

DECODING WARNING SIGNS

Having a dog with behavior concerns can be scary, especially if the dog has bitten or is at risk of biting a person or animal. Fortunately, there are various tools and techniques that can help prevent dog bites.



The term “aggression” means different things to different people. When describing a dog in this way, we ask that foster parents elaborate on the circumstances surrounding the behavior. If the dog’s behavior is new, let your foster team know. We may need to make an appointment to rule out medical causes. A dog who isn’t feeling well or is in pain might react with aggression.

It's important to learn to read your dog's body language. Dogs normally give warning signals before escalating to growling, lunging, or biting. Because some communication is subtle, you'll need to observe your dog's body language closely to learn what the signals are and what has triggered them. Warning signs leading up to a bite can include pupils dilating, hackles raising and lip licking. If you see any of these signs, cease interaction and try to remove the trigger that is causing the dog to react in this way.

Some people discipline a dog for growling, thinking that the dog is being “bad” and that telling the dog not to growl will stop the behavior and fix the problem. However, growling is your dog's way of communicating that they feel threatened by something or someone. If you punish your dog for growling, they might learn you don't want them to tell you how they feel. And the next time, they might give you less warning before a possible bite.

Punishing growling does not change the underlying emotional state that causes the behavior, but it does teach your dog not to communicate with you. Frequently, when a dog bite occurs seemingly out of nowhere, that dog has a history of having warning signals ignored or punished. If you notice your foster is displaying aggression or reactivity, alert your foster coordination team so that we can connect you to our trainer. Noticing and addressing these issues sooner rather than later is the key to keeping everyone safe and happy.

REASONS A DOG MAY DISPLAY AGGRESSION

- **Trigger stacking:** Every dog has noises, sights, etc. that trigger a stress response. If they experience one of those triggers and are not able to decompress before experiencing another, it might lead to a bite. An example would be a reactive dog on a walk seeing multiple dogs in a row without being able to decompress. Then, a biker passes by, and they lunge out to bite them.
- **Losing the ability to warn:** Most dogs will give warning signs leading up to aggression. When they have been conditioned not to give those warning signs, they might escalate right to a bite.
- **Defensive aggression:** This is fear based. These dogs are asking for space with their warning signs, but if pressured they might bite to get that space.
- **Offensive aggression:** Dogs displaying this will go forward toward a person or animal even if given space.

If any of these issues result in a bite, notify Renegade leadership immediately.



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