

Redirected aggression in dogs

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Redirected aggression in dogs

We all get frustrated and feel angry from time to time. We might slam a door or throw something on the ground, or be less tolerant of the next person we meet. These are normal responses to frustration. Dogs can also act angrily if they are frustrated. It is important to know what to do in these situations. While no advice is 100% guaranteed, here are some guidelines on what to do and what not to do.

Frustration

- This can happen when your dog is stopped from doing something he/she wants to do.
- Or if you give conflicting signals so that he/she does not know what is appropriate or inappropriate behaviour.

Redirected aggression

- If the source of the problem is inaccessible, the dog's aggressive response may be directed toward another animal or person instead.
- For example, if your dog is on the lead and is threatened or gets very excited, and you try to calm the dog, then he/she may quickly turn round and bite you, although you have not harmed him/her.
- Touch is a very important trigger. So, if you try to intervene if your dog is in a fight with other dogs, you are at a very high risk of being bitten, especially if your dog is anxious or scared.
- The dog is not thinking about who he/she is biting, as the response is instinctive. He/she may try to make amends afterwards (the 'guilty' look) when he/she realizes what they have done, and they should not be told off at this time.

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Preventing frustration and aggression

- It is best to avoid known situations that frustrate your dog or cause them to get overexcited in any way.
- Teaching your dog to walk in a headcollar with a muzzling action may not only help to keep your dog calm, and make it easier for you to move your dog out of situations he/she finds difficult to tolerate, but can also help reduce the risk of you being bitten. It is important that headcollars are used correctly to ensure that your dog is comfortable and can still enjoy his/her walk.
- If your dog has a tendency to get overexcited, ask your veterinary surgeon about calming exercises you can do.
- If your dog gets overexcited, **DO NOT** touch him/her. If your dog is on the lead, it is best to try to get his/her attention and move away calmly. Or, if needs be, simply walk away without drawing attention to the situation.

! How to separate fighting dogs

- **Do not take unnecessary risks or put others in danger.**
- You will ideally need one handler per dog plus one to break up the situation but **DO NOT** force people to get involved who are not aware of the risks. Keep other members of the public away from the dogs.
- If your dog is involved in a fight with another dog, try to pull them apart using the end of the lead *if it is safe to do so*, or by lassoing the dogs with a looped lead. **DO NOT** try to grab them by the collar or clip a lead on a dog that is already loose. If one of the dogs is much smaller, **DO NOT** try to pick him/her up to separate the dogs, as you will increase the risk of being bitten by either dog.
- In some cases it can help to try to startle the dogs with a loud noise (especially if they have not fully engaged with each other). But in other cases this can excite them more and may make matters worse, and so is not without risk. If there is a *water* fire-extinguisher to hand this can be used, but you must be careful not to injure the dogs with the water jet.

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- If the dogs are not on the lead, try to insert a couple of broom handles or similar devices between them and lever them apart. If they bite the stick you can try to direct their mouths away from each other and get someone to put some sort of barrier between them if possible. **DO NOT** hit either dog with these items.
- Once you have separated the dogs, try to gain control again by looping a lead around your dog's neck (by threading the lead through the handle) so that you have your dog under some control. Do **NOT** jerk the noose or reprimand your dog as this may trigger more aggression.
- You may wish to give your dog something to bite on to, such as the end of a long stick.
- Give your dog time to calm down before trying to touch him/her. **DO NOT** try to clip the lead on until he/she has calmed down *and the other dog is out of sight*.
- When your dog is calm, give him/her several obedience commands and reward good behaviour.
- Check your dog for injuries when he/she has calmed down and contact your veterinary surgeon if necessary.
- Talk to your veterinary surgeon about how to sort out the underlying behaviour problem.

If you get bitten

- **DO NOT** scold or punish your dog, as this is more likely to provoke further aggression.
- Try to get your dog under control without directly touching him/her (see above).
- Undertake first aid as necessary if bleeding. Wash the wound under a running tap of clean water and seek medical attention if the skin is broken.