Managing Dog To Dog Aggression

The question of when and how to control and monitor dog to dog play at the dog park has raised a lot of controversy. Some feel that dog interaction should be micro managed, some share the views of the dog owner you ran into and others, like myself, are somewhere in the middle. There are positive and negative points to each opinion, when you evaluate the possible side effects and impact that each possess, it appears that a combination of management and allowing the dogs to sort out minor issues themselves encourages the development of appropriate play skills the best.

In the case of a rude adolescent or puppy that jumps on dogs with no warning, being told off by another dog can help them learn less offensive greeting behaviours. Watching your dog being ‘told off’ by another dog can cause your heart to skip a beat, especially if you’re not use to seeing a dog squabble (often a lot of noise, growling, spitting and braking involved) but more often then not, both dogs remain uninjured. Most dogs use some degree of acquired bite inhibition (they control the strength of their bite to refrain from causing serious damage) when sorting out disagreements. This is a wonderful evolutionary skill developed to keep a pack from depleting their numbers when fighting over important resources. This kind of feedback from other dogs is vital for the development of well rounded social behaviours, which in the long run, will help your dog avoid starting a real fight with their rude behaviours.

On the other side of the spectrum, in the case of a true bully incident (when the victim dog cannot get away from the harasser), failing to intervene can cause the victim to develop any number of issues including; low self esteem, fears, phobias and even dog aggression. Allowing this behaviour to continue also negatively effects the aggressor by reinforcing poor social skills which will likely lead to a real dog fight later on down the road. If your dog is not playing fair, not allowing the other dog to get away or causing the other dog to display signs of fear and stress, the responsible thing to do is call him off and make him take a break. If your dog consistently bullies other dogs, be fair to the other dogs in the park and remove him all together. Theses types of dogs often do well in doggy play dates with confidant, assertive dogs they can play well with rather than mingling with the general dog population.

Dog to dog aggression is a very complicated subject as there are many sub-categories encompassed under this one label. Although some of the sub-categories appear similar due to the behaviour displayed at the end of the leash, each one has a different root cause driving the behaviour forward. This means that each type of dog to dog aggression requires a different behaviour modification program. Having a professional evaluate the behaviour and personality profile the dog is the best way to ensure that your dog receives the best treatment program possible.

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