

## IS GROWLING OK?

### *Don't Punish Your Dog For Communicating*

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**W**ould you ever take the batteries out of your smoke alarm? Of course not! A fire alarm is meant to warn you of possible danger and you would never intentionally interfere with that warning. It would be even more ridiculous if you took it as a personal insult or got angry with the fire alarm for warning you. Similarly, when a dog growls, she is simply attempting to communicate and warn that something is wrong and it is irrational to punish her for it.

Dogs have a very limited amount of ways to communicate with us, since of course they don't speak our language. Basically, it comes down to body

language, barking, and growling. A dog should never be punished for attempting to communicate in any way, but growling seems to be the thing that upsets people the most. So often, a dog growling is mistakenly taken as a personal insult, aggression, dominance, or just plain "bad dog" behavior. Consequently, our human response is often threatening and/or punishing, which will assuredly only make things worse.

If a dog is consistently punished for growling, eventually she will stop warning and communicating altogether and when a situation arises where she is threatened or frightened enough, she will go straight for the bite. The result may

be a dangerous dog and it was totally preventable.

To make matters worse, owners sometimes exacerbate the situation by "testing" their dog by doing things like allowing children to do inappropriate things or messing with the dog while she is sleeping or eating. How would you feel if someone started poking you while you were sleeping, or putting their fingers in your food while you were eating? I imagine you would growl too! Instead of reacting angrily when your dog growls, praise her heartily and say, "Thank you!"

"Thank you so much for warning me and telling me that this situation is very upsetting, uncomfortable, and/or frightening for you."

A growl can mean many different things and not punishing the growl does not mean that you are allowing your dog to make the rules. If your dog is growling out of fear or pain, that is one thing. If she is growling because she is guarding her bone or doesn't feel like getting off the couch, that's something else. Again, thank your dog for communicating. "You are allowed to protest, but you still have to get off the couch!" Through basic obedience and proper training, situations such as these are easily managed without conflict. If you are unsure about why your dog is growling or what to do about it, please contact a professional trainer.