

Sibling Rivalry

Why would dogs who live together fight? Anyone with a sibling can tell you that it is impossible to live closely with others and never have conflict. A little growling between sibling dogs is not out of the ordinary, however, if it happens repeatedly or gets more serious, it's time to step in. Usually the fighting is triggered by one or more of these common events:

- **Changes in the household**, such as changes in the number of dogs or people in the house, or in the home environment. Anytime there is a disruption of the social structure of the household, conflict is more likely until things settle down. Added life stress such as moving, divorce, illness of caretakers, loss of a job, having children, etc. can also make fighting more likely.
- **Reproductive pressures** such as a young dog in the household reaching puberty (in males, about 10 months of age and in females, 6 to 8 months). Many behavioral and hormonal changes occur at this age and it can spark fights. Unaltered males may fight when a female in the home or nearby has come into heat.
- **Competition** over food, attention, good places to sleep, etc.
- **Confusion over social structure**, relationships, and expectations due to inconsistency in rule enforcement and training.
- **Re-directed over-excitement or frustration**. Sometimes a frustrated dog will take out his feelings on another dog rather than what is actually frustrating him.
- **Personality conflicts**. Sometimes pets or family members just don't like each other. It is as unrealistic to believe that all dogs will get along as it is to believe that all people will get along. Addressing the fighting generally involves addressing the underlying causes, and managing the home and the environment so that fights are less likely to occur.

Fights from household changes & stress

Tip 1. Create a predictable daily routine. Predictability reduces stress caused by uncertainty. A predictable routine allows you to control things that might create conflict, such as mealtimes.

Tip 2. Focus on stress management for you and your dog. Regular exercise like walking can reduce circulating levels of stress hormones in humans and animals. Also anti-stress products out there such as calming collars, pheromone diffusers, or herbal drops and supplements don't usually do any harm and might help. Talk with a vet before adding supplements to your

dog's diet.

Tip 3. Provide your dog with a safe space to retreat to if they need to escape and chill out. This can be a bedroom or crate, but make it clear to the family that when the dog is there they want "alone time."

Tip 4. Introduce newcomers slowly and take steps to relieve social pressure.

Fighting due to reproductive pressures

Tip 1. Spay or neuter your dogs. This important measure means no hormones triggering mating behaviors and no fighting over breeding rights.

Fighting due to confusion over social structure

Tip 1. Implement a "Nothing in Life Is for Free" program to make it clear to your dogs that they do not have an automatic right to anything and that all resources must be earned.

Tip 2. Discourage status seeking behaviors such as stealing, bullying, and inappropriate social behavior (mounting, standing over, etc.) by giving the offending dog a time-out.

Tip 3. Discourage demanding or jealous behavior. If one of your dogs is getting petted and the other comes over and pushes the other aside or begs for attention from you, stop petting, stand up and leave and go somewhere else.

Fighting started by re-directed frustration

Tip 1. This happens most often when dogs are excited, but forced to share a tight space such as a door or out on leashed walks. Teach both your dogs to wait at doors before going through them and walk your dogs separately until the behavior is under better control.

Tip 2. Most of the time that this is an issue, the dog has arousal or reactivity issues as well and you will need to address those behavioral problems to stop the fighting.

Fighting caused by personality conflicts

Tip 1. Give your dogs a reason to want to be around one another such as feeding them treats when they sit near each other, or group walks.

Tip 2. Make sure there is plenty of space so if the dogs don't want to hang out with each other they can get away. In severe cases, it may be necessary to keep the dogs' living areas completely separate until they are getting on better.

Tip 3. If one of the dogs is more social than the other (such as a young dog and an old dog) consider giving him extra outlets to interact with other dogs and burn off energy such as trips to the dog park or doggy daycare.

Troubleshooting: Sometimes, despite our best efforts, dogs simply aren't going to get along. If that is the case, the only option may be to re-home one of the dogs. For tips on rehoming your dog safely, seek help from your local shelter or behavior professional.

**The information presented here is for supportive and informative purposes only; it is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any behavioral issue and is not a substitute for professional help. With any behavior problem that persists or worsens, please seek help from a qualified behavior professional.*