

LOVE DOGS

Ladder of aggression



Canine Companion

Ladder of aggression

1. Yawning, blinking, nose licking:

- These are often the first signs of stress or discomfort.
- Application: When you see these, give the dog space or remove them from the situation.
- Training: Teach handlers to recognize these subtle cues and respect them.

2. Turning head away:

- The dog is trying to create distance and avoid confrontation.
- Application: Respect this signal by backing off or redirecting attention.
- Training: Practice "consent petting" - stop touching when the dog turns away.

3. Turning body away, sitting, pawing:

- These are stronger indications that the dog is uncomfortable.
- Application: Immediately stop the interaction and give the dog space.
- Training: Teach handlers to "be a tree" (stand still) when dogs show these signs.

4. Walking away:

- The dog is actively trying to remove itself from the situation.
- Application: Allow the dog to leave without following or forcing interaction.
- Training: Respect the dog's choice and teach others to do the same.

5. Creeping, ears back:

- Signs of increasing anxiety or fear.
- Application: Create distance between the dog and the trigger.
- Training: Work on counter-conditioning to reduce fear responses.

6. Standing crouched, tail tucked under:

- Clear signs of fear and stress.
- Application: Identify and remove the stressor if possible.
- Training: Focus on building confidence through positive experiences.

7. Lying down, leg up:

- Often a sign of extreme stress or submission.
- Application: Immediately end the interaction and provide a safe space.
- Training: Work on building trust and positive associations.

8. Stiffening, staring:

- This is a serious warning sign of potential aggression.
- Application: Create distance and avoid direct eye contact.
- Training: Teach alternative behaviors and work on impulse control.

9. Growling:

- A clear vocal warning that the dog is highly uncomfortable.
- Application: Respect the warning and do not punish growling.
- Training: Address the underlying cause of stress, not just the symptom.

10. Snapping:

- A serious warning, often with no contact made.
- Application: Immediately cease all interaction and create distance.
- Training: Consult a professional behaviorist for a behavior modification plan.

11. Biting:

- The final stage, where the dog feels it has no other option.
- Application: Seek immediate professional help and medical attention if needed.
- Training: Implement strict management to prevent future incidents while working with a professional.

Applying this knowledge in dog training:

1. Prevention: Use this knowledge to prevent escalation by respecting early warning signs.
2. Socialization: Carefully expose puppies to various stimuli, always watching for signs of stress.
3. Desensitization: Gradually expose dogs to triggers at a level they can tolerate without showing stress signs.
4. Counter-conditioning: Pair potentially stressful stimuli with positive experiences.
5. Management: Use tools like barriers or leashes to prevent dogs from being pushed past their comfort level.
6. Education: Teach handlers, especially children, to recognize and respect these signals.
7. Positive reinforcement: Reward calm, relaxed behavior in potentially stressful situations.
8. Building confidence: Use training exercises that boost the dog's confidence and trust.
9. Stress reduction: Incorporate stress-reducing activities like nose work or relaxation protocols.
10. Professional help: For dogs showing frequent signs of stress or aggression, consult with a certified behaviourist.

Remember, the goal is to create an environment where dogs feel safe and don't need to escalate their warning signals.

This approach leads to happier, more confident dogs and safer interactions for everyone involved.