



Rutland Dog Training

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Inter Dog Aggression by Adam Beral

I own an Australian Kelpie crossed with a Blue Merle Border Collie. He is aggressive towards other dogs although he lives with another Border Collie and is fine with him. He acts like he'd kill the other dog but the outcome is just a nip to warn the other dog, he then runs away. Please could you advise me?

I am glad you have taken the time to write in. Aggression between dogs is extremely common and one of the biggest reasons for dogs being rehomed. I have an Australian Kelpie and an Australian Cattle Dog, both of whom came to me because they have serious aggression issues towards other dogs. The main concern in these cases is safety, and if you have an aggressive dog you must keep him on a lead at all times. If you still cannot control his behaviour with other dogs, you should consider a muzzle.

For cases such as this I have found clicker training to be the most effective solution. Clicker training involves a small box called a 'clicker' that produces a 'click' which you then associate with a positive stimulus, usually a food treat. The most important part of the training programme is to correctly 'charge the clicker' when you begin. Your dog has to be 100% confident that a click will always be followed by a treat to the extent that it becomes similar to a Pavlovian response. The click itself will become rewarding and, because the noise is so distinct, it will stand out.

Once you have charged the clicker, you need to decide on a behaviour you want your dog to perform instead of being aggressive to other dogs. I have always favoured the 'sit and watch' command that ensures the dogs attention is on me. Practice this in your home until he is reliably sitting and looking at you on command. It is then time to increase the distractions that are present when you ask him to sit and watch. Introduce the distractions gradually but keep the reinforcement constant. I use a CD of dogs barking and a model dog placed at a distance long before I increase the distraction to a real dog.

In cases involving aggression, punishment is totally counterproductive. Shouting at your dog or pulling on the lead will get you bitten or at best will increase your dog's aggression. Once a dog has gone into 'red zone' any negative stimulus may be associated with the dog he is trying to attack. Discomfort from a tight collar for example will be perceived as pain coming from the other dog, making the attack more vicious.



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Rehabilitating a dog with aggressive tendencies is not an easy task and involves much more than I can fit in this short column. Rest assured that his behaviour can become controllable if you consistently reinforce the behaviour you want him to perform, however infrequent or slight it is. I would advise seeking out an experienced trainer who uses modern methods to help and support you. Please contact me to let me know how you progress and if I can be of any further assistance.

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