



## Is my dog overly aggressive?

### The causes of aggression

Dogs naturally display occasional, moderately aggressive behaviours. Each dog varies in its aggressive responses based on inherited predispositions, combined with past experiences and the present situation. Like humans, a dog's personality is a product of nature, nurture and the social environment. All behaviour is a result of genetics, learning and response to what's happening.

Some dogs with an aggressive predisposition may never display it, if circumstances don't trigger that response. Similarly, a calm dog may become extremely aggressive if the situation is sufficiently hostile.

### We understand...

...any dog has the capacity to show aggression given particular circumstances, as it is one of their many behavioural traits.

### Aggression: the Fast Facts

Ways to minimise your dog being overly aggressive:

- **Good Selection:** Choose the most suitable dog and breed from a reputable, breeder who is a member of Dogs SA, shelter or association considering your family; finances; yard size; lifestyle and time for teaching and playing.
- **Good Health:** Research tells us desexing your dog will improve health and reduce overly aggressive behaviours. Keep your dog in general good health by vaccinating; worm and flea prevention; regularly visiting your vet and providing a balanced diet with daily exercise.
- **Good Behaviour:** Teach your dog to behave well by socialising with others from puppy to adult. Provide training to ensure that you have sufficient control over your dog either on a lead or under voice command and actively supervise around children.
- **Good Care:** Provide your dog its own secure space, ensure its identification with council registration and micro-chipping for safe return if it wanders.

## We understand...

... excessive barking, snarling, biting or harassing others is distressing for everyone. That's why it's important to manage the situation and your dog.



## Dealing with aggressive behaviours

If your dog is threatened or is being protective of something it's more likely to react with aggressive behaviours. As a dog owner however, it is your responsibility to minimise the risk to others of your dog displaying excessive barking, snarling, biting or harassing behaviour towards members of your family, people in the community or other animals.

Seek advice from a qualified animal behaviourist, as instances of aggressive behaviour are often fear-based. Studies have shown that using punishment or confrontation based methods will often lead to further fear and aggression.

## Any dog can be aggressive

Above all, recognise that any dog can bite if it is frightened, protective or threatened. Sometimes these factors are beyond your control. For example if you choose an adult dog you may not know what experiences it had as a puppy. Fortunately it is possible to “teach an old dog new tricks” but it does take time, patience and love.

Reputable dog shelters only re-home dogs which have undertaken a behavioural assessment. You can take comfort in the fact that they will test the temperament of the dog and staff will assist you to match your dog's personality to your family circumstances and lifestyle. They will be able to

tell you the level of play and learning activity required and how that dog behaves with children and other dogs. These are all important things in managing the potential for aggression in your dog.

## Reporting a dog harassment or bite

In South Australia, it is important to report to the relevant local council when a dog bite or harassment occurs so that the necessary help, support and management can be provided. This could be your own dog, or a dog that isn't yours, that chases, threatens or bites you or your dog in a public place or in your home. For your local council information and contact details visit [www.lga.sa.gov.au](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au).

## Aggression: a Good Owner tip

Some dogs may only be aggressive under certain circumstances, for example when protecting their territory, food or family and sometimes when confronted by a stranger.

You can reduce the risk by understanding the behaviour of your dog and how it demonstrates nervousness, anxiety or aggression.

**To find the facts and other tips on how to be a good dog owner, visit [dogandcatboard.com.au](http://dogandcatboard.com.au)**



An initiative of the **DOG AND CAT MANAGEMENT BOARD** and your local council. Council information and contact details can be located at [www.lga.sa.gov.au](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au) View the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* along with Information Sheets on selection, health, behaviour and care at [www.dogandcatboard.com.au](http://www.dogandcatboard.com.au)