

Canine Aggression



What is canine aggression?

Canine aggression is a threat or harmful action from a dog toward one or more individuals. Threats may include things such as aggressive barking, snarling, growling and snapping without contact. Harm is usually inflicted on the target by biting.

Aggression can be a clinical sign of another underlying medical problem or disease state. Aggression may be the first or only clinical sign that you see, so it is important to have a comprehensive examination to rule out underlying health problems that may be contributing to the aggressive behavior.

Aggression that is not associated with any identifiable physical ailment is most likely due to a group of factors including, but not limited to, living environments, exercise regimes, socialization, genetics, miscommunication and mismatched expectations. Canine aggression is the most common presenting complaint to behavioral specialists. Of all the potential behavior disorders, aggression is often the most disconcerting and dangerous. Issues of public safety and liability are a concern when canine aggression is involved.

From the dog's perspective, aggression is a communication strategy; aggression is used to back away a perceived threat. Those "threats" may be things that humans do not consider or intend to be threatening such as guests in our home, petting or touching the dog or getting close to the dog's food bowl. By displaying aggression, the dog is trying to convey that it wants the target to back off.

There are strategies to help prevent aggression from developing such as use of positive reinforcement-based training methods, early and continual socialization and learning how to observe and properly interpret canine body postures so that you can identify problems before they develop into aggression.

There are also strategies to manage aggression. Your Banfield veterinarian can establish a diagnosis, prognosis and treatment plan to help you control aggressive behavior in your pet.

If your dog is exhibiting aggression:

What to do:

- Contact your Banfield veterinary hospital to schedule an appointment
- Identify/list triggers for aggression
- Avoid triggers, whenever possible

Do not:

- Challenge or reprimand the dog by yelling/hitting or otherwise physically challenging a dog, as this may escalate the dog's aggression
- Disregard/discount the aggression as an isolated incident



For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

