

## Helping your dog enjoy camp (a.k.a. understanding dog behavior)

### **The dog's perspective on the camp experience:**

Your dog is not used to being surrounded with lots of people and 25+ other dogs that might be giving signals, making eye-contact or barking at him or her. It can be nerve wracking for a dog, especially if they are an “only-dog” at home used to peace and quiet. They may act a little testy or get exhausted from constantly being on the lookout. They may not want to eat. After a few days of this your dog may look like someone drugged him or he's sick or he might become agitated and restless. He's just exhausted from having non-stop fun (and stress) all day long with less sleep than usual for several days in a row. This is normal. Even for well-socialized dogs having lots of fun, learning new things and interruption of normal sleep patterns can cause some stress and tiredness. So we want to help you make it as low-stress on your dog as possible by teaching you how to monitor your dog's interactions with other dogs and remind you to give your dog lots of rest time and one on one quiet time with you.



### **Bite Thresholds**

All dogs have a bite threshold. Some dogs are more easily provoked to bite than others. Various breeds are bred for their trigger points. Guard dog breeds are specifically bred for a more sensitive alarm trigger point (reactions at greater distances from the target). These breeds might start saying, “Who's that stranger approaching a mile down the road? He could be dangerous! Bow wow wow wow!” A Golden Retriever on the other hand, has been selectively bred for an almost non-existent trigger point. They might say, “Oops, I guess I should have moved sooner— maybe I shouldn't stand here wagging my tail at the axe murder standing over me, swinging the axe at my head!” :-)

Aggression triggers are cumulative; they can pile up and reach a breaking point. Think of aggression triggers as points (assigned only as an example below). The more stress the dog feels because of the situation or thing, the higher the point value. And your dog's “threshold” numbers might be higher or lower depending on how quick he/she is to give warning signals or bite.

(10 points) If the dog is fairly stressed by the presence of a small child (this might not be enough to push him to the bite threshold if it's the only stressor present.)

(5 points) If you add another factor, like a noisy room, which makes the dog less relaxed. (This might put the dog closer to a bite, because he may be provoked to growl at 15 points.)

(12 points) When you throw in something else that excites or worries your dog, like the presence of a valued resource (toy/ bone/ treats, etc.) his worry level is now at 27.

If the dog's “snapping” point is 25, all these stress factors combined make him snap when the kid approaches. But unless you look at all the factors stressing your dog, you

might not understand why he snapped at the kid when in the past he's been fine with children. All you need is one more thing to get the dog stressed to the point of a bite.

If he happens to be on a tight leash, held by a nervous owner (8 stress points), this dog is suddenly at his bite threshold of 35 points (10 + 5 + 12 + 8). A dog that normally would not be provoked to bite under any ONE of these bothersome "triggers" is suddenly sending someone to the hospital because everything kept adding up (raw bone, in a noisy room, on a tight leash, with a child approaching). It helps to know your dog and what worries, excites, or triggers stress or aggression. And if you see a potentially explosive scenario developing, get yourselves out of there.

### **Aggressive displays are normal communication.**



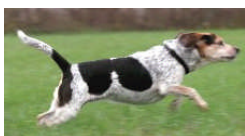
The dog that snaps isn't always the "aggressive" one. If a dog is being rude (in dog language) to another dog, then the offending dog might get "told off" through barking or snapping. While the dog that barked or snapped may be seen as the offender, the real problem was the dog that hasn't learned manners and proper greeting behavior.

Often it's the people with dogs that love all other dogs that are the worst offenders. They know their dog won't hurt another dog so they let them rush up and get in the other dog's face or sniff certain parts too long. This is very rude in dog language and some dogs are much less tolerant of this rude behavior. A doggie greeting (sniffing butts) should not last longer than a human handshake (2-3 seconds) before the dogs move to other behavior like play or separating. If the dogs are greeting too long, call them apart before one or the other gets uncomfortable and feels the need to snap.

