



DOG AGGRESSION

INDEX OF FAQs

- [Why are dogs aggressive?](#)
- [Are some dogs naturally aggressive?](#)
- [Are some breeds of dog more aggressive than others?](#)
- [What are the signs of aggressive behaviour?](#)
- [My dog is aggressive, what should I do?](#)
- [Should I tell my dog off when it is aggressive?](#)
- [Are male dogs more aggressive than female dogs?](#)
- [Will neutering my dog make it less aggressive?](#)
- [Will playing rough games with my dog make it aggressive?](#)
- [My dog is aggressive and I've been told to assert my dominance over it. Should I do this?](#)
- [I have a new puppy. What should I do to prevent it from becoming aggressive?](#)
- [I have a new child in the family/on the way. Will my dog become aggressive?](#)
- [If a dog shows signs of aggression towards me, what should I do?](#)
- [Is it possible to predict if a dog will be aggressive in the future?](#)
- [How do I know if a dog is about to bite?](#)
- [What causes a dog to attack?](#)
- [What should I do if a dog attacks me?](#)
- [How can dog attacks be avoided? \(See also FAQ Why do dogs bite children?\)](#)
- [Why do dogs bite children?](#)
- [If a dog bites a person or another animal, should it be put to sleep?](#)
- [How will a professional pet behaviour counsellor stop my dog being aggressive?](#)
- [Where to go for help](#)



WHAT IS DOG AGGRESSION?

Aggression is a normal part of the way all animals behave. Often people only consider aggressive behaviour in a dog to be a problem when it reaches the extremes of biting, but it can include lesser degrees, such as “grumbling”, growling, snarling, teeth baring and snapping at the air without making contact. Bites too can vary from light touches with the teeth right through to inflicting serious injury.



Aggression is the outward expression of an emotion and can be used to communicate various intentions by the dog. Rather than being something that switches on and off suddenly, aggression is part of a range of behaviours that dogs have available to them to deal with life’s everyday challenges. Many of these behaviours are passive and it is only when the dog changes from trying to avoid a situation, through things like moving away or showing that they are not happy, to actively trying to manage the situation, that we term it “aggression”. When a dog has to cope with a particular feature of its life it has a number of options available to it. Aggression is simply a part of some of those options.



WHY ARE DOGS AGGRESSIVE?

Dogs are aggressive in response to unfolding events. Any dog has the ability to use aggression, but it is always dependent upon what they believe is happening to them. When a dog uses aggression it is almost invariably because it thinks that it is under some form of threat. For example, the threat could be to its personal safety, to take away something (or someone) it values highly, or by preventing it from doing something it really wants to do, which causes frustration. Aggression can be used to control or reduce this challenge. Theoretically every single dog, if pushed far enough, can and will use aggression.



ARE SOME DOGS NATURALLY AGGRESSIVE?

Although it might seem that some dogs are born to be aggressive, it is more accurate to say that they are born with inherited tendencies that might, if not controlled, make aggressive behaviour more likely.

As aggression is always a response, usually to a threat, there is no reason why a dog cannot learn alternative responses. If these responses are controlled throughout the dog’s life, starting with breeding from well balanced parents and continuing with learning good social skills as a puppy, there is no reason why any dog should learn to use aggression inappropriately.





Because of the way some types of dogs have been bred, some puppies will need more careful nurturing than others to ensure that they do not grow up to use aggression inappropriately.

If dogs do not have the right kind of experiences at any time in their life, they can learn that aggression can solve problems for them. Once learnt it can become the dog's first choice of ways to solve problems. This kind of dog may appear "naturally" aggressive, but they are actually responding to the combined effect of the learning experiences they have had over their lifetime.



ARE SOME BREEDS OF DOG MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN OTHERS?

There are inherited ways of behaving that are particular to some breeds or types of dogs that make it more likely for individuals to grow up to use aggression where others would not. Because no two dogs are exactly the same, individuals will differ too. For example some breeds are intentionally bred to be more reactive and some to be "wary of strangers", which might make them more likely to be defensive if approached. In every breed there will be individuals that use aggression inappropriately and others that will not.



Aggression is not a single characteristic, however there are breeds of dogs that have historically been used for specific purposes, such as for fighting dogs or other animals, or for guarding. Whilst these breeds may not be any more likely to show aggression, because of their physical and temperamental attributes if they do show aggression it is likely to have more serious consequences. Persistence in attack coupled with strong jaws can cause serious injuries.

