



DOGS THAT BITE

Did the dog deliberately use enough pressure to break the skin of a normal adult or older teen so that it bled freely for at least a few seconds? If not, don't consider it a bite; refer to the article on Mouthing and follow those suggestions.

If it was a bite, the first thing is to consider the circumstances. Dogs bite out of fear or out of aggression.

We'll consider aggression first, because it's easier to fix. An aggressive dog wants to control something: usually territory, food, toys, or people. Usually the dog wants to control the thing or the person because the dog considers that thing or person a possession and a rarity.

Dogs with a house or a yard to run around in don't usually get possessive about territory, though they may be possessive of doors and gates. Dogs kept in one room or on a chain often are possessive of territory; the smaller their territory the more important it is to them to control it. The first step is to increase their territory. If the dog absolutely must be on a chain or leash, at least make it a much longer one. The overhead trolleys with attached leashes work better, for some reason, than a chain or leash attached to a tree or a post. Circular territory is bad; we don't completely understand why, but it is. If it's one room in a house, why? Is the dog not house trained? Refer to the article on the house training method that really works. Does the dog get destructive? Dog-proof your house so he can have more space. Put away things you think he might break or destroy, and email me about separation anxiety training if he goes crazy when you're out. If you can't do any of these things, find a new home for your dog; you're being abusive and forcing your dog to be aggressive.

If the dog is food-aggressive, start putting down food bowls with only a small amount of food and gently toss more pieces of food into the bowl as he finishes. Stand far enough away that he isn't growly. Over a period of days or weeks, slowly move closer and closer until you can stand right in front of him and drop food into the bowl without hearing growling or seeing any aggressive behavior. Don't ever try to remove the bowl until he finishes and moves away. How would you feel if the waiter in a restaurant took away your steak before you'd finished?

If it's a toy, teach him to leave the toy in exchange for a treat. Get a small tasty treat that he won't get at any other time and offer it to him in exchange for the toy. Don't try to take the toy in your hand yet; just lead him a few steps away from the toy before giving the treat or toss the treat a couple of feet away from the toy. Praise him for taking the treat and leaving the toy, even if afterward he goes right back to the toy. If this is going well after a week, keep the treat in your hand as you sit or stand about 3 feet away from him when he has the toy. If he leaves the toy and comes to you, give him the treat and praise him. If he brings the toy over and doesn't drop it, move away and pretend to eat the treat yourself. Act silly about it; say Yummm yummm yummm and look really happy. Try again in a few minutes. When he'll drop the toy, come for the treat, and stay near you for a few minutes of petting you're doing well. It might be a good idea to buy a couple more toys too; remember the rarity angle - if he only has one or two toys he'll work harder to guard them.



If it's a person, he may be unhealthily attached to that person. Some people think this is cute, that the dog is being protective; but that's not so unless the person is being actively attacked. What's happening is called resource guarding, and the person being guarded must stop feeding or interacting with the dog. Another person in the household must take over - temporarily. The dog will be unhappy about this and may make his unhappiness known by breaking housetraining or doing some destructive chewing; you'll have to be determined and not give in to this "emotional blackmail" on the dog's part. After a week or so, the situation should be improved enough that the person originally guarded can start paying attention to the dog again and doing some of the feeding; but the dog's care should never be left to any one person - ever! - or the behavior will recur. In a one-person household, or if others in the household are unwilling to help with the dog's care, the person being guarded may be able to ask friends or neighbors to help on a temporary basis. If there is no other person to help, the person being guarded will simply have to stop rewarding the guarding behavior. Stand up, walk away, don't touch or look at the dog who's growling and getting between the guarded person and a friend or relative. If the dog continues trying to get in the middle, take his collar and GENTLY put him in his kennel for a few minutes. If he doesn't have a kennel, go to WalMart or somewhere and get him one. If you have to put him in the kennel, don't talk to him, look directly at him, or touch him more than you can help; but be careful not to be rough with him. If you're rough, he'll know he got your attention and that'll undo the training. Let him out after 5 or 10 minutes; if he starts growling and getting in the way again, put him back again.

Fear biting is more complicated; you need to figure out what he's afraid of. Email me at guarrj2002@yahoo.com and we'll discuss it and how to fix it. Also email me if the methods given above don't seem to be helping, or if you have some problem with using them. I am always glad to help dogs and those who love them.