### **Reactive Dogs**

Most people that have attended Dog Scout camp (or been part of an active troop) have a better understanding of dogs that are "reactive" (barking at other people or dogs). We know what causes those reactions and how to prevent them so we seldom see it. However, if someone has a lapse in attention and isn't monitoring his/her dog or their dog's environment and there is a "tiff" between the dogs, try to remain calm.

Notice I put the responsibility of monitoring on the humans. We are ultimately responsible for our own dog's actions. If you let your dog have more freedom than his good behavior and trust-ability warrants, then you are setting your dog up for failure. We don't want to see any dogs hurt so please keep your own dog (regardless of how friendly he might be) under your supervision and immediate control (whether on leash or off). You also want to be on the look out for any situations that might get your dog in trouble. Often a dog that is off leash is bitten by running up to a dog that is ON leash. The person with the off leash dog should have been more careful about where the dog was allowed off leash and/or trained a better recall and/or been more alert to



their dog's attention to the presence of the other dog. And the person with the on-leash dog should have asked for the approaching dog's owner to keep him back.



## Yellow Bandannas

Please do your very best to keep your dog away from dogs wearing yellow bandannas or anyone who asks you to “Please keep your dog back.” These are not confrontational words. These words are used by people looking out for the best interest of their dog and yours. If a dog is approaching your dog in a rude way or the greeting or play is going on too long or getting too rough, you might want to remind the person to “please get their dog back”, even if it’s just for a temporary break in the play.

## A tight leash means, “Don’t play; FIGHT!”

Proper loose leash greeting means allowing dogs to BRIEFLY go into the “handshake” position (nose to butt) and is better than tight leash “face-offs” where the dogs are forced to lock into a frontal approach. After a brief sniff, call the dogs apart and back to focus on the handler unless both of the dogs go quickly into play mode and the handlers are ok with the dogs playing at that time. If one handler calls their dog, the other handler should also call theirs.

A dog straining against a tight leash to greet another dog is showing all the wrong signals to the other dog. Regardless of how your dog actually feels, the tense body, direct eye contact and raised body are all signals that tell the other dog “I’m assertive and might hurt you”. Proper dog greetings involve approaching in an “arc” with a curve in the approach path (rather than straight on in a direct line), a loose and relaxed body/tail and other calming signals that can include looking away, licking lips, lying down, scratching, yawning, etc. If you are not good at reading dog body language, you will want to look at the page titled “Body Language 101” on the articles page of the DSA website.



## Proper Greetings

If your dog does not know how to give calming signals, it may be because he or she never learned to “speak dog” as a youngster. You can “manufacture” (create) a calming signal by rewarding your dog for looking at you (and away from the other dog), which is a calming signal that tells the other dog your dog is not a threat at that moment. This helps reduce tension during the meeting of two dogs that don’t know each other. When we help the dog give the right signals, we call this “Manufacturing a Deferential Behavior”, meaning your dog artificially shows deference to the other dog, by looking away (because you trained him to).

This can also be accomplished by having one dog getting treat after treat from his owner’s hand while the other dog gets a quick sniff of his butt. Then reverse the roles. Remember to keep the sniff quick and non-invasive by not giving the sniffing dog enough leash to get into trouble. The dog eating the treats should barely notice the sniffing dog’s actions. Do NOT use this method if either dog has food guarding issues.

Another method is having 2 dogs walk in the same direction and alternating which one is leading which can help dogs get acquainted without even sniffing directly. The dog that is following will be able to smell the front dog and see his body language and become more relaxed about the other dog before getting within sniffing range after each dog has had a chance to be in the lead. This doesn’t have to be a long walk. About 20’ in one direction then reverse direction to go back the 20’ which puts the previously

following dog in the lead. Repeat till the dogs are more relaxed and no longer pulling toward each other. Once the dogs relax a bit (& maybe have a chance to each mark in a certain spot) they will be less intense and/or less over-the-top excited about the actual greeting.

You'll also learn to do "walk-by's" at camp to help the dogs get more comfortable with each other.



