



TURNING DOG AGGRESSION INTO CALM ACCEPTANCE

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I have seen people call out of control aggressive dogs at dog shows “hot.” There is really no such thing as a “hot bully”, there are just trained bulls and untrained bulls. An untrained bully is a danger to himself, other dogs and other people. And having an untrained bully is not fun, think about it.....you are tense and nervous, panic stricken and jumpy like you’ve been struck with a bolt of electricity every time someone comes within 3 ft of your bull because you can’t count on your dog to have the appropriate response. That is no way to live. It is not fun, you are miserable and anxious and your bully is confused and panicky.

But the good news is that there are some simple effective steps that you can begin today to get a relaxed and confident bully companion tomorrow. Bully owners are fortunate because we have the breed that is the most eager to please of all dogs making any training task that much easier. Bullies will do anything to please their masters and that is the trait that makes our dogs so special.

The keys to all aspects of training American Bullies is know your dog, what he likes and fears and his favorite things, knowing how to communicate with your dog and making sure your bully understands, YOU are the BOSS. Always remember the most important training concept, if your bully isn’t doing what you want, its either because he doesn’t understand what it is he is supposed to do (because you are not communicating it to him correctly) OR he is not motivated to do it (and that is where knowing your dog’s likes comes in).

Applying this concept to dog aggression starts way before you ever present another dog to your untrained dog aggressive bully. The very first thing that needs to be taught is basic obedience and establishing your position as the alpha leader of your pack. Cesar Milan agrees saying on his website www.cesarmilaninc.com, “When dealing with...dogs, I start by working with the owners, explaining how to establish themselves as pack leaders and to understand the animal in their dog.



This is a crucial part of **rehabilitating** your dog: changing *your* behavior.” So start by teaching your bull that sit means sit, stay means stay with frequent and consistent sessions of praise, reward and positive reinforcement combined with redirection and gentle but firm correction.

Example: the easiest way to teach “Lie down” is tempt a sitting dog with a cookie held low and just out of his reach. As the dog stretches forward and downward toward the cookie, give him the command “Down” or “Lie Down” and then with each downward motion reward with copious praise “Good dog”, smiles (don’t forget to smile, research has shown that dogs are very cued into our expressions especially our eyes) and finally give him the cookie once you coax him to the floor. Using this method, I can generally get a dog that is well trained to sit and stay to lie down in the first training session. If the dog gets excited and stands, then give a calm firm “No”, withdraw the cookie and start again from the sit (correction and redirection).

Don’t forget to pay attention to what you might have done to cause the dog to fail. Did you move your body too much or in the wrong direction? If you are telling him “down” but start to rise up, the dog will cue into that movement and subconsciously will move with you. So as you bring the cookie down, use your posture and movements to reinforce the command and your eager to please bully is bound to follow your movements to success.

This is the same process for training your bully for dog acceptance. First, remember the common sources of dog aggression other than breed traits, are fear, lack of confidence, territoriality/protective instinct and most often combined with a mistaken idea that this sort of behavior is pleasing or at least acceptable to his alpha pack leader (YOU).

In an article contribution from Dr. Raymond Van Lienden, DVM of Clifton, VA “Long term treatment consists of desensitization (gradual exposure) and counter-conditioning the dog to accept the approach and greeting of other dogs with



obedience and rewards. This must be done slowly, beginning with situations where the dog can be successfully controlled and rewarded and very slowly progressing to more difficult encounters and environments.”

Here are some suggestions for accomplishing desensitization. Once your dog thoroughly masters basic obedience (sit, stay, come and walk calmly on a leash) get a friend with a non aggressive dog to help you. First take you have your aggressive bull sit and remain under control (on a strong leash with a slip (choke) lead) while your friend slowly walks his dog in sight of your bull. Pay attention to your bull, if he begins to exhibit signs of aggression (tensing, stiffness, intent staring at the other dog, stands up, moves or lunges) have your friend stop moving and immediately correct “No” and redirect your dogs focus and attention to you.

Get your dog’s attention by using a short tug on the lead, a stern voice, a clap, a treat, whatever you have learned works to refocus your particular dog (remember “know your bull?”). Return your dog to a calm sit and focusing on you and have your friend move slightly closer with his dog but not in a threatening manner. Any small example of calm acceptance of the other dog from your bull should be rewarded with praise. Remember.....this is how we teach the dog exactly what we want him to do and also how we motivate him to do it (praise and reward)!

Just as it is important to correct your dog immediately at the first display of inappropriate behavior to teach what we DON’T WANT we must be equally quick with praise and reward to teach the dog what we DO WANT.

Continue using this method while reducing the distances between the dogs, reassuring your bull in a soothing voice, redirect his attention at the first sign of tension (aggression) and rewarding any good behavior. It’s amazing how quickly the training progresses once your bull thoroughly understands what it is he must do to earn your praise. He was only showing aggression because he had been bred to believe that is what was expected of him. But bullies are so willing to please that



they will do anything including deny their natural hereditary instincts to please their masters. The owners of other breeders wish they could be so lucky!

So continue the training until you can walk you bully calmly down the street next to another dog and practice by taking your dog to places where he is bound to encounter strange dogs. Use the same techniques to correct any instances of inappropriate behavior and you will soon have the best behaved canine good citizen on around.

Note: the other dog should not display any aggressive behaviors during the training. If that occurs and the other dog remains aggressive, it would appear that both dogs need some training on dog acceptance!

The techniques used for this training will work to teach your bully any behavior and is guaranteed to lead to a fun and rewarding relationship with your American Bully family members for years to come.

http://www.cesarmillaninc.com/tips/issues_understand_aggression.php