

EVALUATING OTHER GROWLS

There are times when a growl IS a growl and yet, even these times represent the dog communicating in dog speak. However, as I have explained there are certain dog behaviors which are perfectly normal and appropriate in the dog/dog world but not in the human/dog world. For some of these situations, we still need to understand what is happening and why? Then, determine how to handle those situations for the benefit of the dog and the owners. I do discuss some of these situations in more detail under the BITE section of the book.

PAIN GROWLS:

All dogs are capable of growling to indicate something is causing them discomfort or pain. Additionally, you should note that depending on the degree of the pain and your dog's ability to handle pain, the dogs can just as easily "reflex" with a snap or a bite. This is not intended to snap or bite "you"; rather this is a normal dog reflex toward whatever is causing the pain. In fact, many dogs reflex in pain and then when they realize it was their owner, they are very remorseful because they would never consider hurting their family!

Dogs can also growl in "anticipation" of pain or from their pain memory. If a dog has an area that is sensitive or painful, when someone comes near that area or touches them in that spot, they may growl and/or snap. Consequently, when I work with people and their dog is suddenly having this type of reaction and there does not appear to be any explanation for their reactions, I always recommend that they have the dog assessed by the vet for any possibility of a pain catalyst. Even if your dog has not indicated any injury or issue causing them pain or discomfort, do not arbitrarily rule this out as a possibility. The dogs can have a pain issue, but not outwardly show anything. The major reason for this is the dogs instinctually know that according to the pack rules of the dog/dog world, any sign of weakness, pain, injury, illness, age or physical infirmity can likely mean they will be banished from their pack or killed. A dog who is not capable of being a viable "contributor" to the pack's resources is considered by the pack to be a "drain" on the pack resources.

The dogs will do anything not to give any signs of this nature to their other pack members. When I am checking my dogs for an indication of pain or discomfort, I will watch their eyes and watch for any physical flinch. Often, the only way I can determine a pain or discomfort issue is when I or the vet touch (palpate) an area, there will be squinting of their eyes. Occasionally, there is a physical flinch but the eye squint is more common.

The dogs can also reflex from their pain memory. Meaning, if they have had a sensitive or pain issue on a part of their body and it has long healed, they can still reflex because of the pain memory. This is very similar to what people do. When you have had a major injury and have spent several months "protecting" that area from people bumping into or touching that area, long after you are healed and there is no more actual pain, your

reflexes to “protect” that area remain for several weeks or months. The dogs can exhibit this same response.

If you are able to determine their growls are related to pain or discomfort, you should make sure the issue is properly treated by a vet and give it time to heal. During this time, be sensitive to and understanding of their physical issue. Let’s say they have a problem with a hip joint, be careful to not touch, pet, or bump that area until they are healed. If you have to touch a pain area to pick them up or help them move be very gentle and talk to them so they know you are not trying to hurt them. This can also be necessary if you have to treat an area and the treatment causes them pain or discomfort. You have no option, you have to do this to help them, but be as gentle and understanding as possible. Have other people help you if needed. Let your dog gnaw on a treat while you medicate the area. Soothe, calm, and reassure them with your voice. If it is an extremely painful treatment regimen, you may need to get a cloth muzzle for doctoring them. The key is to be understanding, gentle, and do whatever you can to help them be okay with you treating them. If you are not able to handle the situation, take them to your vet for the treatment regimens or have an experienced dog person help you. Above all, do not get upset with them!

If they are reacting from their pain memory, work to “desensitize” them to being handled, touched, and petted in the area that previously caused them such pain. Give them a treat they can gnaw on while you gently pet/stroke the area. Do this gradually and do not push them beyond their ability to handle the physical touching on that previously painful area. The first time you do this, you may only get one or two soft touches or petting strokes. If you can have their attention on a treat or whatever while you initiate these initial touches, they will gradually come to realize they can be touched and petted in that area without it causing the previous pain they associate with that area of their body. Be patient and do not push too far, too soon! You are gradually re-conditioning their responses when being touched on that part of their body.

In all situations involving pain or memory of pain, do not over react. As hard as it may be for you, ignore their growls or snaps and work on the desensitization program. Help them to overcome their “patterned” reflexes by not reinforcing/validating their reactions while at the same time “re-patterning” their reflexes to a positive reaction.