## Interrupt a stare

Any hard stare between dogs that is held more than 2 or 3 seconds by one or both dogs is asking for trouble. So a good default behavior is to look at YOU (the handler), rather than to stare at the other dog and get caught "locked" into a threatening stare with another dog which could lead to "fighting words" (barking) or worse. If you notice your dog holding a stare at another dog, interrupt that behavior by calling your dog or moving the dog away from the dog he's staring at. Be very careful if the dog's get within lunging range. That staring may have been communicating fighting words and when the dogs get close, they might carry out those threats.



## Dogs that love all other dogs or just want to play

Even if your dog is very friendly to others, you will learn a great deal from reading the following section about dog behavior that can help you keep your dog safe at camp. It is also info you need to know to get the Dog Scout title on your dog. We put this in the pre-camp materials to prepare people for camp (where there might be some reactive dogs), so that we can spend more time doing things with the campers and less time on lecture sessions about how to reduce threat displays between dogs.

## Do you have an aggressive dog?

By Lonnie Olson (DSA founder and camp director)

I have dog camps where close to a hundred people and their dogs come to learn and play each summer. Many people call me with the concern that their dog is "aggressive" and they are not quite sure if they should bring their dog or not. I do my best to screen dogs for truly aggressive issues before they attend camp and camp is not the place for dangerous dogs. We have very few problems with dog aggression at camp, because in the pre-camp material we cover how to help your dog and how you can better understand what can trigger aggressive displays in your dog or in other dogs.

## What is aggression?

The behaviors most people call aggression is actually an aggressive display. It is a form of **communication**. Most dogs don't WANT to bite, they want to avoid confrontation. Often they are using a scary display (barking/lunging) to get the other dog or person to go away, not to try to get them to fight. Others use a snap or growl as simple communication that says "knock it off!" to another dog. I usually demonstrate the dog's need for aggression by telling a story of my own personal experience. I call it the pretzel bag story. This really happened to me when I was in my 20's.

I was at a college party, and this drunken guy sat next to me. I had a bag of pretzels in my lap that I was munching from, and he reached over and started getting some pretzels out of the bag. Soon, I found him digging to the bottom of the bag of pretzels

(not looking for a pretzel), and I jumped up, gave him a “look” handed him the bag and went to another part of the house. *[In dog language, this would be the equivalent of another dog ramming his nose up the first dog’s butt and continuing past the point of greeting. The dog with her space invaded moves away, and gives a look at the other dog that means “I don’t like that—I’ve had enough.”]*

Back at the party... this guy kept following me around. He just had no idea of how completely obnoxious and offensive he was behaving. *[Many dogs are like that, too—they never learned PROPER greeting behaviors as youngsters, so they “cross the line” a lot.]* Finally, this guy touched my face or somehow invaded my personal space that really made me draw the line. In my most threatening voice, I said, “If you touch me one more time, I’m going to take your block off!” *[If I were a dog, you’d say I was one step short of my “bite threshold.” I avoided this guy, I warned this guy, now I’m threatening this guy, and if I’m further molested, next I’m going to go for the “bite.”]* Sure enough, this guy thought he’d be cute, and to accept my challenge he reached up and “scritch” the top of my head (like some people do to dogs). That’s IT! I hauled back and swung with all my might at his face. I swear you could hear my arm “swish” through the air like in a Chuck Norris fighting scene in a movie. I missed, and only got the collar of his shirt. But, he got the message. What happened next was the strange part. The whole party suddenly silenced, and you could hear a pin drop. Everyone was looking at ME, thinking to themselves, “What is wrong with THAT bitch?” *[If I were a dog, my owner would probably be yanking me back and punishing me for an “unprovoked” attack on the guy molesting me.]*

## **Aggressive displays are communication**

If the dog was socialized correctly as a youngster, he or she will recognize calming signals and low-level threats, and will back off. If that dog is not good at reading social signals, or disregards them, that dog is going to end up in a skirmish. The sad part is that many PEOPLE observing this going on in DOGS do not recognize the discomfort, calming signals, or low level threats, and when their dog finally reaches his or her bite threshold the person is shocked, surprised, disappointed, embarrassed and/or ashamed of the dog, and will often punish the one that was on the receiving end of the rude behavior.

