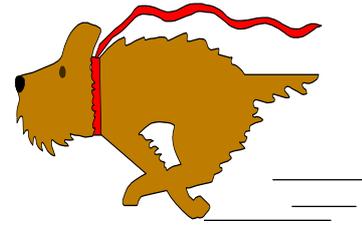


Redgates Agility Club



DOG FIGHTS

WHY DO DOGS FIGHT?

Fighting between dogs of the same sex is common and will occur naturally. Dogs have always fought over food, the right to mate, their position in a pack, and in defence of their young or their territory.

Individual dogs vary in their inclination to fight because of their breeding, socialisation, experience and training. Some breeds of dogs and individuals of breeds have been selected for their fighting or guarding qualities, and may be more likely to fight other dogs.

Male dogs will usually fight with each other more than female dogs do, but fights between females are more common when one or both are in season.

Dogs that have been well socialised with other dogs from an early age are less likely to fight. This should be done from the very early puppy stages (when the dog is only 6 to 8 weeks old), and should be continued throughout the dogs life.

Aggression between dogs of the same sex does not usually develop until just before, or at sexual maturity. Fights between strange dogs frequently occur when one of the dogs is protecting its territory, its owner, or itself.

Dogs on a lead sometimes become very possessive of their owner. Fights can break out between two dogs on a lead passing close by each other, or when two dogs are off lead and their owners are in close proximity.

Owners with aggressive dogs must take particular care when near other dogs. Many dog fights begin because an owner's attention is elsewhere and the dog is not corrected immediately after an incident occurs. What may happen when two dogs meet cannot always be predicted. A normally friendly dog may take a particular dislike to another dog and start a fight with it.

TREATMENT FOR A DOG THAT FIGHTS OTHER DOGS

Castration can reduce fighting in male dogs. This operation changes the odour of the dog, and consequently the other dog's reactions to it. It also reduces the amount of testosterone (the male hormone which precipitates the aggression) that is produced.

Female dogs may also be aggressive towards each other, but male/female fights are less common.

When the fighting is due to a dog being frightened or protective, castration will have no effect.

PREVENTING A DOG FIGHT

Obedience Training and Agility Training will not stop two dogs from being aggressive towards each other. However, the control that owners gain over their dog through such training can assist in both preventing and breaking up fights, as the dog is more likely to obey any commands given.

Preventive action can be taken by owners who understand the body language and facial expressions of their own and other dogs. Common signs of aggression or dominance include:

- Slow and deliberate movements when approaching other people's dogs;

- Stiff body movements;

- An enhanced profile, ears erect and the hairs on the back and neck raised;

- A lowering of the head and extending of the neck forwards with the tail horizontal or upright;

- A direct, hard, unwavering stare;

- Pronounced and frequent lifting of the leg;

- Urination, growling, snarling, curling of the upper lip, or the lips pulled tightly against the teeth;

- Dominance posturing such as mounting the other dog;

Some dogs will approach another dog, investigate and wait for a reaction from it. Others will attack without warning, or from behind cover. Little can be done when this occurs.

When one dog is being walked on a lead and another not on a lead approaches, every attempt must be made to prevent the dogs from making contact with each other. The owner of the leashed dog should leave the scene with their dog by backing away, slowly and cautiously and keeping between the two dogs.

Fortunately most dogs that are aggressive towards other dogs are not aggressive towards people. If the owner blocks their dog from the other dog, it may defuse the encounter.

The distance from the other dog should be gradually increased, If the threatening dog follows, commands such as "Stay" or "No" should be given.

Actions by owners such as turning their back immediately or quickly, striking out or moving forward and allowing their dog to challenge the other dog, may cause the offending dog to attack.

A small dog can be picked up and carried high as its owner backs away from the other dog.

BREAKING UP A DOG FIGHT

Separating two dogs that are fighting can be dangerous as not all known methods are effective with every pair of dogs. Dogs fight at different intensities and for different reasons. Learning how to avoid situations that can lead to a dog fight is far better than having to break one up.

Frequently one or both dogs will redirect their aggression towards the person attempting to break up the fight. Whether this is considered to be a dog attack on a person will depend on the circumstances leading up to the incident.

Never step in the middle of two dogs and try and grab them by the collar to stop a fight. If you do this, the chances of you being badly bitten are extremely high. People don't understand that 2 animals in the middle of a fight are in survival drive. If they see you at all, they don't look at you as their loving owner. When you charge in and grab them they either react out of a fight reflex and bite, or they see you as another aggressor. When they are in fight or fight mode they are far more likely to bite anyone in the immediate vicinity.

Often dogs do not recognise their owners or indeed any humans immediately in these situations, and bite them when they come too close. Owners in other instances can accentuate a fight by intervening, as the dog will then fight not only to protect itself but also to protect its owner.

Never get in front of the two dogs and certainly don't put a hand in between the dogs or anywhere near their heads. If you find that you are close to dogs that are fighting, move away and get behind them. When in a fight, dogs are fiercely looking for something to bite and if you're in a way then you will get bitten. Is not that the dog is aggressive towards you, it is just that its aim is to bite anything around it, and bite hard!

Do not waste your time by shouting or screaming at the dogs. This hardly ever works. A dog in fight mode will not pay attention to you, no matter how you speak. That part of its brain is shut off!

If there are two people available, both dogs should have their hindquarters lifted off the ground (like you would move a wheelbarrow) and then be dragged backwards by the tail. This will confuse the dogs and may cause them to relax their grip on each other. If the hindquarters are not lifted first, the dog may anchor itself by its front feet. Further injuries can then be caused to the other dog. In dogs without tails, the hind legs should not be substituted for the tail, as the dog can easily turn around and bite the person holding it.

Grabbing the head or shoulders of one or both dogs is dangerous unless the person doing so can get directly behind the dog's shoulders and have the strength to control its head.

When one dog is on a lead, the lead should be jerked sharply and a firm "No" given. This should be followed by the command "heel". If the two dogs break apart, the owner may be able to walk their dog away or keep it from the other dog. Releasing the dog from the lead and calling it whilst walking away is usually only effective in well trained dogs that are involved in minor scuffles.

A blanket or a coat or other similar item can be thrown over the heads of both dogs to confuse them. This may stop the fight and allow time for one or both dogs to be removed.

Throwing a noisy object at the dogs, or making a loud sound such as blowing a whistle near their heads to startle them may gain sufficient time to stop the fight. A succession of commands such as "No" or "Stop" or "Come" should be given at the same time.

Water can be poured over both dogs, or squirted into their faces. Again this may startle the dogs and separate them giving you the chance to get some distance between them.

Once The Fight Has Been Broken Up

Once the dog fight is broken up and the dogs pulled apart it is critical that the people do not release the dogs or the dog fight will begin again. The two people need to start turning in a circle, or slowly swinging the dogs in a circle while they back away from the other dog. This stops the dog from curling and coming back and biting the person holding their legs.

Both dogs should be put onto leads and a be separated by a good distance.

Once this has been done, efforts should be made to calm each dog down. This can be done by applying long gentle strokes all along the dog from the top of its head to the base of its tail.

Once you are happy that the dog is calm and no longer interested in the other dog, you should check it over for any signs of injury. If in doubt, get it checked over by your vet ASAP.