

Aggressive Puppy – How to Recognize and Treat Puppy Aggression

Our expert guide to the aggressive puppy shows you how to spot signs of puppy aggression, cope with aggressive puppy behavior and raise a friendly puppy.

If your puppy's biting is out of control, we'll help you. We'll look at true aggression in puppies, and at how puppy play can masquerade as puppy aggression.

We'll also look at protecting your children from puppy aggression. Don't worry because most of what follows is good news!

Aggressive puppy: biting and growling

Goldens are generally known as a gentle breed, yet I frequently talk to new golden puppy owners that are very worried. They are worried because their nine or ten week old puppy is aggressive. This is not what they expected, and they are afraid for what the future will bring.

These are not people that are being pathetic about a few little nips. They are new puppy parents with very young puppies that are launching into frenzied attacks whilst looking angelic in between.

It's about children in tears, it's about snarling and biting. It's even about puppies drawing blood. If your puppy is behaving like this, I have some great news for you! Read on.

Growling and puppy aggression

Growling and snarling in small puppies is loud, and ferocious. If this is your first puppy, you are likely to be very concerned. But the good news is, in puppies, growling is not normally a sign of aggression.

We'll look at signs of true puppy aggression in a moment. But for now, most of the behavior people *think* is aggression is actually play.

Is my Puppy Acting Aggressively?

The fierce growling that accompanies the biting and the tugging at clothing is quite normal. And while goldens usually grow up to be gentle creatures, small pups are a different story. That's right! Your puppy is perfectly normal!

He has not turned into a demon dog – all puppies – and I mean ALL puppies make this horrible, vicious sounding, noise when they play. Rest assured this noise is normal, and you do not actually have an aggressive puppy. *"But, but!"*

you cry “*what about the biting? And the blood!*” Now here’s some good news and some bad news.

Biting does not mean you have an aggressive puppy

Biting is a big problem for many new puppy owners. The power of a golden puppy’s bite can be a real shock if you have never had a puppy before.

The good news is that your puppy is perfectly normal, but the bad news is that he is going to keep on biting for a while. All small puppies bite. They bite *hard*. And it hurts. If your tiny eight week old bundle has not started biting – he will. Just as soon as he settles in and feels at home.

But my puppy bites hard!

A puppy biting hard is always upsetting. Many golden puppies are a bit subdued for the first few days in their new home. Once they have their feet under the table, the biting starts in earnest.

I want to emphasize again that *very* hard puppy biting is totally normal. You do not need to worry that your little pup is becoming savage.

Biting is Normal

Remember that biting, *hard* biting, is normal puppy play. Every puppy, happy and relaxed enough around you to be playful, will bite! At least to begin with. Even with 8 weeks of education from Mom, your puppy is used to biting other puppies and adult dogs. They need to learn to be more gentle on bare human skin. And on our clothes!

It takes time to teach a puppy not to bite, and I’ll show you how to do that. But for a while, you will be subjected to regular assaults with a sharp little set of needles. You are going to have to be tough, and you will need to protect small children from the puppy’s attentions for a while longer.

Puppy aggression towards children

I see this kind of very intense growling and biting much more, in families with small children. This is because kids get puppies over excited.

The answer is to limit the amount of time that small children spend in *lively* play with your puppy and supervise them more closely. If you can encourage calm stroking, rather than rough playing this phase will pass more smoothly.

Lively Puppy Play

Because puppy play can seem like aggression, small children can become very upset by it. Not only does the biting hurt, it also feels like their puppy doesn’t

love them. Of course, this isn't true. The puppy is as loving as ever – he just doesn't understand how to play gently yet.

Regularly separating the puppy from your kids will give them both chance to calm down after play time.

How do I stop aggressive puppy biting?

At your first opportunity, check out the other guide, 'When do puppies stop biting', to cope with puppy biting. Do read right through it, even if you don't read anything else. It will take you through the whole process of teaching your puppy not to bite, from start to finish.

You'll also need a good selection of puppy teething or chew toys and a safe place to put your puppy when he is over excited.

What about older puppies?

Most puppies are through the worst of the biting phase by about four months old. After about six months of age, some puppies begin to show signs of fear aggression. This means that they may growl or snap at strangers who approach or try to touch them.

The way to avoid this behavior and raise a friendly puppy is to thoroughly socialize your pup. You should follow our socialization steps as soon as your puppy arrives in your home and they are listed in the 'How to socialize' article.

