

Pit Bull Causing Problems At Home

Dog's behavior is causing stress on marriage and other pet Pit Bull.

By September Morn

Q. My Pit Bull Braun is 4 years old. I socialized him as a puppy and was very consistent with training. He was very friendly, except when people wore black or hats, and he loved other animals. Now things are starting to change. We brought Mercedes, a 6-month-old female Pit Bull, into our home when Braun was about 2. Braun was very good to her, raised her in his way, but now they've started fighting horribly. We have to keep them separated most of the time. Braun is now growling at strangers who are nice to him. He approaches them very timidly and low, which seems unlike him. He tried to attack our neighbor's dog -- he just isn't himself.

Braun is also very jealous of my husband, who came home a few months ago after being in Iraq. Braun sleeps between me and my husband, and won't let us be next to each other. He will lay on me and takes up most of the bed. Braun is 100 pounds and a momma's boy. I raised him. Now I think Braun is having jealousy issues.

My husband and I fight a lot and both dogs are affected. Braun barks and tries to get between us. Mercedes shakes, and is afraid of everything. I feel awful about this, and I want to help Braun and Mercedes. I know our fighting is horribly affecting these animals. What do I do to correct the problem we created?

A. Yikes! This sounds like a disaster waiting to happen. For the sake of both your dogs and your marriage, you and your husband have some serious cooperative changes to make in how your household is run. You have a lot of work to do, so get busy with it.

*Braun needs to get off your bed and sleep in a different room -- effective immediately. You and your husband have enough to deal with, without having a jealous Pit Bull sleeping between you. Give Braun and Mercedes each a comfy bed or sleeping crate in the other room, and close your bedroom door, so you and your husband can have some privacy at night.

*As you know, Pit Bulls were originally bred to fight with other dogs. As a youngster, Braun could play with other dogs, but now that he's matured and is starting fights, he must not be allowed to run loose where there might be other dogs, even when you're watching him. You're legally responsible for any harm he might do, so don't risk it.

*Enroll both dogs in a positive, gentle, reward-based obedience class, with an instructor who is both familiar with Pit Bulls and likes the breed. If no classes like that are available locally, or if your dogs are too people-fearful or dog-aggressive to work well in a group class, get a course of private lessons with an experienced trainer. You and your husband should each handle one of the dogs in class. My recommendation would be for your husband to work Braun in the classes while you handle Mercedes. Both of you should do your daily training practice at home with both dogs. This way both Braun and Mercedes can form a positive relationship with your husband, yet not feel they've like lost their bond with you. As both dogs get used to listening better and working near one another, it may help smooth out their relationship with each other.

*I'm sure you already know that it's of the highest importance for you and your husband to stop fighting and start cooperating. That's easier said than done, of course, but everything will hinge on improving your relationship. Coming home and re-entering family life, after living in a war zone, is an extremely difficult adjustment to make. Getting used to living with someone who's recently experienced the dangers and emotional stress of war is also difficult. Both of you should look into getting personal counseling and marriage counseling, to help you adjust to these challenging changes.