



It happens

- Outside family
 - Aggression to strangers
 - Mostly fear, but sometimes not
 - Territorial Aggression
 - Displaced aggression
 - Aggression to Children
 - Resource guarding
- Inside family
 - Status related
 - Resource Guarding
 - Startle
 - Fear
 - Pain



What causes aggression

- Aggression in dogs is natural and to be expected
 - We cannot extinguish aggression, although we can sometimes increase tolerance
 - Dogs are emotional beings who can think...rather than thinking beings who have emotions



Types of Aggression

- Intentional
 - Territorial
 - Fear of strangers
 - Familial
 - Intolerance
 - General
 - To particular types of people
 - Children
 - People who look weird
 - Possession
 - Maternal



Reflexive

- During an aggressive display or fight with another dog
- Pain
- Over-arousal
 - Play
- Accidental



General breed guidelines for aggression

- Hounds and Herding dogs – including GSD's – generally give some warnings
 - Aggressive barking
 - Conflict display – lunging and then drawing back
 - If you stand still, dog is often better
 - Tendency to bite quickly and not deeply
- Molossers often give very little warning
 - Direct stare
 - Quick lunge and hard bite

Home Visits

- When you first go to a home, you are actually evaluating a dog –
 - The client just doesn't realize it
 - Always look for signs..



Normal Door Greetings

- Some barking (in most untrained dogs)
- Immediate calming down when allowed to approach
- Vast amount of sniffing
- Invitation to interact or wander off to hang somewhere else



Anxiety - Fear

Signs of fear

- Barks from afar – flight distance
- Charges and barks
- Approaches from rear
- Slightly dropped head, ears back, wide eyed stare
- Stands behind owner



Confident

- Dog's body language is quiet and forward... or s/he investigates you in a pushy, almost obnoxious manner
- The line between confident and pushy is thin



Possibly worrisome dog greetings

- Wild barking at door – inability to calm down
- Immediate jumping up – hard – on guest or
- Barking from three to four feet away or
- Darting to and from guest in an agitated fashion
- Lying down in a place where s/he can keep a close eye on guest

Breakdown of types and modification tools

Territorial Defense

They will create territories larger than those that their guardians own – their house, their yard, their street, the neighbor's house, the whole street, etc.



Dogs are **territorial** – this cannot be over-emphasized

Many will defend those territories – often offensively

Territorial Aggression can take many forms, and be associated with many emotions

Dog might race out the door and attack a neighbor getting into or out of his own car

Dog might bite someone as soon as they come in the door, wait til they're already in then butt-bite, or bite when they are moving in the house



Dog might bite delivery person or postal carrier for intruding on territory

Territorial dogs (and people) do not necessarily pay any attention to the signals the other dog or person is giving out



Territorial Aggression Behavior Mod

Primarily Management

Block Views of neighborhood activity

Disallow door greetings

Walks away from the home

Obedience in yards

Case history – APBT

- Two year old Pit, adopted through Rescue
- Had lived with a foster for many months with no incidents at all
- Placed with fairly inexperienced owners - couple with two children
- I came over after two days for some minor problems (house training, excitement, no recall)
- No other issues for three weeks, then...



- Visiting couple came over and Ellie lunged at the male visitor (who was a little inebriated)
- Owners put her in a crate, where she vocalized for several hours
- They tried taking her out again, and she lunged again, barely missing
- I visited the next day, and Ellie stared, deeply growled, and lunged at me
 - They ended up sitting on the couch with her, where she coldly stared at me no matter where I moved – but particularly the staircase

Analysis

- Ellie was much more unstable than either shelter or I had seen (I was there much too soon after adoption)
- Owners had allowed Ellie to essentially take over the territory – walked from her home, had no boundaries within the house, and no real rules outside of it
- Decision made to return the dog to rescue, where I met her again the following week – no problems at all – friendly, happy sweet dog
 - Subsequently showed random aggression towards dogs and humans

GSD/Pyrenees x

- Shows aggression at doorway
- Occasional instant aggression on walks
 - To both dogs and people
- Fine with most people after meeting them
 - Can be very pushy and bossy
 - Tests the mental strength of humans



Looks like this dog...but isn't ☺

Stranger Danger

- This can be part of territorial defense...in fact, territoriality can make fearful dogs bold
- Dog seems to feel a combination of fight/flight (engage or avoid)
- Fearful dogs also might respond aggressively on walks
 - Particularly to people who look “weird” or who make overtures

