

B-9 PROTOCOL FOR DOGS WITH PROTECTIVE AND/OR TERRITORIAL AGGRESSION

Dogs with protective or territorial aggression protect people or places regardless of whether there is actually a threat. This is an inappropriate, out-of-context response and one that is potentially dangerous to the person or other animal that the dog perceives is trespassing. A dog that was behaving appropriately would either take its cues as to the appropriateness of its behavior from its people or from the context. Dogs that make good contextual distinctions generally give some low-level threat (a bark or a growl) and then make their decision about whether the threat is real on the basis of response that they receive. This is one reason that it is foolish to bark back at or growl at a barking or growling dog: the dog correctly perceives your response as a threatening answer and then becomes more aggressive. Children are particularly tempted to behave in this in appropriate manner and should be explicitly taught not to do so.

Clients often find protective and territorial behaviors desirable in their dogs and want the dogs to protect them and their property. If there truly is a threat (an attack or a break-in), it appears that dogs treated for problem protective or territorial aggression will still react to repel the intruder. It is almost impossible to teach dogs to act in an appropriately protective manner unless they show signs of interest. Once the dog appears to be willing to protect, those traits can be enhanced through training. The problem is that appropriate protection and inappropriate protective aggression are two very different circumstances. Clients are often concerned that if they control their dog's inappropriate, out-of-context protective or territorial aggression that their dog will no longer protect them or their property if there is a threat. This is not true, and it is kinder and safer for everyone to take action to ensure that the dog learns not to react inappropriately.

Dogs can protect people or animals in their household from other people and other animals (protective aggression), or they can protect a space (crate, car, yard, room, house) from other animals or people (territorial aggression). These become problematic behaviors because the dog responds as if there is a threat when none exists. For example, when someone hugs the client in the presence of the dog, the dog threatens or bites the person hugging the client. In this example the dog exhibits the same behavior that it uses to repel an intruder who physically threatened the client.

Some dogs react inappropriately even if no one touches their person—if the client stops to talk to someone on the street the dog may start to growl. Clients often report that these dogs do not react if the client does not acknowledge the presence of the passerby, whereas other clients complain that their dog begins to react even if the dog sees another person on the street. Both behaviors are a part of a continuum of problematic behavior. In either case the person that the dog threatens can be a total stranger (e.g., a delivery person) or someone known to them, but not well (e.g., the client's cousin). Only in rare cases will the dog inappropriately protect one household member from another. This situation sometimes arises when children are involved. Dogs that are not sure whether the threat is real may protect the child against being yelled at or hit by the parent. If no physical abuse of the pet or child is, or has been, involved, this is an undesirable, exaggerated, and inappropriate response. One of the requirements that will then be factored into the treat-

ment of the dog will be to find ways to correct the child that do not put the dog in the position of threatening the individual who is correcting the child. On the other hand, if abuse has been involved, an aggressive response can be a learned survival tactic.

It is a common belief that dogs are territorial animals and that they will protect their turf (bed, crate, house, yard). Animals often protect such areas but usually do so by marking and posturing, rather than by threats and violence. The dog that responds to another dog that walks past its crate by growling, snarling, and lunging without first posturing, staring, or waiting to see if the other dog takes the bed is acting out of context—the dog perceived a threat where there was none. The dog that guards the front of its crate from children by pacing and scanning is acting inappropriately—there is no threat. The dog that is loose in the yard and snarls frantically at anyone who comes into the yard has a problem. The dog that will not let anyone enter the house, instead positioning itself by the door and then lunging and snapping at anyone who attempts to enter, is not exhibiting appropriate behavior. Some dogs will be fine with strangers off-lead but vigorously protect their people when on-lead. Some dogs are fine in the yard but become very aggressive when they are put behind a fence, which leaves no doubt as to the extent of their turf. Usually dogs that exhibit protective or territorial aggression do so because they are unsure whether there is a problem. This causes them to be anxious in any similar circumstance. Accordingly, this protocol, as for Tier 1 of the behavior modification protocols, emphasizes removing sources of the dog's anxiety.