PREVIOUS ABUSE OR MISTREATMENT:

When a dog has been abused and pain inflicted in various situations, they can come to expect any similar situation means they will be hurt. These reactions are common in strays, shelter dogs, rescue dogs, any dog who has lived in another situation. For example, if a dog has been hit with a stick when they see something in your hand that looks like a stick, they can perceive this to mean you are about to strike them. If a person wearing a baseball cap abused them, they can react to someone in a baseball cap associating them (the cap) with pain being inflicted. I cover these situations in depth later in the book.

DOOR GROWLS:

Some dogs can develop growling behavior when you are asking them to go out the door. If this is the case, you need to determine what brought about these reactions in your dog. For example, during housetraining some people will get so upset at the pup/dog when there is a potty accident in the house, they will drag the pup to the door and roughly force them out the door. Unfortunately, some people actually toss or kick the dog out the door. *Note: Some people will do these same things to the dog for all different types of infractions or perceived infractions like chewing or tearing something up.* What ends up happening is the pup/dog comes to associate “the door” with something bad happening to them. Or, if they are dragged by their collar to the door, they can associate being grabbed by the collar and/or any physical interaction with their neck area as meaning something bad is going to happen to them. If any of this has occurred with your dog, it is not uncommon for them to growl. You would need to reassess your handling of the dog in these situations and recondition them to the door or being touched around their neck or you touching their collar. You would want to condition them to associate the door or being touched around their neck or their collar with GOOD things happening to them instead of bad things happening to them.

Another scenario with the door can occur because the dogs are let outside and then left for extended or inordinate periods of time. They will not want to go out that door because it means they are going to be left for a long time! Re-train your pup/dog to realize when they go out, they will be allowed back in a reasonable amount of time. This may mean you go out with them for a time. Or, you may let them out and then they are allowed right back in so they learn the door works both ways. They will come to trust that they CAN get back into the safety, security, and comfort of the house when they want to.

CRATE GROWLS:

Some dogs will growl when you go to place them in their crate, take them near their crate, or at times they have come to know they are going to be placed in their crate. If this occurs, it can almost always be traced back to some negative association they have made regarding their crate. This can occur when the dogs have been repeatedly crated for inordinate amounts of time. If you use the crate as a punishment, the crate will elicit negative associations in the dog. If you hit or kick AT the dog when they are in their crate for whatever reason, they will come to expect bad things happen to them when they are in their crate. When a dog is crated and someone taunts them or pokes at them with some object through the bars of the crate, they will not want to go into their crate, expecting bad things to happen to them and they will be unable to get away from these bad things.

If any of these situations are the catalyst or presumed catalyst, do not allow those situations to occur. Then, you need to re-crate train your dog. You would want to read the crate training section of the book and go through that process from scratch. If you handle their crate time and the process of crating them properly, they will want to go to their crate. The dogs will learn to go to their crate on command or at patterned times. For example, all of my dogs are properly crate trained from the time they are pups. They will

all run to their crates on command and wait for their treats. In fact, when I let the dogs out for their last potty break they come in the house and run to their crate to wait for their last night potty treat. They even do this long after they no longer sleep in their crates at night, but they still remember that going to their crate means their last night treat. Also, when I get ready to leave the house and the dogs know they are not going with me, they go to their crates on their own and wait for me to give them their treat and close their crate door. Additionally, in any situation I can say “kennel” (my crate command) and all the dogs run to their crates on their own.

Anyone can train these crate behaviors and reactions IF they will just train the crate properly. If for whatever reason the crate has come to mean negative associations, you can re-train your dog to their crates. Many rescue dogs have to be retrained to crates for one or more of the reasons I mentioned above. Be patient and understanding and help them to make positive associations with their crates. The time you spend doing this will pay huge dividends for years to come.