Stranger Danger Behavior Mod

- Territorial management is imperative
- Besides taking over the territory in ways mentioned, the client may need to take preventive steps in the house –
 - Strict protocols upon the arrival of guests
 - Observation of dog's ongoing emotional state
 - Removal if dog approaches threshold (too early is way better than too late)

Karl Barx

- 15 month old herding dog mix
 - Social on walks with most people, indifferent with others
- Had bitten a few people visitors – quick superficial bites... very worrisome



Karl

- Adolescent onset of the behavior problems
- Very nice dog with an overlay of anxiety and fear
- Extremely motivated, intelligent owners

Plan – combination of management and training

No doorway privileges – visitors texted first, Karl is put in back room

When all is quiet, Karl is taken out and goes through a rehearsed show routine – mostly tricks

Karl is taken to tethered bed and allowed to watch the action. After a decent amount of time, he is allowed to sniff *certain savvy* guests

Outcome per owner: “He understands our routine for meeting people and, in fact, has oscillated pretty far toward the “I love company” end of the spectrum, as long as he doesn’t see them come through the door.”

Familial

- Many different scenarios possible
 - Intolerance to handling
 - Possession around food and/or toys
 - Status issues
 - Dislike or avoidance of children

In-Family Aggression



- Grok the Great Dane
 - Couple with little experience purchase a Great Dane pup
 - Husband is away a lot
 - Two small children in home
- Dog is naturally rough and overbearing
 - Children become fearful
 - Dog becomes more overwhelming
 - Children do not want to be around dog

Dog is now 9 months old and often uncontrollable

- Couple is thinking...
 - Boot camp
 - Day trainer

- I am thinking...
 - Return to breeder; needs more experienced owner



Status issues?

- Lab in home from 8 weeks of age
- Developed possession issues around kennel and bed
- Husband & daughter can control dog verbally
- Wife and son cannot control dog
 - Both have been threatened, neither actually bitten



Analysis

- Dog is fearfully possessive of crate, bed and high value objects
- Food possession – when they tried feeding him on the patio, he guarded the entire patio
- Dog is conflicted about people, using avoidance systems
 - male owner used physical reprimands, whereas rest of family did not
 - If dog was in crate and growled, woman left whereas man slammed the top of the crate

- Dog is somewhat afraid of male owner, wary of others in and outside family
 - Dog loves male owner most; wife interacts the most
- As time progressed, male owner stopped using physical reprimands (but it might have been too late)

Recommendations

- Management
 - Remove crate (they did this under duress; very worried about destruction, whereas I was worried about injury)
 - Remove bed during the day, move position daily
 - Remove high value items and replace with lower value, easily fully ingested
 - Block off kitchen area completely to dog

Feeding

- Feed good quality kibble
- Use two or three bowls, picking one up when he is eating out of the other one
- Have him sit, look and wait before each bowl is placed. Hand feed good food; kibble in bowl
- Remove all bowls between feeding time

Other stuff

- Exercise regularly, enough so that he is getting stimulation on a daily basis
 - (they had a tendency to do long walks weekends only)
- Regulate amount of attention the dog gets on demand, particularly from the wife and son

Outcome

- Mixed
 - Behaviors got somewhat better, but people were unable to keep up attention/training work
 - I understand they decided not to keep the dog, which was appropriate under the circumstances

Over Protectiveness

- 5 year old herding mix
 - Separation anxiety
 - Stranger aggressive
 - More importantly, aggressive to father of weeks old baby
 - Has charged father
 - Puts himself between mother/baby and father



Nice people, but...

- Wife felt honored that her dog protected her, even from her own husband
- Husband seemed to spend a great deal of time trying to please both of them
- Dog was conflicted, confused and potentially dangerous (threatened me while I was there as well)

- Dog is already on Prozac, with little discernable difference in behavior
- Dog is fed Prather Ranch Organ meat with Orijen Kibble
- Wife tells dog to knock off behavior, while husband tries to mollify and sooth him
- When husband took dog to work, he was much better, though still stranger reactive occasionally



Recommendations

- Management/Relationship adjustment
 - Remove dog from familial beds (there were two)
 - Remove dog when baby was being fed
 - Have dog relax on his own bed rather than between woman's legs, looking out
 - He actually 'claimed' baby's blanket and couldn't easily be removed, particularly by husband
 - Vary dog's feeding time and drop organ meat from menu

- Actions
 - If dog follows, disallow (close doors, send to mat)
 - If dog growls, stand up and leave him
 - If necessary put him on a tie-down so leaving is possible
- Training
 - Primary focus on the “wait” and “watch” cues
 - Dog has a tendency to gaze towards perceived threat
 - I wanted dog to look back at handler for instructions
 - Go to Mat
 - Always reinforce dog when he is **doing** what you want
 - Calm, consistent, strong reinforcements

Prognosis

- Ongoing
 - Dog has gotten better in some areas, but management is difficult as is owner’s attitude
 - The dog is given too much responsibility and cracks under it

Resource Guarding



Resource Guarding takes many forms

- Food
- Chewies
- Toys
- Beds
- Humans

- Guarding from other dogs
- Long distance from dogs
- Body parts!



