the other dog or they perceive, with or without cause, that the other dog represents a social or status threat. Some dogs are aggressive only to dogs of one size, colour or breed or may be friendly to housemates but not to neighbourhood dogs. There are not always obvious signs when a dog intends to be aggressive.

#### *Warning signs to watch for are:*

- Whining, barking or growling
- Staring directly at the other animal
- Raised hackles
- Straining against the leash to reach the other animal
- Ears pointing forwards
- A stiff tail held up high may be wagging (not always a friendly sign.)

### TRAINING OPTIONS

All dogs but particularly those with aggression problems should first go through ?deference ? training. This means training your dog to look to you for cues on how he should behave in various situations. Dogs often become a problem when they stop looking to their people for guidance (see the [Preventing or Reducing Behaviour Problems Fact sheet](#) for more details). All dogs require a clear set of rules and good obedience. This is particularly important for those with aggression problems.

#### *Aggression between housemates*

Housemates that are constantly threatening or even fighting with each other do not have a well-established social hierarchy. First, you must decide which dog holds top dog position. This is usually the dog that goes through doors first, blocks access to pathways, stairs, toys or people to the other dog. Only one dog can be top dog. If you are unsure, ask a qualified dog trainer or your veterinarian for their opinion - every case is different.

Make it clear to all the dogs which one is top by:

- Feeding her before the others ? even when handing out treats
- Greeting her first when you get home, followed by the others
- Making sure the other dogs give way to her when she chooses where she wants to sleep
- Playing with her before the others (but remember, don?t let her win ? you must maintain your own superiority)

This will minimize the risk of aggression caused by the fight for superiority.

#### *Aggression to unfamiliar dogs*

Often aggression between dogs in the neighbourhood is ?fear motivated aggression? rather than a competition for status. Status seeking aggressive behaviour between unfamiliar dogs may be reduced with neutering and in some cases hormone therapy. Speak to your veterinarian.

### **Before you start**

Try to understand what upsets your dog. Is she aggressive when she meets a new dog? Does she seem to dislike a particular type of dog - black dogs or male dogs for example?

Get your dog used to a head halter and a Baskerville muzzle a few minutes at a time while in the house. Always put the muzzle and head collar on before going on a walk until you feel confident your dog can be safe around other dogs.

### **Step 1: Getting your dog used to being around other dogs**

Getting your dog used to non-aggressive dogs in a series of situations involving gradually reducing the distance between her and other dogs.

- Take your dog to parks where there are other dogs. Stay far enough away that your dog sees the other dogs but is not triggered by them or shows signs as the ones described in the behaviours listed above.
- Slowly reduce the distance between your dog and the others rewarding relaxed behaviour and willingness to pay attention to you rather than fixing her eyes on the dogs.

*You may:*

- Distract your dog when she starts showing threatening behaviour by dropping a can filled with stones near her. Alternatively a high-pitched sound alarm or a remote-control citronella spray collar may be effective.
- If she continues to act in a threatening way, use the head collar to move her head sideways, breaking her eye contact with the other dog.
- Reward good behaviour as your dog improves. Praising her in a calm voice will put her at ease and confirm that she is doing what you want her to do.
- Once you feel that your dog can be relaxed while walking close to other dogs, you can begin the positive association process.

### **Step 2: Creating positive association to meeting new dogs**

- Arrange to introduce your dog to another, whose guardian has agreed to help. The new dog should be of a passive nature and not likely to respond to your dog with aggression. Arrange to meet somewhere neutral, such as a park.
- Put your dog on an extending leash so that she can move around freely but you can take control if necessary. Fit her with the Baskerville muzzle and her head collar. With these precautions you can assess your dog's behaviour when approaching another dog ? is she aggressive or just excited?
- If the two dogs appear safe together, remove the muzzle to allow them to sniff one another and play. Try to keep the leash slack. Try to remain relaxed yourself - your dog will be able to detect if you are anxious and increase her own anxiety.
- Get your dog used to interacting positively with new dogs by joining a training club or taking her on walks with other dog guardians.

**VETERINARY HELP**

If your dog does not respond to training, you may want to discuss hormone therapy with your veterinarian. Some veterinarians may prescribe the use of progestins, megestrol acetate in addition to behaviour therapy. Ask your veterinarian about other conditions that may be associated with aggressive behaviour.

**CAUTIONS/REMEMBER**

Dog aggression is a serious problem. It is likely that you will need professional help. However, make sure you select a trainer that understands the underlying emotional factors that are often at the source of dog/dog aggression (fear). Never use pain or physical punishment to control aggression. Your dog may show fear, confusion or stress and may redirect her aggression by attacking you.

Never attempt to separate dogs that are fighting by grabbing them. Instead you can throw something next to them to startle them. Then grab the aggressive dog and remove her. If you remove the victim you may make him look helpless and cause the aggressor to attack again.

---

<http://www.spca.bc.ca/AnimalBehaviour/dogaggression.asp>