BED AND SLEEPING GROWLS:

There are a multitude of reasons a dog can growl when they are in bed with you. One situation is when the dog is not given the proper alpha and pack pecking order signals and the dogs see themselves as the “alpha/pack leader”. When this is the case, the sleeping area, what I call pack proper (where the alpha sleeps), is THEIR area. This means that no other pack member is allowed to sleep in that area or do anything in that area without the consent of the alpha. As a lower level pack member, when you encroach, infringe, or do anything that disturbs the alpha’s slumber or respite, this is a sign of disrespect to the alpha and will be responded to in alpha language. (*Note: I discuss this aspect in more detail in the Alpha Growl segment and the ALPHA section of the book.*)

You would want to examine whether your alpha/pack leader signals are proper and consistent. If they are not, you would want to get on the right track and provide the correct alpha/pack leader signals to your dog(s). This may include having the dog sleep in their crate in your bedroom (for the reasons explained in the crate training section) while also implementing a program of correct and proper alpha and pack pecking order signals all through the day.

Some dogs seem to sleep with one eye open and in guard mode. This means these dogs wake in “self protection or pack protection” mode. It may not make sense to you, but it is a behavior some dogs seem to exhibit. These reactions can be as a result of a dog being jumped by another dog or animal or even a human when they were asleep, so they are always “on guard” because this same scenario could occur again. When in this mode, the dogs do “reflex” which means it happens instantaneously without taking any time to assess the situation. In their minds, they have to react immediately (and think later) or they could be “gotten”!

Certainly if a dog has any physical pain or discomfort areas, as discussed previously, this can cause them to react when touched in these sensitive or pain related areas of their

body. One other common scenario is when you have more than one dog in bed with you. If the dogs have some tenuousness in their relationship, when a sleeping, resting, or reclining dog is touched, bumped, or moved, they can perceive this as the “other dog” doing it and they are warning the other dog to back off or watch it! The tenuousness between the dogs can be caused by improper or inconsistent pack pecking order signals from the owners. Or, one of the dogs may have been jumped by the other dog and is always “leery and on guard” to prevent the same thing from occurring again. You have to realize that sleeping or resting is when the dogs are instinctually at their most vulnerable.

Let me share an example. When my Golden, Ryan, was nine months old and had been granted status for sleeping on my bed with the other dogs, initially all was fine. Still being a pup, Ryan slept very sound and one night Ryan rolled over and fell off the bed. He was not hurt, but this so severely scared Ryan that he was never fully comfortable sleeping on the bed at night for the rest of his life. I was finally able to deduce that Ryan was convinced Beowulf, who was “over” Ryan in our pack, had caused him to fall off the bed. This was not the case as Beowulf was on the other side of me when this occurred. From that point on and throughout the rest of his life, I was never able to convince Ryan he was “safe” once the lights went out. We could take naps during the day and we could all sleep on the bed just fine. Ryan could be on the bed with us when I was reading or watching television in bed at night. However, once I turned out the lights Ryan would only remain on the bed for 15-30 minutes, then he would be off.

Ryan was an exceedingly “beta/meek natured” dog and he never did any growling in the bed. But, I came to understand that even though I was “absolutely” the pack leader, he was never able to overcome his (erroneous) fear that Beowulf would “get him again” in his sleep. Understanding this situation allowed me to recognize that the dogs can be reactive to other dogs on the bed with them and react according to whatever their experiences or circumstances tell them. More important for me in this analysis is that I was not able to reassure Ryan that he was safe. Even though Ryan was not a “growler”, I could see that if he were less of a “beta” dog than he was, the growls when anything touched him unexpectedly would correlate for him as “being gotten”! My understanding of these emotional processes in Ryan, allowed me to recognize that some dogs will growl or react when on the bed with other dogs. The dog is not reacting to you touching them; rather they are reacting because they assume it is the other dog.

If this is the situation you are confronted with, you need to ensure your pack pecking order is well established, secure, and consistently reinforced. But, also know there could be a situation, as in my case, even when the pack pecking order is undeniable in every regard. When this is the case, if one of your dogs’ reactions (growls and/or flares) is overt and untenable, you may have to decide not allow one of the dogs involved in this equation to sleep on the bed with you. In some situations, your decision may be that none of the dogs can sleep on your bed.

If you are like me, you like the dogs to sleep with you. However, you have to make your decisions based on what is best for the dogs and you. You are the only one who can assess how significant your particular situation is and what you can handle emotionally.