## **Don’t punish threat displays**

What’s WORSE is that some people don’t understand that aggressive displays are the communication of information, and actually PUNISH (leash yank, raised voice, or worse) their dog for exhibiting these pre-bite threats to others. The dog learns that it is DANGEROUS (has bad consequences) to give this information to the other dog (or child), so the dog will suppress the pre-bite signals (lip lift, growl, snarl, bark, snap). But this doesn’t mean the dog feels any less stressed or threatened by whatever would have made him give the signals. Then guess what they’ve created? They now have a dog that goes straight from being stressed to attacking and biting, with no intermediate signals to warn us (or the approaching creature) at all! It hides the tick or the count down clock of the time bomb and you have a dog that bites without warning.



Some folks who are concerned about aggression merely have a dog who doesn’t appreciate other dogs with poor social skills invading their space (I call them a “Jethro” dog as in that awkward, overly friendly doofus on the Beverly Hillbillies). The older and

more mature a dog gets, the more normal it is for a dog to want to avoid this type of juvenile contact, and aggressive displays are sometimes the only way to get it across to a persistent “Jethro” dog. A dog should not be punished for trying to remove another dog from its rear end in the only way it knows how.

## Normal Dogs

Sometimes I have a hard time convincing the camper that it’s OK for the dog to snap, if necessary, to get the point across to another dog. This is not overt aggression. This is not a dog that would “cross the street” to beat up another dog, just because it’s fun. It is just a dog that wants to be left alone. This dog is not a danger to society. It is a **normal** dog with good communication skills.

## Dogs with Space Issues

Then there are dogs that are just a little bit more particular about who gets to sniff them. They go through the same normal threat displays, but they do it at almost every dog that approaches. This dog just requires a little more “space.” Sometimes, in a camp setting, it is hard to always surround yourself with 5 feet of space as a “safety zone” for your dog. This owner can request a yellow bandanna for the dog which communicates to the other owners that this particular dog requires a little more space and may snap if your dog gets too near. The other people, however do not always notice or respect the yellow bandanna, especially if the dog “seems” fine and isn’t making eye contact and lunging at other dogs all the time (he’s just minding his own business until another dog invades his space). So, for this dog, I would recommend a little therapy.

These problems usually stem from fear so I would strive to make the dog as comfortable as possible around other dogs. In addition to requesting a yellow bandanna during camp I would be extra watchful and be ready to intervene if another dog comes too close. Don’t be afraid to ask the person on the other end of the approaching dog’s leash to please keep him back.

As other dogs approach, feed the dog with space issues, so that he will make a positive association with the other dogs’ presence. The dog should start to associate the closeness of other dogs with rapid-fire treats from the handler. It shouldn’t take long for this dog to WANT other dogs to get closer because it opens the flood gates of the treat dispenser at the end of their leash. After the dog gets to the point of being comfortable with other dogs getting close, the treats can be delivered a little less rapidly between treats while the other dog is close. And then the treats can be faded little by little till the dog gets one really great treat for having another dog close to him. But don’t rush to fade the treats too fast! It may take some time to overcome your dog’s fears or unease about unknown dogs getting within his comfort zone to the point where your dog enjoys that closeness (especially if your dog has been attacked in the past).



I would try to find your dog a “buddy.” Another dog with whom the dog is comfortable and can play well or just “hang out” around. The dog needs a chance to improve his social skills by interacting with other non-invasive, non-aggressive dogs. The more often this happens, the better the dog will get at relaxing when another dog gets close.

This dog is usually safe in public and will do well as long as the owner takes a proactive role in keeping unknown dogs from getting too close and only allowing play or interaction with dogs known to be safe and well mannered. Remember that threat displays are **normal** dog communication. But for the other dog to **recognize** and respect this communication they have to “speak dog.” If they were removed from the litter too early (before 7-8 weeks of age) and/or were not allowed to play with other dogs as a youngster their communication skills might be weak or non-existent. Therefore, when your dog tries to communicate with a growl or snap the offending dog might misinterpret this information and actually try to fight with your dog. Imagine the pretzel story if he thought I just tried to smack him for no reason—he might try to punch me back!