Nipping and rough behavior in bigger puppies

Some puppies at around six to nine months old have a resurgence of nipping and rough behavior. Often ending in tears when children are involved. This kind of biting is almost always linked to inappropriate play often involving children. Dogs, especially young dogs, are not great at reading behavioral signals from small children and vice versa.

There is a bit of a language barrier here, and children can get hurt. The article on playing safely with your golden will help you with this.

True aggression in puppies

It is important that you also know how to recognize and deal with true aggression. Genuine aggression is very rare in small puppies and is almost always linked to extreme fear. A puppy that bites from fear will normally attempt to hide and withdraw first.

How to Tell the Difference

He will not be attacking your slippers or hanging on to your toddler's jumper, he will be cowering in a corner. The frightened puppy will normally growl fairly quietly and try to avoid contact before he bites, whereas the playing puppy will initiate contact and growl more and more fiercely once the biting game is underway.

A frightened puppy will also often give off a distinctive musky smell.

Helping a frightened puppy

If you find your puppy cowering under a chair and not wanting to be touched, you can be sure that someone or something has really frightened him. Don't dive in and grab him. Remove the source of fear (toddlers, and other dogs are common culprits) and take your time over reassuring him. Fetch some nice food and tempt him out.

Check him over to make sure he isn't hurt, limping, bleeding etc. He may need plenty of cuddles for a while but try not to worry.

Most puppies are very resilient and soon bounce back from an unpleasant experience. All you can do now is try to figure out what happened and make sure it can't happen again.

Aggression in older puppies

It can be hard to know when an older puppy is truly being an aggressive puppy. Most commonly, biting and rough behavior in older puppies is due to the causes discussed above.

True aggression in older puppies is normally caused by fear and anxiety due to insufficient socialization.

Socialization

To avoid this kind of aggression it is vital to socialize puppies carefully, so that they are not afraid of anything.

Resource Guarding

Sometimes, aggression in older puppies is due to resource guarding. This is clearly not to do with play. Some dogs will guard beds, chairs and benches. Resource guarding should be treated using positive reinforcement

The puppy may growl when people approach his food bowl, or his bed for example. Some puppies also guard stolen socks, or trash picked up on their walk. This is all classed as resource guarding.

How to train an aggressive puppy

Some years ago, people believed that resource guarding could be trained out of puppies with dominance and pack leadership strategies.

We now know that these techniques only suppress the problem and make the dog feel more threatened. They can be extremely dangerous and lead to bites and ultimately the destruction of the dog.

Positive Reinforcement

Modern training techniques use positive reinforcement and counter conditioning to change the way that dogs feel about having people near their food and other resources.

With most resource guarding problems, especially in older puppies and adult dogs, it is best to get professional help from a behaviorist. Your vet or breeder should be able to recommend one.

Aggression towards other dogs

As with dog-human interactions, it is important to be aware that puppy growling and gentle biting at the other dogs in your house is normal puppy play. Keep an eye that the older dog is not getting frustrated and separate them if needed – but try not to worry about the puppy noise!

If, however, your older puppy or dog is being aggressive to other dogs it meets, you may want to consider help from a behaviorist.

Finding the Cause

Dog to dog aggression occurs for a variety of reasons. You may need help unpicking the cause, before trying to fix this problem. In the meantime, consider keeping your dog on a leash when other dogs are around.

And remember – punishing your dog is known to make this problem worse.

Aggressive Puppy – Summary

Growling and biting are not usually signs of aggression in puppies. Noisy, aggressive-looking play is a developmental phase that all puppies go through. With your help, it will soon be over.

Serious aggression in small puppies is rare and usually only occurs in puppies that are terrified, and that have been prevented from hiding. So, rest assured, no matter how fierce your little puppy sounds when he hangs on to your shoes or attacks your fingers, it is not a sign of true aggression. It is normal puppy play.

More serious problems

Most puppy owners will be reassured by this article, that their puppies growling, and nipping is not a sign of an aggressive puppy but is a normal phase of puppy development. However, if you are concerned that your older puppy or adult dog is showing true aggression, or that they may bite you in a way that causes genuine harm, seek help.

A canine behaviorist can assess your dog and advise you on how best to retrain them. Your vet or breeder will be able to put you in touch with a behaviorist.

Aggressive Puppy and Children

Remember, children are particularly at risk from dog bites. If you are concerned, minimize interactions between your dog and children. And always supervise their time together.

Research shows that most people find it hard to predict when their children are safe around a dog, and when to worry. So, don't be shy of asking for help. Your vet is an important point of call for an aggressive puppy or dog.