

Article 18

Prey drive has kicked in with maturity and needs to be addressed

Dear Gus,

I have a two-year-old male Labrador retriever. Whenever we are walking, either with him on leash or off leash, if a bicyclist or skateboarder goes by he becomes uncontrollable and aggressive. Reassurance doesn't seem to limit this behavior. We are very concerned about this behavior and need some help!

Judy H., Bethany

Dear Judy,

You are absolutely right to be concerned—this is a story that will end badly unless you immediately seek the assistance of a professional trainer. In the meantime, never let your dog off leash or unsupervised even in a fenced in area. I would also suggest not walking your dog on the public streets until this problem is resolved, since you can't predict when a child will ride by on a bicycle and could be injured.

Your dog is manifesting prey drive, where he sees the bicyclist or skateboarder as prey. It sounds like at 2 years old your dog has reached maturity, and now his hunting instinct is in full bloom. I think that your approach of reassurance with, your dog is the wrong approach, since you are not describing a fearful dog. Your dog wants to chase the fast moving exerciser, and in his excitement to be part of the chase could end either biting someone or causing a fall if he jumps on someone.

Obedience training is definitely in the cards for you and your dog. You will need to start by establishing yourself as the pack leader. If you have poor communication skills with your dog to start with, this will be a challenging problem to overcome. But you must reach a point where your dog is 100 percent obedient to all commands before you begin walking him in public again. Your dog must finish kindergarten (obeying your commands in your own home or yard) before he is ready for college (walking on a leash on a public street).

Good luck, Judy, I hope this helps.

Gus Marnel

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