I still do not include dogs with space issues in the category of aggressive dogs, and they can become Dog Scouts if the dog’s human companion has taken what we teach about how to recognize, avoid and/or get out of situations that could lead to aggression and puts that info to use in everyday life. We call this managing the dog’s environment and setting them up for success.

### **Dogs with Fear Aggression**

Some dogs were poorly socialized and/or removed from the litter before acquiring some or all of their social communication skills. These dogs may be fearful in certain situations. I’ve seen dogs come “unglued” at the mere approach of a strange dog from 30 feet away. This is NOT normal. Dogs who were not kept with littermates until at least 7 weeks of age (or that had no littermates) will not be completely normal in one respect or another, and this is why we so strongly stress the importance of early and continued socialization (with the litter up until 8 weeks of age, with humans and other stimuli from 9 to 16 weeks of age, and with other dogs, people and situations for the rest of the dog’s life). The more new situations and things the puppy learns are safe (prior to 16 weeks of age), the better the dog will be as an adult at coping with and adjusting to novel things and anything that might cause a bit of uncertainty or fear.



The fearful aggressive dog can not expect to live out his life without some major therapy and behavioral adjustment training (teaching coping skills). Sure, you could just keep him at home where he will never come into contact with things that frighten him, but sooner or later you’re going to have to take the dog somewhere (like the vet’s office), and he will be terrified and won’t know how to act.

A fearful dog has two main plans for action. Plan A is “Run away! Run away!” The dog distances himself from the thing that is causing anxiety (an approaching dog or child perhaps). If the dog can not get away, for example, he is cornered by the approaching child or he is on a leash and can’t distance himself from the oncoming dog he has to resort to plan B. Plan B is to get the scary approaching thing to turn tail and run away. To do this, the dog puts on his best display of aggression. If this doesn’t work, the frightened and confused dog may be forced to snap and ultimately bite the thing that he feels is threatening him.

I would say that this is the best recipe for dog bites to children:  
Poorly socialized dog + unrestrained child = Dog snaps at or bites child.

Of course, ANY dog will bite if threatened sufficiently. Dogs with poor socialization require less of a threat than well-adjusted dogs, because, simply put **more things frighten them**. To avoid this, don't buy a dog from a pet shop or a breeder that is only interested in profit or a shelter that doesn't make any effort to try to match the dog with the right person/home. Get your puppy from a source where you know he was kept with the litter for a sufficient length of time to equip him with the **language** and coping skills he needs to get him through life or where a full temperament test has been done to screen for issues. And if you get a puppy, after bringing the pup home, make sure the puppy has many opportunities to meet SAFE, restrained, and well mannered children of all ages. Also never let an unrestrained child around ANY dog. To a dog, small children are downright CREEPY! They grope, poke and pull without invitation, they give direct eye contact, they restrain the dog with a hug and/or they make odd noises and they are simply a different size and scent from the adults the dog is more familiar with. Most dogs feel that they shouldn't be subjected to such molestation--and they shouldn't.



Unfortunately, a dog that bites a child is often carted off to the pound or put to death. This is the easy solution. However the owner will probably just go out and get another 5-week old puppy (who hasn't learned bite inhibition or dog language) and proceed to bring it home and keep it there (instead of taking it out and socializing the heck out of it), and history is going to repeat itself. It's not the dog that is at fault, but the dog gets the death penalty. Could it be any more unfair?



