

Help! She's Being a Right Cow!

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When the request came in for me to write about behaviour problems in the Norfolk Terrier, my first thought was *but we don't have behaviour problems in the strict sense of the words*. This is, of course, entirely true, because what we do see, occasionally, is a set of issues that occur *between dogs* and is largely within the range of normal behaviours and reactions. That, and sometimes separation anxiety, noise phobias, and so on - but these, like the subject discussed here, are never breed associated.

Fighting amongst dogs is, of course, not unique to our breed. The Breed Standard for the Norfolk Terrier says of their temperament: *lovable disposition, not quarrelsome...*, and failure to breed examples of the Norfolk Terrier that do not show these features mean that they are, arguably, not Norfolk Terriers in the true sense. In reality however, we do see some fighting in households where there are several of them. This ranges from the 'showing of teeth', 'raising of a lip', growling, and pushing, to a fight that results in the death of one of them.

During her breed talks Lesley Crawley always reminds us of the temperament clause in the Standard, and the reason it is there. When there is an aggressive dog or bitch in a working pack, inclined to turn on one of his or her mates, that reduces the effectiveness and commercial viability of that pack. The terrier man and his family may end up very short of funds because of it. Such a Norfolk Terrier, or any terrier for that matter, will be removed from the pack or shot.

Breeding for the correct temperament over the decades has resulted in a Norfolk Terrier that to a very great degree – in fact, for almost 100% of the time - fulfils that requirement for a

lovely disposition and not quarrelsome. This is something we can and should be very proud of as the national breed club.

So what's going on when things go wrong?

When we do get questions about behaviour or temperament, however, they are almost always along the lines of:

- Since I got a new puppy, my two older bitches do not get on with each other.
- My bitches have started fighting for no reason at all, after being fine all these years.
- My two bitches sometimes fight, but love each other at other times.
- The younger ones are picking on the old one.
- The younger ones attacked the old one when she/he was limping or ill.
- One fell down a hole and all the others attacked him or her.
- My two boys love each other, except when they have a spat a couple of times a year.
- There is fighting amongst my pack, and I don't know who starts it.

I will answer these in general terms, from a lifetime of living with dogs (I grew up with Mongrels, GSD's, Boerboels, English Mastiffs, Ridgebacks, Keeshonds, and Old English Sheepdogs, usually 4 – 6 at a time), working for the PDSA Cape Town as a schoolboy every spare moment I had, and working as a vet for nearly 30 years. I cannot remember the dogs I grew up with ever fighting. And I now realise how remarkable that is.

Please also keep in mind that this is not a crash course on dog behaviour, just broad thoughts on why and how. And that True Love, Firm-But-Friendly Leadership (where you treat your dog as a dog), and a well-structured daily routine that includes exercise before feeding, and time in the day away from you (yes, it's true!), is what your dog, any dog, is looking for.

For the set of problems sometimes encountered amongst Norfolks, the causes are almost always located in the following two areas: Distribution of Privileges, and Hormones.

Distribution of Privileges

This is a very subtle, but extremely important, area of concern, and does not mean food, toys, and beds only. The dog sees *talk*, *touch*, and *eye contact* as privileges, for instance, and also *grooming* and *where it is allowed to sit or sleep*.

When you have more than two dogs there will always be competition for these resources and privileges, even when you don't think there is. Remember, the signs might be extremely subtle. There will also be competition for the higher positions in the room – sofas, and the backs of sofas especially, and upstairs and on beds.

In the light of this, the following rules may prove helpful:

- ≡ Make sure your dogs always understand that you and the family are at the top of the hierarchy. Remember the firm-but-friendly motto, and be completely consistent about it.
- ≡ Decide what the hierarchy is within your group of dogs, and distribute ALL privileges in that order. This is never difficult once they get the message. We have 8 Norfolks in the house, as well as visiting dogs. If there is disobedience, or aggression,

immediately and quietly (even a shout may be seen as a reward by some dogs)
remove the culprit outside or into a different room, and that is where they stay for at least 20 minutes. Picking them up by the scruff makes that message much clearer. For an hour or so afterwards pay him/her no attention, or even look at them.

- ≡ Do not allow any of your dogs onto the sofa until you feel that they fully understand the rules. Only ever allow your dog onto your lap or onto furniture when YOU make the decision, and the same when they are allowed back on the floor. It is always YOU who start and end every situation seen as a treat.
- ≡ The oldest or slowest dog or bitch will be seen by the others as a drain on the privileges, and they will tend to pick on him or her. This behaviour goes back to when dogs were wolves – the old ones slow down and endanger the pack. It always starts small, so look out for the signs: nudging the old one out of the way; stopping them from going through a door or dog flap; taking on the head-over-his/her-neck dominance stance with the ears and tail in the alert position; standing up whenever he or she stands up from being at rest or asleep; blocking him or her from seeing things; and so on.
- ≡ Sometimes a young puppy introduced to a household is seen as a treat/privilege by the others, especially bitches, and can lead to jealous behaviour. These bitches may hold these grudges for the rest of their lives, and it can result in a very dangerous situation. Introducing a new puppy to a household of dogs can be done very successfully and easily, but that is a subject for a different time. The subject was covered in a previous newsletter article titled ‘How to Raise a Happy Puppy’.

- ≡ When it looks like the oldie is being picked on, apply the distribution of privileges more firmly, and never leave him/her alone with the rest of the group. When you leave the house, always put the oldie in a different room away from the others. Be very firm about this because we have had deaths and severe injury reported under these circumstances.

- ≡ SUMMARY: DOGS IN PACKS/GROUPS COMPETE FOR PRIVILEGES OF ALL KINDS; KNOW WHAT THE PRIVILEGES ARE; ALWAYS DISTRIBUTE THE PRIVILEGES IN HIERACHICAL ORDER; BE VERY FIRM WHEN THEY BREAK YOUR RULES.

Hormones

Hormones are extremely powerful. Whenever I say this to clients, I get the traditional: *Tell me about it!* By definition a hormone is a substance produced in a small amount in one part of the body (a gland) for a profound effect elsewhere in the body.

After puberty, male dogs tend to remain much the same in terms of ‘mood’ throughout their lives, apart from when a bitch nearby is in season. Male dogs might compete with each other for this ‘privilege’ just as they would for other privileges. Dogs that are hormonally ‘equal’ are more likely to fight than dogs where first and second violins are clearly distinguishable. Breeders are very good at managing these situations, and I very rarely hear of trouble. In pet situations, anyway, it is advisable to neuter the less dominant male first, see how things go after a few months, or neuter both and apply the hierarchy method at all times.

Spayed *and* unspayed bitches change ‘personality’ several times a year, and if it leads to a fight, they are capable of holding grudges for a very long time, even forever. Inter-bitch

aggression is a major subject in its own right, and the subject for a separate article. In the meantime, if any signs are noticed nip it in the bud immediately and firmly. These two bitches (and it is usually just two) must be walked together on their own till tired. Use short leads and the calm and very assertive approach throughout. If you have the means, kennel them alongside (but out of reach of) each other away from the rest of the family and the pack, so that they have 'just each other'. Follow this pattern for 6 weeks, and then try them with the rest of the household again. If there is any sign of a potential fight, there is little chance of reconciliation. One bitch will go to a new home, where they are, invariably, much happier.