

Behavior FAQ: Dogs That Don't Get Along with Nonfamily Dogs

By Suzanne Hetts, PhD, CAAB, and Daniel Estep, PhD, CAAB, of Animal Behavior Associates, Inc., reprinted with permission from HelpingFido.com

If your dog is aggressive to unfamiliar dogs, it can severely limit where you can take him and what activities he can enjoy. If your dog is a grumpy Gus, you may find it difficult to take him hiking and may be prevented from enrolling in doggy day care or a training class or from even being able to walk your dog in your neighborhood.

There is no one reason why some dogs can't play well with others. Reasons range from breed tendencies, to a bad experience with another dog, to a lack of socialization during puppyhood or adolescence. Some dogs simply enjoy intimidating other dogs.

You must first manage your dog's environment so she can't harm other dogs. Perhaps this means no off-leash time for now.

The difficulty in working with these problems is being able to create situations in which your dog can learn how to behave. You cannot rely on spontaneous encounters with other dogs (such as on a walk or at a dog park) because you can't predict how the other dog will behave, nor can you control how the beginning of the encounter occurs and be able to end it at just the right moment.

Some communities have special classes for dog-to-dog aggression problems. Be sure to evaluate these classes carefully. Some have great success rates, while others are poorly managed classes that only give dogs a chance to practice more aggressive behavior.

What are realistic expectations for working with these problems? Some dogs can eventually learn to play well with others and participate in social groups. For other dogs, perhaps the best you can expect is to be able to control and manage your dog on leash in the presence of other dogs, such as when you are walking your dog in a park or in an on-leash training class.

Your biggest responsibility is to prevent your dog from hurting other dogs. If necessary, muzzle your dog if he must be in a situation where he might bite another dog, but never leave a dog alone while muzzled.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](http://www.acvb.org), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](http://www.iaabc.org) or [Animal Behavior Society](http://www.abcsociety.org). Learn more by reading "Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant."