



Canine Conflicts

Dogs, like people, have their own personalities and need to build trust in a relationship which can take time. Even dogs that have previously gotten along fine can have new conflicts develop. Dogs communicate through body language, which may include growling, baring teeth, or air snapping. It's important that the other dogs in the household read this body language and react appropriately. If they don't, conflicts can easily arise and the dogs may be injured.

Getting Professional Help

Ongoing canine rivalry is potentially dangerous. Dogs or human family members could be severely injured as a result of fighting. Because resolving rivalry problems requires managing the dogs' somewhat complex social behaviors, it is often necessary for owners to obtain assistance from a professional trainer or behavior consultant.

Why Conflict Occurs

Conflicts between household dogs develop for a variety of reasons. Conflicts may occur if:

- A new animal has been introduced to the household
- A resident animal has died or no longer lives in the house
- A resident animal is re-introduced after an absence
- A young dog reaches social maturity, which is usually between 10 months and 2 years of age
- A resident dog ages or becomes ill
- Any other major household change, including new roommates or moving to a new residence

Breaking Up a Fight

If you need to break up a fight, do so by squirting the dogs with water or making a sharp, loud noise to try and interrupt them. This is not to punish them for fighting, but to break up the fight safely and quickly without using your hands. Never attempt to break up a dog fight by grabbing the dogs by their collars and pulling them apart or getting any part of you in between them. Touching dogs while they are fighting can result in one of the dogs biting you because you are in the way, or worse injury to the dogs due to pulling on the dogs while they are holding onto each other. Do not rush up to the dogs, crowd the dogs, or continuously yell during a fight, as this may escalate the situation.

What You Can Do To Help

- If the dogs involved are intact males or females, spay or neuter both dogs.

- With the help of a professional trainer or behavior consultant, reinforce good behaviors using counter-conditioning and desensitization techniques. These procedures must be designed and tailored to specifically meet the needs of each individual case and require professional in-home help. Please reach out to Homeward Pet's Animal Behavior Manager if you need referrals for a professional.
- Do not punish your dogs when conflict arises. Punishment will not resolve the issue and can actually make it worse.
- Most importantly, if there is the potential for conflict, do not leave the dogs alone unattended. Supervise at all times when they are sharing the same space and appropriately intervene as needed.