



Monitoring Dog Play

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE AS PEACE KEEPER

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No matter which breed you own, a certain amount of dog-dog conflict is a normal part of being a dog. Preventing problems and keeping the peace between dogs is the job of every realistic and proactive dog owner. Not unlike rowdy kids on the playground, dogs need good leadership and clear direction to make sure everybody plays by the rules.

Keeping the Peace: It's all up to YOU!

Nature-Nurture. A dog's tolerance level for other dogs is shaped by his genetics as well as his previous history with dogs. Although pit bulls are terriers and terriers are known for having shorter fuses with dogs, many can enjoy a select number of K9playmates provided the chemistry between dogs is good, the setting is controlled and a good leader is present to enforce the rules.

Note: *New dog intros always go better when they're slow and measured. For info on doing dog introductions, see the 'Socializing Pit Bulls' hand out.*

Dog Tolerance Levels Vary. Do you know your dog's limits with other dogs? Does he have a short fuse, a long fuse, or something in between? **Be realistic** about what he can put up with from other dogs and what kind of play or behavior he will not tolerate.

Dogs can be:

Dog Social - Puppyish and great with all dogs

Dog Tolerant - Generally easy going with dogs; a long fuse

Dog Selective - Picky about which dogs will be tolerated

Dog Aggressive - Has a very short fuse with most or all dogs

Be realistic about your dog's tolerance level and help him succeed.

Dog Limits Change. Dog tolerance levels can and do change with age and circumstance. Young pups can become much more Dog Selective as they mature and unsocialized adults can become more Dog Tolerant with proper intros and positive exposure to other dogs, especially dogs of the opposite sex. Be ready for changes.

Note: *It's important to remember that, in pit bulls, dog-dog aggression is completely unrelated to the uncharacteristic trait of human directed aggression. Dog aggressive dogs can be some of the very best 'people dogs.'*

Leash Reactivity. A dog who behaves badly around other dogs on leash is being Leash Reactive. This does not necessarily mean he's Dog Aggressive. In many cases this same dog can play nicely with other dogs off-leash. Obedience classes that focus on distraction techniques can teach these dogs better leash manners.

Spats Happen. Even dogs that get along can break into an argument if one or both are offended or challenged. Study your dog! - Understanding his body language helps you know when to

intervene so trouble can be averted long before an argument starts. If a real fight does happen, learn from it so it doesn't happen again.

Leadership Counts. Obedience training can't cure a dog of normal dog traits, but being a good leader will help you referee your pet's interactions so he can have a positive experience. Once you've established the rules AND you understand his individual limits, you can set him up for successful interactions and he'll be much less likely to 'cross the line.' Pit bulls are born pleasers.

Note: *Dogs shouldn't play with other dogs unless they're well socialized, under voice control and quick to respond to an emergency recall during their play sessions.*

Dog Limits Change. Dog tolerance levels can and do change. Young pups can become much more selective about which dogs they like as they mature, and unsocialized adults can become more tolerant with proper intros and positive exposure to well socialized dogs, especially dogs of the opposite sex. Be ready for changes.

Solo Flyer Reality Check. Some dogs, including some pit bulls, just can't live with or play with other dogs. They shouldn't be judged for this. Playmates are a nicety but not a necessity for dogs. Having a loving human companion is much more important to these Solo Flyers.

Triggers. Just as with kids, fights can spark up from the most seemingly insignificant 'triggers.' Some common triggers: Arguments over toys, food, favorite dogs or even favorite people (resource guarding). A perceived challenge such as intense eye contact, tug-o-war game or rough play can set a dog off. Watch out for excitement levels that spike when dogs slam into each other while chasing a squirrel or dashing to the sound of the doorbell (Redirected aggression). Knowing your dog's triggers helps prevent trouble.

Housemate Habits. Some dogs wait for their owners to leave the house before they misbehave. For this reason, leaving dogs loose in the home together can present certain risks. This isn't just a 'pit bull thing.' Many different dog breed owners practice these simple precautions: To separate unattended pets, homes use dog crates, kennels and baby gates – and some of us lock our dogs in the bedroom for a nice cozy nap on the pillows while we're away.

Dog Parks. Because excitement levels run high at Dog Parks and not all the participants are fair players, smart dog owners avoid them in place of smaller, supervised play group sessions with dogs that know and like each other.

Grudges. Some housemate dogs will develop a dangerous grudge that goes beyond basic supervision. These situations are the hardest to deal with and can force owners to separate their pets full time. This is a very difficult way to live! Avoid grudges by designing well-balanced housemate matches (opposite sex pairings do the best), maintain a strong leadership role and avoid setting dogs up to compete for your attention.

Rude Manners. Even if your dogs are perfect angels with each other, they should not be allowed to fence fight with the neighbor's dogs. If a feud is brewing between the households, work with your neighbor to rotate your dogs' outdoor times so they avoid each other, make sure your fence is solid and secure and teach your dog that barking at the fence is never allowed.

Mark Bad Behavior. Reinforce Good Behavior. Teach your dog that there are consequences for any inappropriate behavior with other dogs. Mark bad behavior with a firm verbal correction, "UH OH!" and remove your dog immediately from the situation. Your strong disapproval and the removal of the 'fun' will make a point. On the flipside, remember to praise your dog for showing relaxed body language and good manners around other dogs. Always end on a positive while things are going well. Pit bulls are a very intelligent breed and can certainly make good decisions with other well socialized dogs when offered good direction and the best opportunities to succeed.

