

## Young Dog Growls at Child

**A Labrador Retriever growls at a child who pays too rough.**

*By September Morn*

Q. I have a male 1 1/2-year-old Labrador Retriever who has always been very nice and docile. Last week a 3-year-old girl visited and my dog growled at her three times and moved toward her in an angry manner, right in front of me and once on leash. The girl has been here twice before and she can be aggressive with dogs pulling tails, trying to ride them, etc. I'm not sure if my dog would have bitten her, but he did growl and move toward her. I just got back from the vet, and he suggested we get rid of our dog. What is your opinion?

A. The girl probably hurt your Lab when she pulled his tail and jumped on him. Even the sweetest dog has limits. Worried this child would hurt him again, he told her in dog language to get away. He didn't bite, even though he had the opportunity. He didn't even touch her. What he did was normal canine communication — dramatic, but not violent. It would be terribly unfair for him to lose his home over this.

Someone needs to teach this little girl to be gentler with animals, or some dog less docile than yours might really bite her. When she visits, put your Lab in a closed room with his bed and chew-bone, and keep the child away from him. To prevent his experience with this girl from generalizing to all children, invite friends with gentle kids to visit. Confine your dog in an adjacent room with a doorway gate, so he can watch the kids play and see that they're not rough. When he relaxes, let the kids toss treats to him through the gate. Later, leash him and take him into the room, but have the kids ignore him except to toss treats. After a while, when he's calm and interested in the kids, you might allow them to hand-feed him treats. After several pleasant visits, your dog may be ready to be petted, one child at a time. Don't rush this — let your dog's relaxed attitude be your guide.