

# **Prevent Fear Aggression in Puppies and Dogs**

By Patricia Taylor Dog Behaviorist

Humans can inherit a tendency to be anxious, and so can dogs, but the environment, life experience, and breed tendencies also play a role. While dog bites can happen for many reasons, most puppies bite out of fear aggression. That can lead to scared puppies that react with aggression to frightening events.

Poor socialization increases the potential for all kinds of aggression later in life. Shy puppies and dogs that never played with other dogs typically act fine until a first fight, which often arises out of fear or from being accidentally hurt as a result of play aggression. Thereafter, shy dogs inflict hard, dangerous bites because they never learned how to hold back and how to inhibit their bite.

When dogs fear something, it triggers the instinctive “fight or flight” response, and when your puppy can’t escape whatever scares him, he lashes out with teeth. Fear biters think they must fight their way out of the situation, and become so panicked they aren’t able to think in a reasonable manner. When the aggressive behavior makes the scary “thing” go away, the puppy learns that acting aggressively works and uses it time after time.

Fear aggression causes severe damage to the target because usually, the biter had poor socialization and never learned to inhibit his bites. These dogs don’t fight other dogs over status, only fear, and punishing them with harsh physical or verbal reprimands will make the behaviour worse.

## **Signs of Fear Aggression**

Fearful dogs show displacement behavior's,

Such as licking or chewing themselves, sniffing, lip licking, and yawning.

Common vocalizations include growls mixed with whines.

Body language includes whale-eye—showing the whites of the eyes in an exaggerated sideways glance.

The ultimate appeasement gestures are crouching or rolling onto his back with submissive urination.

Most normal dogs tolerate one dog length and a half (their own length) before feeling uncomfortable.

A fearful pup’s sensitive distance may be much greater, and if another dog or person approaches within that range, he attacks.

Cage aggression occurs when a dog can’t back away from your reaching hands when the cage or crate door opens, and he defends the space with snarls and teeth.

## **How to Cure Fear Aggression**

Shy pups may always have problems feeling fearful. But you can learn to recognize and avoid situations likely to cause your dog to react with fear.

### **Ways to diffuse the fear.**

- Don't stare. Strong eye contact signals dominance and intensifies the intimidation. Use your puppy's own language to calm him down. Glance away and pretend to yawn.
- Make note of the distance at which the scared pup becomes agitated, and stay beyond that of range whenever possible.
- Avoid cage or crate aggression by opening the door and backing away, using a food lure to tempt the dog to exit on his own.
- Avoid reaching for his collar. That almost always prompts a bite.
- Avoid petting on the top of the head because a descending hand looks threatening and makes fear worse. Instead, pet the puppy on his sides or chest.
- Practice obedience training to build confidence in frightened dogs. The Gentle Leader head halter works quite well with these dogs.
- Use the "work for your supper" concept to teach your puppy that he must "pay" for everything.
- Once he recognizes you are in charge so he doesn't need to be responsible, much of the fear goes away.
- Create a house of plenty. Provide lots of toys and treats to reduce competition with other dogs for the good stuff.
- Play builds confidence. Teach him to play "fetch," but avoid tug-of-war games with fear biters because that can encourage biting behavior's