



Training Dogs with Positive Methods Can Decrease Dog Bites

In recognition of National Dog Bite Prevention Week (May 17-23, 2009), The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) reiterates our belief in training dogs using positive and humane methods.

Recent research has shown that the use of aversive training methods can increase aggressive behavior from dogs. The APDT urges dog owners to work with professional trainers schooled in the latest scientific research to create a healthy, happy dog and a safe household.

Greenville, SC – May 18, 2009 – The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, the largest professional and educational association for dog trainers in the world, believes that training dogs using positive methods can be a critical part of reducing dog bites in the home and in our communities.

How serious is the problem of dog bites? According to the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov), approximately 4.7 million Americans are bitten annually, about half of which are children under the age of 12. This figure most likely does not account for many more bite victims who receive injuries that are not serious enough to require medical attention or hospitalization. In addition to human suffering, the cost of dog bites is tremendous. The Insurance Information Institute (www.iii.org) has found that one third of all homeowner's insurance claims are due to dog bites, and recent figures put the cost of dog bites to insurers at \$356.2 million (2007).

A recent study (Herron M.E. et al. 2009) found that dog owners who used aversive methods when working with dogs with a history of aggressive tendencies were more likely to trigger aggressive responses from the dogs. Such methods included yelling, “alpha rolls,” forced downs, and leash corrections, among others. The researchers concluded that “such interactions create a substantial risk for owners.”

What should dog owners do when they have a dog at risk of biting? Researchers in the United Kingdom (Hiby E.F. et al. 2004) surveyed training methods used by pet owners and found that “punishment was associated with an increased incidence of problematic behaviors” and therefore “positive training methods may be more useful to the pet-owning community.” The APDT strongly supports this conclusion.

If you are dealing with a dog with aggressive behaviors, the APDT recommends:

1. **Consult with your veterinarian** to determine if your dog may have an underlying internal or medical cause that is creating or exacerbating the aggression.
2. **Contact a professional** experienced with aggression to work with you and your dog. You can find trainers experienced with aggression listed in the Trainer Search on the

APDT web site, www.apdt.com. Only use professionals who use positive methods and are familiar with the science of behavior modification.

3. **Manage your dog's interactions** with household members, especially children, and with strangers while working with a professional to ensure that your dog is not put in a position where he feels he must resort to aggression.
4. **Modifying a behavior problem takes time and effort.** Many popular television shows create the illusion that aggression can be cured quickly through techniques based on mental and physical intimidation of the dog. These methods will not alleviate the problem and will likely increase the probability of more bites. Owners with an aggressive dog must realize that solving the problem takes patience, an understanding of your dog's behavior and needs, and the use of humane training methods.

Citations

Herron M.E., Shofer, F.S. and Reisner, I.R. (2009). Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors. *Applied Animal Behavior Science* 117:47-54.

Hiby EF, Rooney NJ, Bradshaw JWS. (2004). Dog training methods: Their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare. *Animal Welfare* 13:63-69.

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The APDT is a professional educational organization of trainers who are committed to becoming better trainers through using positive, dog friendly methods based on sound scientific principles. With over 5,000 members worldwide, the APDT provides professional dog trainers with a respected and concerted voice. The APDT promotes caring relationships between dogs and people and works to increase public awareness of dog-friendly training techniques. For more information, visit the web site at www.apdt.com.