

How to Handle a Dog Attack

What you need to know to prevent or deal with a dog attack.

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It's difficult to think about your dog being attacked by another dog. But the fact is, it happens, and the best thing you can do for your pup is to be prepared. Here's a guide on what to do in the event of a dog attack and the preventative measures you can take to help keep your dog safe.

How Do You Handle An Attack?

It can be terrifying to see a dog attack another dog but it's critical to remain calm in order to resolve the situation. "If you can keep your own head and get the other person to calm down, then you have a chance of getting out of it," says [Brenda Aloff](#), a professional dog trainer and the author of "[Aggression in Dogs](#)." Communicate clearly with the other dog owner and make a plan on how to separate the dogs.

Aloff suggests trying to separate them with an object, like an umbrella. "Get something between the dogs that's not your body." If the dogs have latched onto each other, the situation is much more serious. "Never put your fingers in or near your dog's mouth," Aloff warns. You can try to pry their mouths open with something like a parting stick. Spraying the dogs with water can also help or, if you have a jacket, you can try throwing it between them or over one or both of the dogs' faces, says Aloff.

What you do after is just as important as how you handle separating them. Keep a short leash and pay attention so that, once you separate them, they don't immediately get back together. It's also important to remain cautious of your own body, as some dogs might redirect their aggression to their handlers, says Aloff. Once the dogs are safely separated, the first step is to check your dog for injuries.

If there's any bleeding or puncture wounds, your dog will require antibiotics and should see a vet right away. "Unless your dog requires immediate medical care, it's important to take a moment to calm him down before you leave the scene to reduce emotional trauma," explains Aloff. Otherwise your dog may end up fearful or tense whenever you encounter the same location or a similar-looking dog.

Communication with the other dog owner is also critical. "It's just like a car accident," says Aloff. "Always exchange information, like names and phone numbers." Regardless of how the attack happened or how the other owner reacts at the scene, they may try to take you to court, which can be very unpleasant.

How Can You Prevent It?

One of the best ways to keep your dog safe from attack is through prevention. It's important to always remain alert around other dogs and make sure your own dog is properly trained. If you can command your dog's attention before a dog attack happens, you could prevent engagement, explains Aloff.

A dog's body language can tell you a lot about how they're feeling. If you encounter a dog displaying aggressive postures, avoid that dog to stay safe. "Aggressive canine body postures can range from defensive to offensive," says [Dr. Rachel Malamed](#), a veterinarian and a board-certified veterinary behaviorist. Dogs who are fearful are defensive and typically show "distance increasing signs."

These signals may include backing away, lowered body posture, trembling, retracted ears and tucked tail and might be accompanied by barking or growling. Offensive body postures appear much more threatening and obviously aggressive, explains Dr. Malamed. Offensive signals can include a direct stare, lunging, erect forward ears, vertical retraction of the lips, rigid and forward body posture and a high tail, which may be wagging stiffly.

When Is It Just Aggressive Play?

"Play-induced aggression may be more likely when a dog is in a high state of arousal," says Dr. Malamed. Normal play involves lots of play bows and chasing, and there may be some growling and inhibited bites. Keep an eye out for signs of aggression before play has a chance to escalate to a fight.

For more on safety and dog training, check out [5 Stay-Safe Dog Commands Every Dog Should Know](#).

Shahrzad Warkentin is a dog owner to an energetic rescue dog named Charlie. As a freelance writer she has had several years of experience covering pet care and health.

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