Guarding breeds have been selected to show aggression when threatened, but the levels of threat always have to be learned through experience. If you were to take a puppy from a very defensive guarding breed and bring it up correctly, it would not necessarily show aggression except in the most extreme circumstances. If you were to take a puppy from the least defensive breed and bring it up badly, it could very well turn out to be extremely aggressive in all kinds of circumstances.



WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR?

Each individual dog will use aggression in the **circumstances** that they believe it to be appropriate and they will use the **degree** of aggression that they believe to be appropriate for each encounter. What they believe to be appropriate will depend on what they have learned previously.





Averting or reducing a challenge can be done in many non-aggressive ways. It is only when the dog believes that these will not work, or that aggression will be more effective, that it will be used.

Dogs communicate mainly through body language. They have a wide range of non-aggressive signals and postures that they exhibit when they want us to stop doing whatever it is that they do not like. These “threat aversion” or “threat reduction” signals include gestures that show they are uncomfortable, like yawning, lip licking, averting their gaze, turning their head away, dropping ears, crouching, low wagging or tucking their tail under and rolling over on their back. These are sometimes termed “submissive” but the intention is the same as aggression – to stop whatever is happening – and if they don’t work the dog may escalate its communication more actively.



More active signals may still incorporate “submissive” parts, but will include things like the baring of teeth, narrowing of eyes, raising of the hairs on the neck and back, shifting of weight to allow escape, growling, snarling and sometimes barking or snapping. These signals will become more and more active if the threat does not reduce, as the dog believes that the only way they can ward off the danger is through force, and they can end in biting.



Some dogs’ communication is hampered by the way they look, for example a dog with a short tail may not use it very successfully and a dog with a lack of facial expression, low hanging ears or lots of hair may have difficulty making itself understood. Some dogs learn over time that the more subtle gestures do not work – people often do not pay them much attention – and so go straight to the more obvious ones such as bites. Some dogs may feel that the danger in front of them is so threatening that they have no time for “small talk” and have to go straight to the top.



All of these dogs may use aggression without the smaller communication signs that we recognise and because of that it may not be easy to predict when they are about to bite.

So, whilst many dogs give off lots of warning that they are not happy with the situation and if you do not leave them alone they may bite, a few other dogs *appear* to bite unpredictably. The “unpredictable” bites are simply the result of the dog deciding the lesser signals are not appropriate for the circumstances.

[\(See also FAQ *How do I know if a dog is about to bite?*\)](#)





MY DOG IS AGGRESSIVE, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Sit down and work out the circumstances that caused the aggression so that you can avoid them in the short term. What you do next depends on when, or towards what or whom, your dog is aggressive. Some dogs will only be aggressive in one context and others will show aggression in lots of contexts. The more often and the more contexts in which your dog is aggressive, the more difficult it is likely to be to treat. For example if your dog defends high quality food, such as bones, with aggression, but shows no aggression over ordinary food, you may be able to deal with it by simply not giving it bones. However, the use of aggression can escalate quickly and the more that dogs use it the more they are likely to use it in the future, so getting help early is crucial.



Aggression can be a sign that your dog is not well. Illness can cause grumpiness and intolerance, so it is essential that you have your dog checked by a veterinary surgeon. If they are given a clean bill of health your veterinary surgeon will be able to refer you to a qualified experienced dog behaviourist ([see FAQ Where to go for help](#)) who will be able to guide you through changing your dog's behaviour.

If you temporarily need to deal with a dog that is being aggressive towards you, please see [FAQ If a dog shows signs of aggression towards me, what should I do?](#)



SHOULD I TELL MY DOG OFF WHEN IT IS AGGRESSIVE?

No. Telling a dog off will be seen as a punishment, as will smacking, 'scruffing' them by the neck or pinning them down. All of these will be seen by the dog as very threatening. Aggression is a dog's response to what they think is a threat. When your dog is already in an aggressive frame of mind, telling your dog off or otherwise punishing it will make it feel even more threatened and will bring it directly into conflict with you. It may even make the dog direct a much greater level of aggression towards you. They may go from growling to biting because they can see no other way out of the confrontation.