Dogs with protective and territorial aggression can be perfectly appropriately behaved in other circumstances. If no one approaches them on the street, they can be well behaved with the family. If no one enters the yard or if they are in the house when someone enters the yard, they can be well behaved. Some dogs that defend their yards or beds are perfectly fine and nonreactive when not near those locations. Both of these aggressions can have extremely variable patterns associated with them; however, both share in common demonstration by the dog of the out-of-context, inappropriate, exaggerated, preemptive defense behaviors in the absence of a true threat.

The best improvement is seen for dogs whose people can very discretely identify the situations in which the dog will respond inappropriately. At first, these situations are to be totally avoided. After the dog has successfully completed Tier 1 of the behavior modification protocols, Tier 2, which focuses on teaching the dog not to react to the cues that are associated with the inappropriate aggression, can be begun. The following checklist is designed to help you control or avoid basic and common situations in which most dogs with these problems will react.

Checklist

- 1. Avoid any and all situations that may elicit the aggressive behavior. If you cannot instantly stop the inappropriate behavior by use of a verbal command, the dog should be removed from the situation. For example, if you cannot answer the door without the dog barking and growling and without having to cling to the dog's collar while it snarls and snaps, the dog cannot go to the door with you. Simply tell the person to wait a minute and place the dog in another room behind a closed door or in its crate until the person has left or is well settled into the house.

