

# Aggression In Dogs And The Breed Ban Debate

*Written by Glenn Redmond*

All dogs no matter how big or small can become aggressive. One breed of dog is not necessarily more aggressive than another. I have seen and treated a variety of breeds for aggression and have found that Yorkies can be just as aggressive as Rottweilers and German Shepherds. It would be a huge miscalculation to assume that the problems that we are experiencing today are only a large breed issue. Remember a 15 pound terrier can cause a lot of injuries to an infant.

Genetic and hereditary factors play a major role in aggression. Every dog has its own genetic makeup with a blueprint of an aggression level. Poor breeding practices can create unstable temperaments and hormones can **contribute to aggressive tendencies in unneutered males, females in heat, and females nursing puppies.**

Environmental conditions also play a major role. Isolation from human contact, excessive punishment, lack of socialization, being spoiled by doting owners, **tethering for long periods**, and frightening experiences, such as being attacked by another dog, all influence aggression.

Puppies have a critical need for socialization from three weeks of age, when they can see and hear, until fourteen weeks of age. Eight to twelve weeks is a fear period during which time no negative experiences should occur. A traumatizing experience at this age could leave a permanent implant in the pup's mind causing life long phobias. It is extremely important for the pup to be exposed to a variety of situations that they will encounter throughout their lives. If a puppy has not been socialized by the time he/she is fourteen weeks old, they may never be trustworthy around people or other animals. From six months onwards, the pup begins to gain more confidence, possibly barking at strangers and becoming more protective. We should take the time with our dogs to introduce them to delivery personnel especially the mail and paper carriers since they come around every day. These delivery people to a dog are intruders unless they are taught otherwise.

What we all have to understand is that dogs do not come pre-programmed. They only know what we have or have not taught them. So many dogs get labeled as "bad dogs" simply because owners have not taken time to do any training work at all or even worse, tie them out back on a chain to live a life of isolation. There is a responsibility that goes with pet ownership both to the animal itself and to the community one lives in. Too often this responsibility is entered into lightly or even negated contributing immensely to the growing problems in our towns, cities and countries.

Dogs usually have to build up to a bite. They start with simple disobedience, and move on to challenges, threat gestures, and growls and then a bite. The first bite may surprise a novice owner, but to the experienced eye, it is predictable as the light of day. The fact is that canine aggression usually works. The dog snarls and you withdraw. He growls and you leave him alone. This confirms the belief that they get what they want this way making them much more likely to be aggressive in the future. Aggression, if caught early, is usually correctable. Remember, dogs do not turn on their owners without clear signs that trouble is brewing. Not every dog that is aggressive will have the following signs. Some will have a couple. Most will have at least a few.

1. Ignores Known Commands
2. Refuses to lie down on command
3. Mounts you or the children
4. Bumps into you or the children

5. Refuses to give up sleeping areas
6. Stops eating or chewing when approached
7. Hides under furniture
8. Growls for any reason other than play

Children receive an alarming number of dog bites. 80% of victims are children mainly between the ages of five and nine. The majority of dog bites happen at home, or in a familiar place, with the vast majority of biting dogs belonging to the victim's family or a friend. Children do not know how to be safe around dogs. Parents have to teach the rules of etiquette. They must be taught never to approach a strange dog, and to ask permission of owners before proceeding to pet a dog. Children need to be taught to never run past a strange dog, and not to stick their hands in through car windows or fences. Think about it. We teach children to look both ways before crossing the street and to never accept rides or candy from strangers. We must be as proactive with the dogs in our world.

There has been much talk about breed bans across the country, but simply stated, they don't work. Banning a certain breed of dog has the same logic as banning a certain model of car because statistically it is the most commonly used vehicle of the drunk driver. The responsibility for dog behavior has to be placed directly on the owners. It is time for education. This is the only solution that will solve this problem at its core. We need mandatory spay and neutering for all companion animals as well as significant fines to any repeat offenders of aggression. It is time we ban the backyard breeder concerned only with pumping out the little bundles of money that each pup represents. Rampant with disease and uncertain genetics, they are sold blindly to people who have no idea what costs lie ahead, both monetary and emotionally. If we as a society choose to hide the patch of breed bans thinking that the problem will be solved, then what resonates in me is just how far we still have to climb to even reach a basic understanding the problem.

*Submitted by Certified Dog Trainer & Behaviorist  
Glenn Redmond*