The fearful aggressive dog is going to require your constant supervision and management of his environment but he can be helped with therapy. The therapy I would recommend is to try to "undo" all of the effects of under socialization by re-socializing him as an adult. Show him that things aren't scary with some counter conditioning. Introduce new things from a distance that doesn't scare the dog and pair these new things with really yummy treats. The dog should associate new things with his most favorite and special treats so that he looks forward to seeing new things. Teach him dog language like showing deferential behavior (arching approach and looking away) on cue if he is unable to do it naturally. Introduce him to safe dogs, one at a time, in a safe environment. Introduce him to new stimuli in a safe and fun way, including lots of treats. Jean Donaldson, author of the best dog book on the planet (The Culture Clash), uses a technique called "The Bar is Open." This therapy involves changing a dog's perception of a scary thing, by making its presence predict wonderful things happening (food). When the scary thing goes away, "the bar is closed," and the opportunity for yummy treats is gone along with it. The dog soon finds himself hoping the strange dog will approach, because it is no longer scary, it is a joyful event.

While these dogs aren't what I would call "normal," they could go through life without incident with the proper management of the dog's environment (keeping him away from things that frighten him). However, that would be like a prison sentence and taking the dog in public would require a proactive owner with a very watchful eye. If this dog wants to become a Dog Scout, he will have to receive some therapy as mentioned above so that he is not reactive around the scary things any more and learns to trust that the owner is in control and will not let things harm him.



## Dangerous Dogs

There are very few of what I would call truly dangerous dogs. These are dogs that WOULD actually cross the street to beat up another dog for the fun of it. I'm not sure what happened in these poor dogs' upbringing or genetic makeup that makes it "fun" for them to beat up or kill other dogs, but it is a gravely serious situation and one that must be dealt with immediately.

I would define a dangerous dog as one who might not display the normal aggressive signals. You don't see any signals until the dog rushes over and attacks another dog. Therefore, this aggression is very unpredictable and hard to prevent. Predatory aggression often looks like this. A dog has no need to growl or act aggressively to his meal (prey), so if he is attacking another animal (as though it is prey) with intent to shake, eviscerate and/or kill it, you will often not see any warning signals. There will often be damage caused by the bite as well. This dog is not trying to just send a message with a scruff shake.



This dog is a liability to own. To save yourself a lot of grief, euthanization might be the only answer for a truly vicious dog. You can counter condition and manage the environment until you're blue in the face, but you just never know when there might be a moment that you are caught with your guard down. That's when something could happen that you can't "undo." That's my personal opinion.

## Help for aggression

If you do have a truly aggressive dog and you want to try to help him, consult with an behavioral expert in dog aggression that uses reward-based methods. Brenda Aloff is an aggression expert that has been on staff at Dog Scout Camp, and she is amazing. She has people come to her from all over the country to get help for their dogs. Brenda rehabilitated a wonderful German Shepherd that was destined to be destroyed because of many serious attacks on humans and other dogs (serious like long bone breaking and hospitalization.) Brenda adopted the dog because she could see a potentially sound dog underneath all of the aggression. After training, this dog had the demeanor of a service dog: calm, self assured and non-reactive. You have to read Brenda's book on Dog Aggression to get the full idea, but she basically taught the dog to "include Brenda in all decision making." With all positive training, Brenda convinced her dog to delay action for 5 seconds and look to her for guidance. Those five seconds gave Brenda a chance to react, so that the dog didn't have to. I never saw this dog stare at, growl, snap or display any other kind of aggression in the time I knew her (several years). She exuded self-control, and it was all put in place by Brenda, with positive training. (The online Camp Store carries this great book on aggression. Go to the DSA store to order your copy.)

## Is the dog really dangerous?

Some dogs **act** really vicious though, and we come to find out (after a muzzled growl class) that this dog just wanted to play with the other dogs but had a really loud way of saying so (or is conflicted and trying to tell the other dog to back off while at the same time actually wanting to get closer to play). One camper in particular had the trainers back home telling her that her dog was vicious and should be put to sleep only to find out that the dog was basically nice, grossly misunderstood, and in need of a little

socialization and environment management. The ferocious noise he was emitting made the owner frightened and she was transmitting the wrong signals down the leash to the dog. When she was able to be more relaxed the dog calmed down also. This “vicious dog” is now a Dog Scout. He has toned down markedly and his owner now has the skills necessary to control his rambunctious behavior. Plus, he’s not frustrated because he is now able to socialize with all of the dogs he was previously being pulled back from (for fear he’d injure them.) By the end of this dog’s growl class therapy this Rottweiler was playing nicely with a Toy Poodle. The owner was weeping tears of joy to find there was a very “normal” dog underneath her dog that had been so misunderstood all his life.