- 2. Some people want to be able to take their dog to the door expressly for protective purposes. Regardless, as your dog's behavior improves, this will be a task that it will be expected to negotiate without inappropriate reaction. If you cannot instantly abort the aggressive behavior with a verbal command, consider a head collar for all situations in which your dog might react. A Gentle Leader Promise System Canine Head Collar can allow you to interrupt the dog as it begins to react inappropriately, can close the dog's mouth, humanely, rendering the dog safer, and can help you remove the dog from the situation without an intensification of the behavior. All of these are critical for the dog's learning process. The head collar can be worn indoors so that the dog can be corrected at doors or as people within the household pass by. Do not leave head collars, or any other device on which any animal can become hung, on the dog when the dog is not being directly supervised.
- 3. Warn your neighbors that head collars are not muzzles. This means that the dog can still bite, although now you have the option of closing the dog's mouth to prevent this. Obviously, no one should tease the dog, but for clients who need for the dog to be able to protect them, this behavioral flexibility is important. Use of head collars still permits *appropriate* protective aggression. Do not make excuses for inappropriate aggression. For problem dogs, inappropriate aggression is far more common than appropriate aggression; do not let your dog manipulate you.
- 4. If the dog growls or lunges, say "No" sharply and disrupt the situation by leaving or by bringing the dog into another room. The use of a head collar can facilitate this. For the dog to learn from the correction, it must occur within the first 30 to 60 seconds of the onset of the suite of behaviors in which the aggression occurred (i.e., within the first few seconds of the aggression). If you cannot use a verbal command that reliably achieves this result alone, you need to use a lead and preferably a head collar. For dogs that may also have dominance aggression, which can cooccur with protective and territorial aggression, grabbing the dog when it reacts can put the client at risk. These dogs should be wearing head collars so that the risk can be minimized.
- 5. Dogs can be let out of a room in which they have been placed *only* under the following circumstances:
- The dog is quiet and calm
 - The dog, when released, willing and perfectly performs a few exercises from Tier 1 of the protocols, thus demonstrating willingness to defer to the clients and to take cues as to the appropriateness of its behavior from them
 - If the visitor is still present, the dog is introduced to him or her on a head collar; the visitor does *not* solicit the dog, instead letting the dog come to him or her; when the dog comes, the visitor requests that the dog sit; the dog complies, and the visitor verbally praises the dog but otherwise ignores it.
- If these are not possible, the dog stays banished.
- 6. Warn your neighbors and friends that *any* dog that is aggressive, for whatever reason, can be dangerous and that it is important that they comply with your instructions to minimize danger to the dog and to themselves. Emphasize that such compliance will help the dog improve. This is also true for dogs that are protective or territorially aggressive with other dogs. In such circumstances the other dog must also be able to respond appropriately.
- 7. Sudden arm gestures or motions can be perceived as a threat to dogs with protective aggression. Caution people to avoid them and be alert for potential problems so that you can avoid them.
- 8. If your dog continues to bark, growl, or ignore you in any circumstance and working through a series of Tier 1 tasks that the dog knows well does not help the dog relax, sequester or banish the dog to another room. Taking attention, and control for attention, from these dogs is one of the most effective and safest disciplinary actions. As soon as the dog is quiet or subdued, it can be released, but you must do this as for number 5, above.
- 9. If your dog exhibits territorial aggression only when you are in the house, make sure that the dog is placed behind a secure door when any repair person comes. This should also hold true for a friend's visit if you cannot enforce numbers 5 through 7, above.
- 10. If your dog exhibits territorial aggression only when you are not present, never leave this dog in a situation where it can have or obtain access to delivery people, repair persons, and so on.
- 11. No dog with territorial aggression should ever be left alone, loose outside. The dog knows what it considers its turf; humans do not.
- 12. If your dog has protective aggression, it should not be put in the situation where it is with you in a fenced yard; someone that they may perceive as a threat can enter.
- 13. Never leave a dog with territorial aggression behind a fence, electric or otherwise. The fence defines their boundaries absolutely and will render the dog more confident and dangerous. Remember, visitors cannot see an electric fence and so are deprived of any warning. Problem dogs forfeit their freedom in these contexts. There is no room for negotiation.
- 14. If you decide to build a pen or run for your dog, make sure that it is not near any sidewalks, driveways, service areas (propane tanks), doorways, or any other areas to which strangers might need or have access. Not only does the logic in number 13 above hold here, but the dog's behavior will worsen by exposure to what the dog perceives to be threatening circumstances. Furthermore, the dog could pose a risk to others.
- 15. If your dog protects its crate, bed, or eating area, do not facilitate this. Selectively exclude the dog from areas by using baby gates, or make the exact location of the protected area (e.g., the dining location) unpredictable. If your dog decides to protect these areas from another animal in the house, do not leave them alone unsupervised. Always make sure that they are separated behind secured doors when not supervised, *and* place the dog that is being territorial in a place that is a less desirable area that is not as defensible or worthy of defense (e.g., a spare room, rather than your bedroom). The animal that is behaving appropriately should always have free reign and be able to move, unimpeded, throughout the rest of the house. You may have to move the area in which you keep
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the aggressive animal frequently so that the animal does not begin to feel that it is *its* area.

- 16. Get a "Dog on Premises" sign. This is not an admission of a dangerous dog; it is a civically responsible reminder that a dog is on the property. Anyone who has a dog should have such a sign.
- 17. If you have a dog that you know is protective, territorially aggressive, or both and small children come to visit, banish the dog, regardless. Children can be unpredictable and may inadvertently provoke an aggressive dog. Do not talk yourself into taking the chance.
- 18. Do not use any form of physical punishment.
- 19. Remember that by correcting your dog's problem aggressions you will not remove any appropriate protective behaviors.
- 20. Consistently practice and enforce "Protocol for Deference: Basic Program" and "Protocol for Relaxation: Behavior Modification Program Tier 1." When you and your dog have successfully completed Tier 1, you will be ready to move on to the relevant components of "Tier 2: Protocol for Desensitizing and Counterconditioning a Dog (or Cat) From Approaches From Strangers" and "Protocol for Desensitizing and Counterconditioning to Noises and Activities that Occur by the Door."

Antianxiety medications may help some dogs that otherwise are unable to succeed in this program. Remember, if it is decided that medication could benefit your dog, you need to use it *in addition* to the behavior modification, not instead of it.