

Aggressive Dog Attacks Guests

Take your dog to a vet, and try obedience class.

Q. I have a 4-year-old Beagle who is aggressive with guests in our home. We've had her since she was six weeks old, and she started this about a year and a half ago. When we're right there she is fine. But if we turn our backs and she doesn't see us, she'll lunge and try to bite guests if they try to pet her. She's such a sweet dog otherwise, and she's my pride and joy. She has been babied because we do not have kids, but I cannot deal with her acting this way. She also doesn't like other dogs. Any ideas?

A. Two suggestions immediately come to mind. First, take your Beagle to the veterinarian for a physical exam and a full health workup, including blood tests to check the function of her thyroid, liver, and kidneys. Sometimes a dog can have an otherwise un-noticed health problem that will cause an onset of aggression. You need to have her thoroughly checked so any "invisible" illness that might affect her personality can be ruled out or treated with medication.

Second, once any health problems have been ruled out or dealt with, enroll your Beagle in a reward-based obedience and manners class. If you had human kids, I'm sure you'd see to it they got a good education and learned acceptable social behavior around others. Your dog-kid deserves that too. Taking part in a group class will not only teach her better manners around people and dogs, it will help you learn how to control her if she acts grumpy or snippy toward guests in your home. Taking a positive reward-based training class with your dog is a great way to improve your bond of mutual respect and will also be fun for both of you.