

Dog to Dog Behaviors

By Robin Adams

Recently, I was having a discussion regarding "dog to dog aggression".

It's really difficult to walk through the kennel and see all these great dogs still waiting for a home. We've known these dogs for months and our staff will tell you that working with them really isn't difficult...it's just thinking smart.

But let me tell you about my own experience with that phrase. At a dog show, there can be as many 20-30 intact males within butt-sniffing range of each other. Sometimes, there may be a female in heat! Every dog usually gets along with each other despite the stresses. That's because they've been conditioned.

One day we were entertaining another "dog show couple" and invited them to bring their Golden. My Spencer knew this dog from the show ring and never had a problem with him. However, this particular day, the "guest Golden", out of nowhere, beat up on Spencer. Spencer did the right thing, rolled on his back. I got guest Golden away from Spencer by throwing a towel over his neck like a collar and pulling him away, but Spencer remembered.

The next time at a dog show, we were sitting by the ring when Spencer and Guest Dog got into line of sight. They were almost 30 feet apart. This normally mush-puppy raised his hackles, his lip and growled. The guest dog remembered who rolled over and he proceeded to act like alpha. Okay, so now we knew to keep both dogs out of line of sight. Spencer was FINE with all the other dogs. No other dogs were a problem for Spencer. It was just guest dog. And he turned Spencer, a dog with a legendary wonderful temperament into what I called a likeness of a rabid teddy bear.

A few months later while walking all three of the dogs in a park, a dog off lead attacked us. Spencer went into protection mode – he was protecting the rest of the pack – including me. A few Band-Aids on me and some peroxide on their wounds, and life went on.

Then, some time later on a walk, and within two houses of home, out of nowhere came a big ol' Lab who – you guessed it – got us again. This one wasn't so easy – I had to have surgery on my elbow...but Spencer's "emotional" wounds were deep.

I probably didn't help any of these situations because after the second attack, I'd see another dog – off lead – and my reaction was pull back on the lead and run in the other direction. I established and reinforced a pattern for Spencer to respond to.

So, this normally more than docile dog suddenly became a different dog when in the company of other dogs. All other dogs? Well, most. We worked on changing, but I was the one who still, apparently had some fear, because I would IMMEDIATELY change my walking speed, direction and grip on the lead. All messages sent to Spencer – BEWARE AND REACT.

Spencer's gone, but I still work with the lessons I learned. When walking all three of our dogs and we see another dog, and they start to bark or show typical dog behavior MY and I repeat – MY reactions are different – and that's what sets the behavior for them. I usually tell them to hush and then switch to a high voice and tell them, "look, it's a puppy!". And, they usually posture a bit (emit a high-pitched bark – as if to play) and we move on.

So what does this have to do with all the great dogs at Gateway who don't like other dogs? They're probably there because someone did exactly what I did...the wrong reaction sets a behavior.

Before I wrote this, I entered dog-to-dog aggression (I HATE that "A" word) in my search engine, and came up with dozens of pages on the behavior. What I found is what I already knew – that it's workable, usually correctable, and just takes commitment and time.

So that's the story. If you're waiting to adopt and have the commitment, time and temperament to work with this behavior, you'll have a VERY big reward.

Put yourself in their paws. All of us at some point in our lives were probably bullied. Maybe we stayed away from the playground or anywhere the bully was present. We missed out on playtime (socialization in dog terms) with other kids and probably suspected every human we met as a potential bully if they showed any ONE trait of our nemesis...maybe even if they just looked like our foe!

But, didn't life change when you learned that not everyone is out to beat you up?

These dogs are ready and waiting. It's not a lot of baggage...in the big picture...it's just an "overnight bag".