Punishing a dog for showing small signs of aggression, such as growling, may stop it. However, if they have no way of showing that they feel under threat they will hide their emotions until they cannot contain them any longer, resulting in what appears to be "unpredictable" aggression, where the dog misses out all the lower communication and goes straight to biting ([See FAQ What are the signs of aggressive behaviour?](#))

Changing an aggressive response is all about understanding why the dog feels that way and then changing that feeling, not about telling them off for the way they feel.





ARE MALE DOGS MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN FEMALE DOGS?

Both male and female dogs have the ability to show aggression but the statistics show that “entire” (not neutered) male dogs are more likely to show aggression than female dogs or neutered males. Unfortunately this isn’t the easy answer it might appear to be.

Entire male dogs are likely to be more competitive over things they value than are either females or neutered males. They may be more confident in their ability to control things they think are important and that may lead them into conflict in situations in which their owners expect them to defer, or do as they are told.



For example if a puppy regularly muscles their litter mates away from food, they may form the idea that they can take food whenever they want. This may lead them to think they are entitled to any food that is on the floor. Because they control their litter mates, they expect to control other similar situations as well. If they then fail to control food, because their owner stops them, the frustration and anger they feel may turn to aggression, leading them to use aggression to defend food they have “found”. In their view they are defending something they believe is theirs.



Whilst it is entirely possible that female dogs and neutered males may show the same behaviour, the extra competitiveness of some entire males make them more likely to do so. ([Also see FAQ Will neutering my dog make it less aggressive?](#)). Male dogs are not more aggressive than females, but their competitive tendencies might bring them into conflict with their owners more, which may result in aggression if not handled properly.



WILL NEUTERING MY DOG MAKE IT LESS AGGRESSIVE?

This really depends upon the reason that your dog is aggressive. As seen in [FAQ “Are male dogs more aggressive than female dogs?”](#) neutered male dogs are less likely to show aggression, but this is probably because they do not learn to use it in the first place. Once aggression is learnt as a response to a situation, neutering a male dog (also called “castrating”) is unlikely to have much effect. Castrating dogs before they start to show aggression may well reduce the future likelihood of some individuals becoming aggressive, but once they have learned that aggression is a successful response, the learning does not go away. There is also strong anecdotal evidence that neutering a male dog can actually make some forms of aggression worse.





Female dogs show less aggression than male dogs in general, but neutering a bitch will not affect aggression unless it is driven by female hormones, for example nest guarding in false-pregnancy. Again there is evidence that neutering a bitch can make some forms of aggression worse.

If your dog, either male or female, is not showing any signs of aggression, neutering them may make them less likely to show aggression in the future, but there is no guarantee. If your dog is already showing aggression you need a professional behavioural opinion as to exactly what the cause is before considering neutering as an option ([See FAQ Where to go for help](#)).



WILL PLAYING ROUGH GAMES WITH MY DOG MAKE IT AGGRESSIVE?

Studies show that there is no connection between playing rough games with your dog and aggression, but one way that dogs use to test their ability to win competitions is through rough games. If your dog plays rough games with you they are less likely to inhibit their behaviour towards you at other times. If your dog defers to you, obeys you when you ask and you are happy with your relationship, there is no need not to play any type of game. If your dog is showing aggression, particularly towards you or other family members, playing rough games may well be contributing to it.



Playing rough games does not cause aggression, but it can give your dog an unrealistic impression of their ability to control you, which can lead to a lack of consistency in your relationship, which may cause aggression in some dogs. If your dog is already showing aggression towards family members, playing rough games is likely to make them worse.

MY DOG IS AGGRESSIVE AND I'VE BEEN TOLD TO ASSERT MY DOMINANCE OVER IT. SHOULD I DO THIS?

Relationships with pet dogs are far too complicated to be defined as simply either dominant or subordinate. "Asserting dominance" is an outdated concept that modern behaviourists do not think is an appropriate way of interacting with our pets. If your dog is aggressive you may well need to adjust your relationship to take them under your control, but this should not be done in the confrontational manner suggested by "asserting dominance". Things such as "staring them out", shaking them by the scruff, rolling them over, holding them down, "Alpha rolls", holding their jaws, smacking, or any form of physical punishment, at best may do little good and at worst will severely worsen aggression in your dog.





Even less brutal interventions thought to support dominance, such as “making them eat after you” or “standing in their bed from time to time” have little basis in science and are unlikely to have a positive effect on aggression.

I HAVE A NEW PUPPY. WHAT SHOULD I DO TO PREVENT IT FROM BECOMING AGGRESSIVE?