Because dogs don’t have hands, they often use their mouths to grab things. My dog gets so excited when she plays with me that she likes to grab my arm in her mouth. She never squeezes. It’s a very inhibited, open mouthed contact, and she means it only in fun. I have another dog that gives “collie hugs” by taking my arm in her mouth and just holding it. This is a sign of affection. Some dogs will grab you by the hand to “lead” you someplace, or pull gently on your clothing. These are not signs of aggression. Be careful not to “condemn” your dog for doing something with his mouth that he in no way meant to be aggressive.

Also keep in mind that dog aggression is normal communication of information, and if the dog merely snaps, nose-butts (a “punch” with the nose), or uses an INHIBITED bite (one where the skin is not broken), it probably had no intention of hurting anybody and was merely trying to communicate his distress. As our dogs’ caretakers, it is our responsibility to prevent them from being “manhandled” or frightened by other dogs, unrestrained children and ignorant adults.

Most bites, especially to children, could be prevented with proper management (of both the dog and the child). Parents should realize that toddlers don’t have the ability to use good judgment, so they have to keep their kids safe until they’re old enough to learn about asking first and the proper way to approach a dog **if given permission**. Parents often fail to act responsibly though. I’ve had to throw a body-block between my dog and an attacking unrestrained child on more than one occasion. I don’t worry about embarrassing the parents. My dog’s safety comes first. But these kinds of parents are rarely embarrassed. They don’t see themselves as having done anything wrong to be embarrassed about! They just let their screeching toddler race up, with arms flailing, to every dog they see. Then because I’m protecting my dog from being climbed on by the groping child the parent has the gall to ask me, “What’s the matter, is your dog MEAN?” I have to hold my tongue to keep from saying, “What’s the matter, can’t you control your kid? If you want him to live to be an adult you had better teach him to stop attacking every dog he sees! The next one you encounter may well be ‘mean’ and its owner may not be as good as I am at running interference!”

## **Preventing aggression in your dog or others**

I hope this information on aggression has been helpful. I do not claim to be an aggression expert. I merely pass on the information I have learned from others. Dog Scout Camp (or any dog camp) is no place for a truly aggressive dog and because of the sometimes close quarters a dog that is reactive to almost all other dogs might be excessively stressed. But it can be a great place to work with a mildly reactive dog with instructors who have helped many others and with fellow campers who have hopefully read this and have a better understanding of the displays.



I hope I have helped you understand that some aggressive displays are normal and should be accepted, others need therapy and can be modified and managed, and still other types of aggression are dangerous and should be dealt with by expert counsel, rehabilitation and management. I also kind of lumped dog aggression and aggression toward humans together here, but you should know that there is a distinction between the two. We don't get too many dogs with "people" issues. If the dog dislikes or is fearful about the approach of humans there is a rainbow colored bandanna that we have the dog wear at camp to let people know the dog does not appreciate human advances.

### **Report a bite history to the camp director**

If your dog has bitten someone or another dog it is a serious matter. Dogs have powerful jaws and sharp teeth and can do a lot of damage. A dog is able to kill an adult human and can easily kill or injure a child. As our dogs' owners, we are ultimately responsible if our dog bites another dog or a person. Please be sure to tell us if your dog has a bite history, what the circumstances were, the severity of damage the bite caused as well as what steps you have taken to prevent further bites. A dog that has bitten is not automatically barred from camp, but knowing your dog has bitten in the past puts more responsibility on you to manage and control your dog so it doesn't happen again.

If you need additional help understanding your dog or learning how to help them be more stress free or better able to cope with certain things, visit the "helpful articles" page of the DSA website, ask on the public DSA Yahoo list, or contact the camp director directly. We want your visit to camp to be a safe and pleasant one for you AND your dog.

