

## Article 36

### Canine snapping should not be tolerated

My two-year old lab mix went after my nephew over the weekend. My dog was under the kitchen table and my nephew went to pet her and she just snapped. All I saw was teeth, and heard growling. My nephew is now scared to death of her and I don't know what to do about this. Please help.

Anthony M. Orange.

Anthony, this is a very serious situation.

The first thing to rule out is any physical problem, although in a two-year-old, this is unlikely other than in an injured dog. However, if your dog has not seen your veterinarian recently, it would still make sense for him to have a physical. Certain health problems can cause aggressive behavior so a physical is always a good place to start. That being said, I believe that the fact that dog was under the table to begin with antisocial behavior.

Social skills are established in the first few weeks of life. Dogs that are left only with siblings and have very little interaction with humans in this critical period usually end up with poor social skills. They aren't very outgoing, tend to be withdrawn, and aren't friendly, especially toward strangers. Dogs work under the flight fight mentality, meaning they either retreat or fight. If given the choice, most poorly socialized animals will choose to retreat and stay away from humans (strangers) either in another area of the house, or, like your dog, under furniture for their perceived safety. Your dog was using the table as a shelter. When your nephew went to pet her she had no place to go and reacted totally out of a defensive reaction, hence, flight fight. This is not an excuse for this behavior, but in order to change it, you need to know where this behavior comes from.

In a two-year-old I don't think poor socialization can be fixed but her behavior can be managed with good obedience training. Most importantly you need to understand which situations are good, and which situations to avoid. For safety and sanity sake when you have guests over you need to think dog first. I would strongly recommend a crate for the dog's security, and for safety of your guests. Your dog needs to view her crate as a safe place (her den) and associate the crate with a positive experience. This can be done by slowly getting her used to the crate. Have her go in her crate for short periods of time, using positive feedback when she is in the crate, and even feeding her in the crate.

Keep her crate in an area of your home where she will see lots of activity, and feel part of the family. I don't recommend locking a dog in another room or putting the dog outside when you have guests since that further isolates her and limits her opportunities to see strangers in a safe environment. The perception from your dog will also be that when someone comes over, I get thrown out and punished so, I don't like you! You also need to work with her on basic obedience, so that your dog views you as a leader, and will be less fearful in strange situations.

This is not an easy fix, but with patience, lots of love and understanding, awareness of whom and what is around you, this can be managed successfully. I'm very glad no one got hurt. Good luck.

Gus

BACK