Unfortunately breeding from parents that show aggression and the effects of very early upbringing could establish a tendency to use aggression before new owners even see their puppy.



Assuming you’ve done the right thing by researching the kind of dog that fits your lifestyle and buying from a reputable source, you will have been to see the puppy with their mother, brothers and sisters and established that they are happy and contented. From birth, the puppies should have been regularly interacting with people in a normal family environment, not shut away in a barn or shed. Always try to see a pup in their home well before the day on which you pick them up, so you can walk away if the conditions aren’t right. Remember, you could be caring for this dog for the next twenty years; don’t make the mistake of choosing one that has had such a bad start in life, as, without specialist help, they are more likely to be aggressive when they grow up.



Having got your puppy home you need to gradually increase their exposure to all the different things that they will experience as they grow up. This is often referred to as “socialisation” and one of the best ways of starting out is to enrol in a puppy class where the environment is tightly controlled. Your veterinary surgeon may be able to advise you of puppy classes in your area run by a properly qualified person, where you can get extensive advice on avoiding aggression in the future. Puppy classes are not legally regulated, so you should make sure that you choose someone who has real qualifications. This is a crucial time in your puppy’s development and a badly run class could damage them for life. ([See FAQ Where to go for help](#))



I HAVE A NEW CHILD IN THE FAMILY/ON THE WAY. WILL MY DOG BECOME AGGRESSIVE?

There is no reason for a dog to become aggressive because you have a new child, but children bring with them a huge change in your circumstances that may have an effect on how you relate to your dog. You may not have time to walk them as much, or be hampered by a pram when you do; lack of sleep might make you a little less tolerant and maybe a little grumpy; you may not be able to cuddle your dog as much because you have a baby on your knee.





None of these things may have a direct impact that causes aggression, but they may make your dog more unsettled.

It is a good idea to prepare your dog for the changes before they actually happen, so you can gauge their reaction. Dogs that have no experience of children and babies may take longer to adjust than those who are familiar with them.

Bring out the cot and pram before baby comes home so your dog can get used to them, and you can play CDs of the noises that babies make (crying could be quite worrying for a dog that has never heard it before). When baby comes home, don't exclude your dog but allow them to see, hear and smell the new arrival, under strict supervision of course, so they can understand more easily that there is nothing to be worried about.



It is also a good idea to teach your dog to go and sit on a "day-bed" (such as a blanket or cushion) where they can relax out of harm's way. The bed should be in the same room as you, but away from where you will be busy with baby. Train them to sit on the bed or give them a chew when they go there, to give you freedom to attend to baby when you need it.



The little noises that babies make and their uncoordinated wriggling actions can remind some dogs of prey, so it is vitally important never to leave dogs unattended with babies, no matter how safe and friendly you may think they might be. ([See also FAQ Why do dogs bite children?](#))

IF A DOG SHOWS SIGNS OF AGGRESSION TOWARDS ME, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Firstly, discontinue whatever it is you are doing. Aggression is the dog's way of warning you to stop.

Secondly stand still. Movement towards an aggressive dog may be interpreted as a threat, and movement away may make the dog bold enough to bite. Stand still and take stock of what is happening. If the aggression stops, think about what caused it and avoid doing the same thing again. If it is your own dog and you are stuck in the situation, try to distract them with something positive, such as picking up their lead, or asking them to sit for a treat. If it continues, or if it is a strange dog, see [FAQ What should I do if a dog attacks me?](#)



If this is your dog, you probably need professional help because you have not been able to prevent this happening, so you are unlikely to be able to improve it. You may well be too close to the problem to take a detached view. ([See FAQ Where to go for help](#))



IS IT POSSIBLE TO PREDICT IF A DOG WILL BE AGGRESSIVE IN THE FUTURE?

There are factors that make it more likely that a dog will use aggression in the future which can be used to estimate the likelihood that they will do so in particular circumstances. For example if a dog has bitten their owner the last nine times they have tried to take a bone away from them, the likelihood that they will do so on the tenth attempt is very high. With a detailed history of how an individual dog has behaved in the past, a professional dog behaviour counsellor may be able to estimate the likelihood of whether the dog will be aggressive in similar circumstances in the future. This is not the same as being able to predict aggression. Almost all of the relevant factors depend upon knowing what has happened in the past. Without these precise details it is impossible to predict future aggressive behaviour.

