

Positive Training vs Bullying and Aggressive Behavior

Dogs can be spoiled rotten
Dogs can be bullies
Dogs can have bad tempers
Dogs can be mean
Dogs can be self-centered

We understand that dogs have temperaments but humans tend to feel that dogs only have the good, submissive, and loving side of temperaments. They overlook the fact that they are cognitive mammals that can have 'wants' and 'needs' – like humans. Temperament is something a dog is born with. They do not learn it. All breeds, and designer-crosses are at risk.

You may have done everything right.
You have worked with a good trainer.
The problem of bullying isn't limited to backyard breeders and rescued dogs.

The first step is to stop owning the problem and 'let it go.' Self-doubt, guilt, and giving up will not help.

Positive Only Training

I support positive training, but it is not suitable for all dogs. When a dog makes a cognitive attempt to cause harm to a person, or dog, because that dog is not getting its own way then it is dangerous. It is important to realize that dogs are cognitive (they can think) but they are not smart. They will not continue a behavior that doesn't have negative consequences.

Those consequences may be nothing more than stopping the game, or stopping on a walk and waiting until the dog is quiet before continuing.

Correction vs Punishment

Most pet owners jump right from positive training to punishment – totally skipping corrections as a method of gaining a dog's obedience.

This can set a dog back because the dog isn't given an opportunity to learn. The dog does something 1 or 2 times, so we

want it to do better the next time. This is not how dogs learn a new behavior. They need to try it 20-50 times in different environments, and with different distractions.

If the dog is not given a chance to learn before being punished then it becomes frustrated. I've seen dozens of 'positive only' trained dogs who have high-levels of frustration.

Bullying

Bullying should never be tolerated, especially when it involves resource guarding, playing a game, or trying to get the best position on a couch or bed. Most people don't notice their dog bullying other pets or children until the dog is bullying them, or the dog escalates the behavior and bites, knocks kids down, or terrorizes smaller animals.

At this stage pet owners want the problem stopped. Unfortunately, it has gone too far for an easy, positive fix.

The best way to prevent the problem is to stop repeating commands until the dog feels like listening, take the time to teach behaviors well, be consistent in commands and corrections, and when your dog does challenge/bully you – stop everything until the bullying or challenge stops.

Corrections

Corrections are something that give a dog a choice whether to behave, or act out. Your place is to 'wait' and see. For example, your dog doesn't want to give you the ball. You use 'dog behavior' move and push the dog backwards. This doesn't work.

Next you stand on the toy. You've claimed it. A dog should naturally step back and wait to see if you are going to continue playing with the toy.

Give the dog a choice to obey, or not. This is how dogs learn to stop bullying.



Another way to deal with this is to trade the dog. Offer a treat. When the dog takes the treat then reach for the toy.

It may be a good idea to have someone hold a leash so the dog doesn't lunge and bite.

Punishment

A punishment is something that reduces the likelihood of the behavior repeating again. Again, people first resort to causing fear or pain as a punishment. Fear and pain makes dogs either withdraw or engage. This defeats the purpose of a punishment, because the bully will engage – escalating the problem until it wins.

The best punishment is one where you will win, every time, and the dog has no opportunity to engage.

Let's say that you push a bully backwards and he pushes back. What do you do now? Well, if you were a dog you would escalate. I would push harder and move the dog backwards until it released the ball.

If this doesn't work, I would leash the dog and restrict its movement until it released the ball. The most important thing is to start the game when the dog releases the ball.