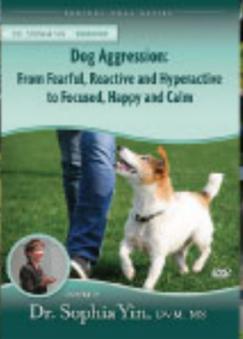


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How to Break Up a Dog Fight Without Getting Bitten

2 | Posted 12/2/14

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By Dr. Sophia Yin

Separating Feuding Fidos

If you have a dog and he goes to the dog park, lives with doggie housemates, or otherwise socializes with other dogs, chances are at some point you may need to break up a spat. These may range from low-level altercations with no real contact to a no-bites-spared brawl. So what should you do? First, realize that regardless of the amount of noise, most fights between unfamiliar dogs at the dog park or first fights between housemates are spit and drool matches. When bites are involved during these fights, dogs generally bite and release. So in the majority of cases we do not need to worry about prying the jaws open or getting dogs to actually release.

Instead, our major concern is just getting the dogs apart and to do so without getting bitten. The number one way to avoid being bitten is to **avoid trying to grab the head or neck area**. Frequently while trying to grab the front end or getting in the between the dogs, the humans accidentally get bitten. Alternatively, in the heat of the moment a dog may actually turn and redirect the aggression to the person pulling them away.

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The safest method to get the dogs apart is to **grab them by the rear end and quickly pull them away**. In other cases, because of your positioning in relation to the dog or because they are moving around too quickly, you may need to shove one away by placing your foot on their rib cage and pushing. This is safer than bending over and trying to push with your hands. It may also allow you to use your hands to grasp the other dog if you don't have someone else to help.

Other methods for separating dogs include spraying them with water, placing a board or object between them, or banging a noisy object near them. These techniques are all meant to distract them. Other surprisingly benign distractions may work too, says Melissa Morris, a dog trainer who recounts the case of her mom's dog. "Her shepherd, Ruby, attacked a visiting yellow lab. Ruby grabbed the lab's neck and wouldn't let go. My mom was yelling at Ruby. My brother-in-law was there and punched Ruby in the head, trying to get her to let go. All that did was hurt his hand! My mom was holding a newspaper and lightly hit Ruby on the head with it (newspaper was not rolled up). That distracted Ruby and she let go."



In another situation Melissa recalls, "When my neighbor's pit bull attacked the chow that was walking by their house and wouldn't let go, they tried yelling, kicking the dog, turning the hose on him, none of that worked. But when they opened the car door and said, 'Let's go bye-bye, he let go and jumped in the car.'"

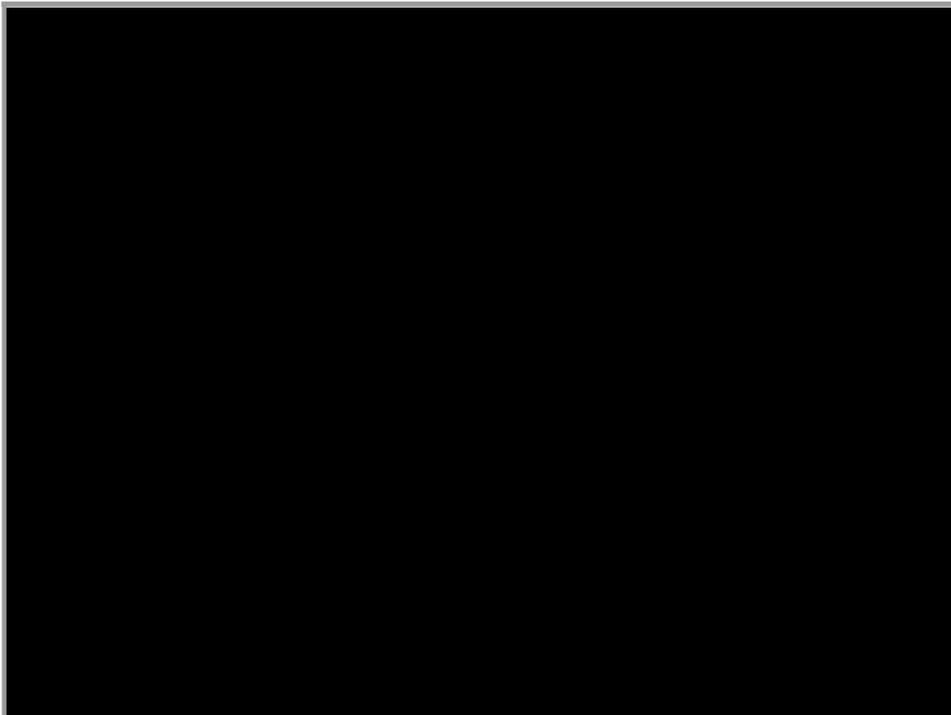
These two situations highlight the fact that creativity may win over force. Also consider using a spray deterrent such as citronella (Direct Stop or Spray Shield) or pepper spray. They can work in some cases too. Just remember—in all cases **avoid actions that will cause the dog to redirect the aggression to you** or even unintentionally lead to a bite.

What to Do Once the Dogs Are Apart

Once you have the dogs apart you should pay attention—does your dog want to keep fighting or does he immediately calm down or try to get away? The one who wants to continue fighting will require more work to modify the behavior in the future. In either case you'll want to understand why a fight occurred instead of just assuming it was a fluke or hoping the same type of situation won't occur again. A majority of the dog aggressive behavior cases involving bites that I treat have a history of getting into lower level spats, which over time, developed into more dangerous fights. Many fights can be prevented simply by noticing when one dog is tense around another, calling the two dogs apart before there's trouble and then rewarding your dog for good behavior.

To learn how to recognize signs that your dog is anxious and may be ready to get to a fight read

Chapter 1 in this online book: [Low Stress Handling and Behavior Modification of Dogs and Cats](#). To learn how to teach a really good 'come when called' read this blog called [Teaching Rover to Race to You on Cue](#).



Tags: [dog aggression](#), [dog bites](#), [dog bullies](#)

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Posted by Paula Jacunski on 12/03 at 11:23 AM

Good post! We had a recent scare with a rottweiler barreling out his driveway toward the smaller of our cocker spaniels. He wasn't responding to his owner's calls or my husband's verbal and nonverbal attempts to keep him away. My husband whacked him in the head a few times, which didn't bother the dog. My husband threw himself over the dog's chest and hind end until his owner caught up to him and leashed him (instinctual old wrestling skills, my husband said). The dog's head was pinned to the ground and he looked quite stunned. And he broke wind in my husband's face... Scary event. Our cocker and my husband were both unhurt, luckily. The owner was shaken up and will hopefully get some training!

Posted by Barbara Lucas on 12/04 at 10:46 AM

this is good info.

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