Dogs use aggression in response to what they see as a threat. If the dog has never felt sufficiently threatened, they may never have felt the need to use aggression. When a sufficient threat arises any dog may decide, there and then, to use aggression.

In dogs with a history of aggressive behaviour it is possible to estimate the chances of future aggression. In dogs with no history of aggression, or an unknown history, it is virtually impossible to be certain.

HOW DO I KNOW IF A DOG IS ABOUT TO BITE?

Most dogs will give plenty of warning that they are going to bite. They may give “leave me alone” signals like licking their lips, yawning, turning their head or trying to walk away; they may be even more obvious with signals such as raising the hair on their neck and back, growling, snarling, showing their teeth and barking. Do not make the mistake of thinking that a wagging tail means they are friendly – a wagging tail can mean lots of things, including “I am about to bite”! The most obvious signal will be a snap at the air in front of you, which is not a “miss” but a warning that the next one will make contact.

“Unpredictable” biting is never without a cause, but the reason may be hidden from us by the dog’s previous experiences. Biting is usually the last thing a dog wants to do, but they can learn that it is the only way out of a situation. Such a dog may learn that in a certain situation it is useless to try all the other signals, because they have never worked before, and may go straight to biting as a guaranteed way of reducing the threat. Alternatively the threat may be so sudden and close that the dog feels it has no option other than to bite. ([See FAQ *What are the signs of aggressive behaviour?*](#))



Environment



Diet



Behaviour



Company



Health and welfare



WHAT CAUSES A DOG TO ATTACK?

Dogs can attack for a number of reasons, but all can be traced back to the basic threat ([See FAQ *Why are dogs aggressive?*](#)). It is important when viewing this to do so from the dog's perspective. Dogs can feel threatened by lots of different things depending on what their breed was originally developed to do and their upbringing. Dog breeds that were originally bred to be guards may be more inclined to attack if they feel their territory is threatened. Even if we know the postman does not pose the same threat as a burglar, the dog treats them the same. Dog breeds that were originally bred to retrieve game may be more inclined to defend things they have in their possession, whether it is their own toy, or something they have "stolen". The threat may even come from trying to stop them doing something they enjoy. Dogs that have had bad experiences, for example of being attacked by other dogs, may feel threatened by new dogs they meet. Dogs may even attack because they are hurt or in pain.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF A DOG ATTACKS ME?

See FAQs: [My dog is aggressive, what should I do? If a dog shows signs of aggression towards me, what should I do?](#) and [Where to go for help.](#)



The dog is almost certainly attacking you because it considers you to be a threat in some way. There are two main priorities to ensure your own safety: firstly to physically protect yourself and secondly to reduce the threat to the dog so they stop the attack. Using strategies that combine these two priorities will afford you most protection.

- *Stop moving towards the dog.*

If you are at home, stand still ([see above FAQs](#)). If you are out walking, jogging or cycling and a dog approaches you, you have probably inadvertently entered what it considers to be its territory. If it runs towards you but is not barking or growling, it may just be checking you out and after a quick sniff to determine you are no threat may leave you alone. Stand still and let it sniff. Do not try to touch it, or make sudden movements, but speak reassuringly. Keep standing still and it will lose interest and leave. If it is barking or growling, it considers you a threat that must be dealt with and will be unlikely to leave.

- *Stay calm.*

Indoors, or if you are walking or jogging, stand still and face the dog, slightly angling your body away from them. Keep your body relaxed and on your back foot. You want to give the impression you are leaving calmly.





Do not try to shoo away, hit or kick the dog as you will be increasing the threat, and will increase the possibility of a full attack. Talk to the dog calmly in a pleasant tone of voice. Tell it you mean it no harm and that you are leaving. If you are cycling, dismount and place the bike between you and the dog. This allows you to slowly wheel it far enough away to remount. Do not try to outpace the dog as this may encourage it to chase you.

- *Get something as solid as possible between you and the dog.*

Indoors this may be furniture, a chair, coffee table or even a cushion. If you are delivering something to the house it may be the parcel, a bag or your coat. If you are in the street or park it may be a bench, a lamppost or litter bin. If cycling, use your bicycle as above.

- *Watch the dog.*

But do not stare into its face. Turn your head slightly to one side and downwards. Watch it very carefully out of the corner of your eye.

