

lissa.scott

From: lissa.scott [lissa.scott@verizon.net]
Sent: Sunday, December 09, 2007 4:06 PM
To: 'ExtMAGDRL'
Subject: DOE Topic #42: Growl Appreciation

Hi All,

It's been a while since I've written a Dog Owner Education topic, so this one's overdue! I'm a member of Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) and right now there's an interesting discussion on how to restore growling in a dog that's had it suppressed. This may sound odd since we humans instinctively "shush" our dogs if they growl, so I am sharing this learning as DOE Topic #42: Growl Appreciation.

Last summer I was at a PetSmart M&G when one of our members came back to our table after taking her male Dane for a spin around the aisles. At some point during their walk, this well-trained, gentle Dane had been rough-housed by two inebriated male humans, so the owner quickly brought this frightened Dane back to our safe group. He laid quietly on his bed pad while his owner talked to visitors.

A few minutes later, a bulky pre-teen male quickly approached this Dane. The boy bent over to pet this normally calm Dane, when out of the corner of my eye I saw the Dane stiffen, his cropped ears laid flat against his head, and I saw white at the corners of this dog's eyes (whale-eye.) Unfortunately, this Dane's owner sat talking behind him and didn't notice his reaction, so I calmly said to the boy, "Step back, please!" He did not stop moving forward – and by this time the dog's hackles were raised – so I loudly said, "STEP BACK, PLEASE!" Thank DOG, he finally did. I explained what I had seen to the Dane's owner, and she immediately took him home. The next day after he'd defused, she got him back out around friendly people with treats in-hand. Good job!

But the most chilling thing about this incident was that this Dane never made a sound. Somewhere along the way, this well-trained dog's growl had been extinguished – a VERY dangerous practice.

Growling is our dog's "early warning system" to let us know when they are stressed. They need us to safely remove the stressor so they can avoid escalating into a fight/flight reaction. The current APDT discussion is about how to reinstate growling in dogs whose owners corrected it out of them because they did not realize that it's a dog's cry for help. This list's members are trainers and behaviorists who say that growling is very, very tough to relearn once it has been extinguished. One member also said they believe that what was formerly labeled as "rage syndrome" in dogs that bite without warning is not really a genetic or breed issue, but a growling suppression issue.

The educable opportunity here is that one of the worst things we owners can do to our dogs is "shush" or punish them for growling. Our dogs growl to tell us they can't handle a situation, and they need to be safely removed and rewarded for warning us. There is a good article by Pat Miller on the impact of suppressing growling, and few can say it any better! http://www.dogicuts.com/index_files/growling.htm

So please appreciate your dog for growling!!! Have a safe and Happy Holiday, and thanks for educating yourself to benefit all dogs and their owners.

Lissa Scott
AKC Canine Good Citizen Evaluator
Mid-Atlantic Great Dane Rescue League
MAGDRL web: <http://www.magdrl.org>
MAGDRL events: <http://www.lissa.net/Joya/MAGDRL.htm>
Bloat info: http://www.lissa.net/Joya/Merlot_bloat.htm

Gastropexy info: <http://www.lissa.net/Joya/Lapro-Pexy.htm>

"A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself." - Josh Billings