Possession Scale

1. None (none)
2. Minor (eats faster)
3. Medium (freezes, stares)
4. Medium (freezes, walks away from tester – or tries to hide chewie)
5. Serious (freezes, stares, snaps)
6. Very serious (freezes, stares, bites hand)
7. Extremely serious (just bites – no warning)
8. *Guards more than one thing – food/chewies/bed/person*

Food Guarding

- Probably the easiest to spot...and the easiest to work on – at the lower levels







General Food Guarding Protocols

Teach the dog to sit upon approach – (method first developed by Sophia Yin)

- Give the dog a bowl with a little food in it
 - » As she finishes, step towards him and ask her to sit
 - When she sits, reward with hand treat
- Continue this method until the dog sees the approaching feet as the cue to sit.

Same method can be used for chewies

- Give the dog a relatively low level chewie, big enough so that it cannot be taken under something
- Cue the dog to sit, and offer something delicious
- Gradually increase the value of the chewie the dog is giving up

Why this works (IMO)

- Most dogs eat automatically, without thinking. They are in their reptilian brain (amygdala). They react to the approach of anything as they would to a serious threat
- When you cue a dog to sit, you bring him into his frontal brain (cortex). He must think; when he does so, the urge to bite recedes – *with most dogs*
- As time goes on, the dog starts eating less automatically and more mindfully

Other Protocols

- Adding better food to the bowl
- Three or four bowl method
- Feeding without a bowl
- Feeding via hunting (spreading food around)

Case Study – Bella, Red Lab

- Couple acquired Bella from Craig's List – family had several small children, husband had gotten 6 week old puppy without wife's consent – puppy was kept primarily in a crate.
- Jeff and Paula got her at 8 weeks



Behavior issues

- According to owners, Bella is very sweet, compliant (though demanding), obedient and growls when eating food
- Does not like wife, although she will tolerate her

Bella



What has the owner been doing to adjust the behavior

- They have tried multiple methods
 - First, tried putting treats in bowl as she ate – she growled
 - Took advice to pin her when she did it – behavior got worse
 - Leashed her and fed her in the middle of the room, leash correction when she snarled – behavior got *much worse*

Behavior Mod

- Put her on a GL, fed her by hand, and corrected her for growling (which she did consistently)
 - After all this, Bella actually bit Jeff while he was hand feeding her
- Followed the sit for treat method (the major one I use), where you teach the dog to sit when approached
- Worked for awhile, then Bella bit Jeff as he walked toward the cabinet

Recommended behavior mod

- Remove bowl of food
- Feed her on the floor (they moved to a tray)
- Leave her strictly alone – put food down, release her to eat, then leave the room
- After a week, begin wandering in and out of the kitchen
 - Pay attention to Bella *only* when she has finished and approaches for affection
 - Bella successfully eating (10)

In Addition....

- They reduced the amount of attention they were giving her...both positive and negative
 - They thought they were shunning her, I thought they were taking the pressure off her
- So far...things are going well 😊



Start here

Dog Bites

- When you work around dogs, you should understand that they can be dangerous – Case study
 - Ky – toy Aussie, rescued from a hoarder and placed with an experienced owner
 - After eight weeks, Ky could not settle, barked almost constantly, and had bitten the foster once and threatened her a couple of times
 - He seemed to have some neck sensitivity, snapping when his neck was touched or equipment (even a harness) put on
 - He played too roughly with other family dog (who was fearful), wanted to play ball all the time, and seemed anxious



Consult

- First 45 minutes was spent trying to establish a relationship with the dog...which didn't happen
 - Possibly because he had been shifted around he did not trust anyone completely (foster the most, but he had bitten her)
 - I didn't touch him
 - One of the issues was putting his harness on
 - In experimenting with a way to do it, he reached out and bit me

Guarding humans

- Lap Guarding
 - Generally small dogs, often insecure or fearful (but not always – sometimes over-privileged)
 - Misread by owners as protection
 - Chi video (12)





Lap Guarding Behavior Mod

- While it might be best practices not to allow the small dog on the lap of the owner, it probably isn't going to work – the reason a person gets a small dog is often to let them on laps, beds and other high spots
 - Most effective behavior mod is often to remove the lap, either by setting the dog on the floor, or putting him in a soft crate (*and stop laughing when he does it!*)
 - *Alternatively, handing the dog to the other person butt first will often suppress the behavior temporarily*

Bed/Area Guarding

- Dog will not allow human (or other dog) near her own bed, her owner's bed, or her owner
- This particular dog also guards refrigerator at times – from both human and other dogs in household



Behavior Mod

- Identify times of day when behavior is likely to occur (in his case, it was in the evening)
- Don't confront!
- Provide alternative activities and housing (closing doors, etc)
- Train appropriate behaviors
 - Find it away from bed/fridge, etc. – practice these when the dog is doing well, or it will never work

Guarding People – Medium to large dogs

- Most people think their large dog is protecting them...but they're more likely protecting him
 - If a dog presses back against the human, it's fear
 - If a dog stands between the human and a threat, it's protection
 - If a dog will not allow anyone to approach – even when there is no threat – it's likely guarding (Boxer)
 - Behavior mod
 - Obedience (particularly sit/down stay)

Dog/dog resource guarding



- Natural behavior, except when one dog tries to take something from another
- Can be added to rank competition
 - (my sister's issue)

Perfect storm

- Two resident boxers...one seemingly benign foster
- A garbage can overturned and left...
- One dog discovers it





Stuff to talk about

- Aggression should not be taken lightly - ever
- Animals do not distinguish between how they feel and how they act
 - (emotional beings who think)
- This means that in most cases, the action follows the thought pretty much instantaneously
 - Dog reacts to sight, sound or smell of what he considers dangerous



Stress is natural – long term stress is not

- Animals are built for quick buildup of emotion, then action, then release
 - The consequence would be survival (if she perceives a threat)
 - By running away
 - By freezing in place
 - By running after
 - Arousal chemicals include adrenalin (epinephrine), dopamine and cortisol



- When the event is over, it is over
 - The body returns to normal
 - This is why people say “he bit me, and then he looked like nothing happened”
- Calming chemicals include serotonin and Gaba



Chronic arousal is very bad for our dogs!

- When we reinforce excited, energized behavior, especially when we first arrive home, we may be reinforcing the very behaviors we do not want to see
 - When you come home and immediately take your dog(s) out, you are reinforcing an adrenalin rush
 - The dog fluctuates between being alone (and possibly lonely) and in a high state of arousal



Balancing Act

- We must figure out how to help unstable dogs become balanced
 - Predictable routine
 - Lots of sleep
 - Balanced feeding schedule
 - Obvious leadership (not dominance)
- Puzzle solving
 - Burrowing under blankets
- Patience exercises
 - Sit and down stay
 - ???



Stranger danger

- Questions?
 - Do you allow greetings (curiosity is natural) or not
 - If not, how do you give the dog the information he needs
 - Is unquestioning obedience possible...or desirable?
 - How much novel information is good for a dog? Is it better to walk a dog in a known or unknown area
 - How much stress does it cause the dog

Walks with unstable or aroused dogs

- Walk with a purpose, create short term goals
- Keep the dog focused on you and your walk
 - Teach walking games - touch, spin, "go rock"
- Practice avoidance moves
- Do not allow greeting of people or dogs
 - This eventually will decrease frustration



Decision Tree

- When keeping the dog in the home is appropriate
 - When management is relatively easily accomplished, and doesn't need constant vigilance
 - When owners/guardians are committed to keeping up an appropriate training program
 -

- When re-homing is acceptable

- Dog

- Is not actively dangerous
 - Would improve in another home
 - Environmental controls more appropriate
 - Experience level more appropriate
 - Potential appropriate home with no pets, or appropriate pets – children or no children

- When euthanasia is appropriate

- Dog

- Is actively dangerous (even if protracted work would help)
 - To people in household
 - To strangers
 - To other dogs in household
 - Is obviously in mental or physical distress
 - When appropriate owners might be difficult or impossible to locate

- Considerations

- Extent of household and canine management needed to minimize or eliminate circumstances which lead to inappropriate behavior
 - Amount and type of changes owners have had to make to accommodate dog's behavior problems (ie walking at odd times of day, not having guests over)
 - What kind of behavior modification techniques would be appropriate, and how much time and commitment it would take

- Whether instinctive drift would be likely to occur (tendency of an organism to slip back into its "comfort zone")
- Whether owners' commitment could extend beyond several months
- The Presence and Age of Children
- Insurance risk/neighbor problems

Counselors rules

Listen

Pay attention

Tell the truth



Let go of the results