- *You may need to move, either behind something or to get away from the dog.*

If the dog does not press home its attack, walk slowly backwards or sideways. Do not let the dog get round behind you; keep moving gently so that you continue to present a half side/front view of your body. Do not make sudden movements or run, just walk slowly away from the dog. It is not likely to pursue you very far. Keep walking and talking up to the point at which the dog loses interest in you. Try to place more solid objects between you if you can, for example move from table to sofa, or from lamppost to litterbin. If you *must* get past the dog, try to circle round, keeping at least the original distance between you.

- *If the dog does press home the attack.*

Try to hold something between you and it, such as your briefcase, bag or coat. Fend off rather than try to fight back. Very few dogs press home a serious attack and after a snap-bite they will be content that you are leaving. Do not scream or yell. If you know there are people within hearing distance, call to them for help. Stay on your feet and do not corner yourself. Continue to walk slowly away, backwards or sideways, looking down and sideways, talking reassuringly, fending off if necessary and aiming to place solid objects between you as you leave.





HOW CAN DOG ATTACKS BE AVOIDED?

[See also FAQ why do dogs bite children?](#) Firstly by choosing a puppy sensibly and bringing it up correctly you will be able to minimise the aggression it is likely to show. However, although most dogs go through their entire life without ever showing any signs of attacking anyone, every dog has the ability to attack if they believe the circumstances warrant it.

Secondly, by knowing the dog. Have they shown signs of aggression before? Are they generally grumpy or even uncharacteristically grumpy today? Do they dislike particular things such as being leant over or disturbed in their bed? Are they intolerant of children or of hands reaching to their food bowl? Do they have a toy that they really like to keep? Every dog has preferences that they may be prepared to defend. If you know exactly how a dog is likely to react in a situation, you can avoid or cut short any aggression by controlling the circumstances. Although this may not be an ideal long term solution for a dog showing a high risk of aggression, it will prevent injury whilst you seek professional help ([see FAQ Where to go for help](#)).

Finally, dog attacks can be avoided by paying attention to what the dog is doing. In circumstances where the dog might think there is a threat, there will usually be warning signs ([see FAQ How do I know if a dog is about to bite?](#)) The dog will often try to remove itself from the situation, or otherwise avoid the threat in some way, before resorting to attack. Pay close attention to their body language. A slight stiffening of posture may be the first or only clue. Only by taking notice can you hope to understand what the dog is going to do next. Canine communication is a language like any other. It needs to be learned so you can effectively understand your dog.



WHY DO DOGS BITE CHILDREN?

Young children are far more likely to be bitten than any other population group and anyone is far more likely to be bitten by a dog owned by their own family than a strange one. This puts children in the highest risk group of being bitten by their own family's dog. Because children's faces are close to dog height and their skin is so fragile, any bite they suffer is likely to have very serious consequences.

Most dogs are considered part of the family, and children quickly understand that. What they may not understand is that they are a different species. Children tend to treat pet dogs as their peers, just like their friends and brothers and sisters. They hug them, try to cuddle them, pick them up and scold them.





Children express their affection for their family and friends through very close facial contact, often kissing. Much of this is exactly opposed to dog social behaviour.

A dog never hugs or tries to confine another dog, and looking closely into a dog's face is usually a threat. Children, especially toddlers, are still quite clumsy and can inadvertently stand on feet, fall on top of, tug ears, hair or tail or otherwise hurt a dog. From the dog's point of view, children do not use standard adult human communication. They cry at high volume, yell, shriek, crawl and run about unpredictably, waving their arms and throwing toys.



Dogs can find it hard to understand children, and even harder to ask them to back off. If adults have difficulty telling when a dog is about to bite, children just don't understand that their pet wants to be left alone when they want to play.

Children should never be left alone in the same room as a dog and should only be allowed close contact with them under competent adult supervision. Dogs should always have a 'place of safety' to retreat to if they need to get away from a child. If that is their bed, then children should be taught never to approach the dog in their bed and supervised to ensure they don't.



There are ways of introducing a dog to children and babies ([see FAQ I have a new child in the family/on the way](#)) and ways of teaching children how to relate to dogs that can help to minimise the risk of bites (for further information on dog safety for children and parents please visit http://www.apbc.org.uk/info/dog_safety_information for an APBC approved list of resources), but there is no substitute for proper adult supervision.

