

Dog Confrontations

Avoid and halt dog-to-dog altercations with tips from the experts.

Patti Roth

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Lots of dogs enjoy the company of other canines, but sometimes an encounter between a pair of pooches isn't friendly. How humans react when dogs are snapping and snarling can be key to thwarting a scuffle or breaking it up safely.

While different situations call for different actions, some general tips were offered by Jean Donaldson, director of behavior and training for the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Pia Silvani, director of pet training and behavior counseling at St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center in Madison, N.J.

Prevent Confrontation Socialize your dog. A dog experienced in canine etiquette generally is more comfortable and happy around other dogs. Puppy kindergarten is important for cultivating good manners from puppy to adulthood.

Playtime with other friendly dogs keeps the social wheels well greased. If your dog isn't comfortable with other dogs, consult a professional trainer or behaviorist.

When your dog is leashed, avoid dog parks and other areas where dogs are loose. The leash may interfere with appropriate body language and the constrained dog may become anxious and defensive.

Pretend to be jolly when approaching other leashed dogs, even though you're on guard and prepared to steer clear. If you're overtly uneasy and yank on the leash prematurely, your dog also may become worked up when approaching other dogs.

Allow ample slack on the leashes when friendly dogs meet so they are free to sniff each other and display proper body language.

Carry a small pop-open umbrella when walking your dog. If a loose, aggressive dog charges, popping an umbrella might frighten it off.

Breaking It Up Some dogs resolve their conflicts with a showy, but harmless, display of bluster and flashing teeth.

Determining when and how to intervene in a canine scuffle varies with each situation, the dog training experts say. If you decide to intervene: Keep your hands away from the dogs' heads to avoid being bitten. Try distraction. Make noise. Spray a hose. Or insert a hefty object between them. Be aware, when intervening, the dog might redirect its aggression toward you. Use two people, ideally, if you decide to separate the dogs. Each person pulls on a tail or top of the rear legs back and up. If only one person is available, pull the more aggressive dog back and up by the tail or top of the rear legs. Don't pull on the feet; you could injure the dog's legs.

When in social situations with your dog, always be cautious of interactions with dogs of significant size difference. In addition to the disproportionate power and strength, a significant size difference could trigger predatory behavior.

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