



MILTON ULLADULLA DOG TRAINING CLUB

AGGRESSIVE DOG PROTOCOLS

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MUDTC PROTOCOLS FOR AGGRESSIVE DOGS

Introduction

The MUDTC aims to provide training for dog owners who want to make their pets “good canine citizens”. However, in some instances there are dogs that require additional attention owing to their aggressive tendencies. What is aggression? According to Konrad Lorenz, 1966, aggression :

- is the ‘fighting instinct in both animal and human, which is directed against the same or other species
- occurs when flight impulses are prevented because danger is too near
- occurs when flight is prevented because of lack of space, strong social ties or a brood or family
- may occur if the animal is surprised- the enemy is now too close

Responsibilities

For its part the Club will attempt to assist a member who has an aggressive dog to manage the unwanted behaviour. The Club Member has the responsibility for adopting a recommended course of action outlined by the Club’s Chief Instructor. It may be necessary in some circumstances to have the owner employ the services of a specialist (animal behaviorist).

Should a member not pursue or attempt to adopt any of the suggestions made then the Club has the right to request that the member muzzle the dog or not bring the dog onto Club training grounds.

Aggressive Behaviour

As a general statement, aggressive behaviour in dogs is most often detected in their first 12 months. In some circumstances the breed of dog is noted for aggressive behaviour. In other situations the dog may have experienced some trauma (sometimes unknown to the owner) that has triggered the behaviour. It is true to say that in other circumstances the owners themselves may be responsible for the behaviour; if the owner is fearful of other dogs and their dog detects this fear then it may act in a way as to protect the owner. The various strategies available will require consistency, persistency and encouragement from the owner.

Finally, what do you do when your dog displays aggression?

Do nothing that the dog may think is reinforcing the aggressive behaviour. Stand still, give the dog time to think, ensure that everyone is safe. Say nothing, do nothing and wait for the dog to calm down. When the dog is calm, redirect to a few positive behaviours and then reinforce.

Training

Essentially it is through training that owners attempt to increase communication between themselves and their pets. The primary mantra of Club training centres on focussing the dog’s **attention**. Maintaining a dog’s focus enables the handler to direct (or redirect) a dog’s attention to a particular focal point. This is critically important where a dog begins to exhibit aggressive behaviour and the owner can quickly recognise these traits and so avoid an incident by redirecting the dog’s focus away from another dog. In order to gain a dog’s attention you must establish a positive relationship based on trust, safety, care and training

Aggressive displays that may precede a likely aggressive attack include:

- prolonged dog to dog eye contact (staring)
- hackles raised
- standing on toes
- still /raised tail
- possible stepping towards another dog

These sorts of signals should have the owner immediately adopt steps that **redirect** focus away from the other dog. Further it is important that the owner reward behaviour that is re-focused and that the new focus is maintained in order to avoid the dog returning to an aggressive posture.

Finally, **desensitisation** should be used to expose the dog to low levels of frightening stimuli and gradually increasing the level at a rate which does not cause distress. The dog needs to be presented with rewards and praise during this procedure.

At all times owners have the responsibility for the safety of their own dogs and those around to always be aware of their own dog's behaviour.

Dog Association

Puppy Class is an ideal way to have very young dogs socialise without fear- an excellent substitute for litter behaviour where hierarchies are established.

However at all stages of training in the Club, instructors will promote the socialisation of dogs in their respective classes through various obedience and other skill set exercises included in training programmes.

In situations where a dog is particularly aggressive towards other dogs it may become necessary to make the dog take "time out", ie the dog may need at times to be crated or otherwise separated until such time as it calms down enough to tolerate the 'partnering' by another member. Sometimes 'time out' may even have to be extended for the entire lesson if the dog is really having a bad day.

A deliberate "quiet time" strategy may be recommended whereby the owner of the aggressive dog is partnered by another member in the same class with their dog and they spend 3-7 minutes in a quiet area away from other distractions. This pairing entails the two owners to drop their dogs in close proximity to each other whilst they themselves remain relaxed and calm talking to each other thus avoiding any 'anxiety signals' being picked up by the dogs. This regimen can assist the assertive dog in coming to grips with at least the other dogs in the class.

Veterinary Assistance

There are two subsets here:

- desexing
- hormone/drug treatment

Desexing, especially for dogs, may assist in reducing aggressive tendencies. Unless the handler is intent on having the dog breed, desexing also provides improved chances of reducing cancers associated with a dog's reproductive organs.

Hormone/drug treatment has also been advocated as useful for reducing aggressive behaviour but veterinary advice must be sought in this regard.

Some owners do not like the veterinary methodologies involved here. Certainly the Club would not direct that such action must be taken but again it is advice and the coupling of such treatment with other strategies listed above are likely to assist in addressing the problem.

Protocols

There are 2 subsets here:

- dog aggression towards humans, and
- dog aggression towards other dogs.

Dog Aggression Towards Humans

All incidents, however minor, of dog/human aggression must be reported to the CI who will in turn notify the Club's **Difficult Dogs Committee**⁽¹⁾. If the aggression was no more than a fearful dog growling and snapping ineffectively then the DDC may decide whether the Club has the resources to devote to correcting the behaviour. Otherwise the DDC will recommend that the specialized services of an animal behaviorist be employed.

If an owner chooses not to follow this advice of the DDC then the Club may:

In the case of a relatively mild incident require the owner to have the dog identified with a coloured (red) "stay away" collar at all times while on Club grounds; this enables instructors and others to be particularly vigilant when approaching the dog.

In the case of a repeated incident or if the case is more severe in nature then the DDC will require that the dog be muzzled. If the owner is unwilling to agree with the Club's protocols they may be asked to leave or not participate in Club training activities.

Dog Aggression Towards other Dogs

A minor incident where a dog ineffectively growls/snaps at another dog ineffectively (essentially keep out of my face and place) then the class instructor should focus the owner's attention on those techniques discussed above. If the aggression reoccurs then the DDC must be informed. The DDC may determine that the owner use a head halter on the dog to provide greater control and minimise damage in the case of a subsequent attack(s).

In the cases where a severe attack occurs then the CI must be informed and a strategy of training agreed with the owner. The owner of such a dog will have it wear a coloured collar (yellow) to identify it for the purpose where other members are made more alert when approaching such a dog.

Should a second attack eventuate the owner will be required to muzzle the dog whilst it is on Club training grounds.

If the owner is not prepared to follow these protocols then he/she may be asked to leave or not participate in club training activities.

Conclusion

There is no single quick fix solution to altering an aggressive dog to one which could be counted on as being a consistently reliable canine citizen. The Club for its part will advocate a mix of strategies to help the owner address the problem and the owner for his/her part will need to actively pursue these strategies both at Club training or with additional expert advice.

If a member of the Club elects to voluntarily put into place any of the procedures/processes listed above because they are concerned about their dog's behaviour then the Club will support such action and undertake as in all cases, to assist the handler with as many strategies as possible.

Note (1). The Difficult Dogs Committee (DDC) will comprise: CI, Asst CI, Class Instructor for that particular handler/dog and the Club's specialist advisory person on difficult dogs.