Never allow your child to approach a strange dog or one you do not know to be friendly towards children. Children think that all dogs will act like their own and the most pleasant looking dog may not be comfortable with an unknown child approaching them.



IF A DOG BITES A PERSON OR ANOTHER ANIMAL, SHOULD IT BE PUT TO SLEEP?

There is no rule that states a dog should be automatically put to sleep if it bites a person or other animal. Legally, if certain conditions are fulfilled, the person in charge of the dog may be brought before a court and may be ordered to have the dog put to sleep, although this is by no means inevitable.

What is more important is how much danger the dog may be in the future. To know that will require a full understanding of why they bit. Some dogs may be so dangerous that the only safe option is to put them to sleep, but the majority of episodes of dogs biting can be both explained and controlled.





Canine Aggression FAQs

RSPCA COMPANION ANIMALS PET CARE FACTSHEET



A professional pet behaviourist will have the qualifications and experience to tell the difference between dogs that can be changed and the ones beyond help. ([See FAQ Where to go for help](#))



HOW WILL A PROFESSIONAL PET BEHAVIOUR COUNSELLOR STOP MY DOG BEING AGGRESSIVE?

Properly qualified and experienced dog behaviour counsellors or behaviourists will examine the circumstances in which your dog is aggressive in minute detail. They will be able to work out why your dog is acting in this way and the range of options available to deal with it. These may include ways of changing your relationship with your dog, training specific exercises and changing the ways that your dog reacts to some stimuli. They will show you how to implement these changes so that you can control any future causes of aggression. Because each dog and owner are different no two interventions will be exactly the same and, although they may follow the same scientific principles, ways of changing each dog's behaviour will be tailored to the individual circumstances ([See FAQ Where to go for help](#)).



WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

It's important that you use a behaviour expert with the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to treat your pet. Anyone can call themselves a dog behaviour expert, but many do not possess up-to-date knowledge or the necessary skills required to treat pets with behaviour problems.

Inappropriate or outdated advice or methods may adversely affect your pet's welfare and even make your pet's behaviour problem worse.

For any behaviour problem involving aggression, it is important to have your dog checked by a veterinary surgeon. Aggression can be a sign that your dog is unwell and any good behaviourist will want to rule this out first.



The **Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB)** accredits **Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourists (CCAB)** who possess the appropriate skills, knowledge and abilities. This includes having an Honours or higher degree in a relevant subject, attendance at appropriate specialist courses, and at least three years of regular clinical experience

The **Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC)** also represents animal behaviourists. APBC members will have at least a relevant degree and two year's experience or a postgraduate qualification and one year's experience.





Canine Aggression FAQs

RSPCA COMPANION ANIMALS PET CARE FACTSHEET



CCAB and APBC behaviour experts will work to identify the cause of the behaviour problem and then develop structured treatment plans that are suitable for you, your pet and your circumstances.

Because CCAB and APBC behaviour experts offer a high standard of professionalism their work is covered by many of the pet insurance companies when referred by a veterinary surgeon.

For information about puppy classes, contact one of the recommended ASAB/APBC behaviourists for advice.

Find a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist - visit: www.asab.org

Find an APBC behaviourist – visit: www.apbc.org.uk

The information within these FAQs has been provided by David Ryan, Chairman of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC). The advice offered in these FAQs is recognised by the ASAB Accreditation Committee as reflecting what is accepted as good practise by those working in the field of clinical behaviour in companion animals



The APBC, founded in 1989, is an international network of experienced and qualified pet behaviour counsellors who work on referral from veterinary surgeons to treat behaviour problems in dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, horses and other pets. APBC members are able to offer the time and expertise necessary to investigate the causes of unwanted behaviour in pets, and outline practical treatment plans that are suitable for their clients' circumstances



The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) is the leading professional society in the United Kingdom for the study of animal behaviour. The Society recognises that the general public and others seek professional advice about the behavioural problems of animals. Certification, which is administered by the ASAB Accreditation Committee, is the means by which ASAB demonstrates to the public and to other professions, such as veterinarians, that certain individuals meet the educational, experiential and ethical standards required by the Society of a professional clinical animal behaviourist.



This pet care sheet has been produced by the RSPCA Companion Animals Department (V2 CAD/CC/SG 24.10.12). This leaflet is provided for general information only and is not intended to be relied upon as specific advice. Whilst we try to ensure that the information is correct, we cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information, nor for any reliance on or use of the leaflet.

