

## Baring teeth: defense or submission?

**Observe a dog's body language to understand the message behind baring his teeth.**

*By September Morn*

Q. My 2-year-old Miniature Schnauzer, Sampson, bares his teeth a lot. It seems to be related to fear associated with my fiancé. Lately however Sampson is doing it more, and is also displaying it toward me. It seems to have started when my fiancé and I met, but it does not seem to be a jealousy issue. What should I do?

A. You suggest Sampson may be showing his teeth because he's afraid of your fiancé, but you don't say why. Did something happen between them that scared Sampson? An in-person consult with an experienced dog trainer or behaviorist could help you determine the cause of Sampson's behavior and establish a plan to fix it.

Bared teeth can be a defensive threat, or it can be a gesture of submission. The rest of the dog's body language clarifies the message.

Don't scold or punish Sampson for the display, instead act calmly, give him some space, and let him calm down, then direct him into a different activity he doesn't find threatening.

Sampson and your fiancé somehow got off on the wrong foot, but you can right that by enrolling, as a family, in a gentle, reward-based training class. Keep your training positive and up beat, using happy praise and yummy treats as rewards. Give Sampson a chance to work with each of you at class and during daily homework sessions. He will soon realize there's no reason to be afraid and that his place in your family is safe and secure.