If your dog(s) only do the growls because of what I have described, you may determine you can live with that because you understand what the growls are about and why they occur. However, if one of your dogs has a more overt reaction to this same scenario, you will have to do what is best for your safety and the other dog's safety. This does not mean getting rid of one of the dogs, rather it means compromising and making the right decision that one or both of the dogs cannot sleep on the bed with you. (*Note: All that I have described under this section can also occur when the dogs are asleep on the floor, couch, or in a chair.*)

GROWLS WHEN BEING WAKENED OR STARTLED:

Many dogs react adversely when unexpectedly startled or waken suddenly. There can be many reasons for this and can be specific to an individual dog. The first thing is to assess your alpha/pack leader status to ensure it is properly and securely established and consistently maintained. If it is, then the dog's reactions are not based in dominance or pack leader modality. The next area of consideration is to determine if your "underdog pack" hierarchy is properly established and consistently reinforced by you, the alpha-pack leader. (*Note: To understand and assess your alpha status and pack pecking order, read the ALPHA section of the book.*) If there is an unsettledness, inconsistency, or tenuousness in your underdog pack pecking order, a dog can react adversely when startled or waken suddenly because they are always on guard/on edge regarding the other dogs in the pack. Their instantaneous reflex can be that one of the other dogs is jumping them when they consider themselves to be vulnerable as when sleeping or resting.

If you can rule out either or both of the previous scenarios, you have to look further. Consider these possibilities.

- 1) Is your dog a "nervous Nellie", high strung and overly reactive to things in their environment? For these type dogs, they would be especially reactive to things that startle them or that they are unprepared for and may react/reflex in a fear/self protection mode.
- 2) Does your dog lack self confidence? If so, the above reactions can occur. Basically, they do not believe they can handle themselves in various situations. This can mean they react in a defensive/self protective mode.
- 3) Has your dog had bad experiences when waken suddenly or unexpectedly startled/frightened?
- 4) Does your dog sleep very soundly? If so, they can wake in a somewhat disoriented state. This disorientation can cause the dogs to react adversely until the fog or disorientation clears which usually takes only a few seconds. But, they can still have their reactions in those few seconds. This is similar to the overt reactions many people have when being wakened suddenly or when they have trouble waking up.
- 5) Is there a chance your dog is having hearing and/or eyesight problems or changes? Even if you think your dog can see and hear just fine, do not take for granted that they are not experiencing the first stages of their hearing and/or eyesight undergoing a change. Even very observant dog people can have many months of observing seemingly inconsistent signs of hearing or seeing issues. In

- the initial phases of their hearing and eyesight undergoing changes, they can be better at times than other times or the lighting or other sounds can positively or negatively affect their ability to see or hear clearly. All of this can lead you to believe there is no problem, when indeed there is. If there is any possibility of one of these issues, you should have the dog evaluated by a vet who is trained to assess these senses (auditory and/or visual) in the dogs. The dogs' hearing and eyesight are very important to their sense of well-being and vulnerability.
- 6) Does your dog exhibit stiffness or slowness when moving after being in one position for a period of time? If so, chances are they are having some pain or discomfort from arthritis or other physical conditions.

If any of these situations or circumstances is a factor, the best recourse is to always get your dog's attention before waking them or trying to move them when they are asleep or resting. This means getting their attention in some manner other than physically touching/engaging them until they are awake and alert, oriented, have their bearings, or have their feet under them. On a final note, I think some dogs are just a little grumpy when they first wake like some people are. If your dog lacks self confidence, undertake a program to build their confidence. If your dog is a "nervous Nellie", over reactive to their environment, work to desensitize them to the various stimuli that tends to increase or feed on their nervousness or high strung nature. This means helping them become more comfortable with various situations and occurrences. Help them to develop coping skills for these situations by providing them with diversions to alternative (positive) reactions and reinforcing these reactions. Help them to associate something that is upsetting them with good things happening, rather than bad things occurring.

HIGHLY STIMULATED AND ADRENALIZED STATES:

When dogs are in over stimulated or highly adrenalized states, they can exhibit what is called "displaced aggression". Again, I hate using the word aggression, but that is the clinical term applied. If a dog is overly excited, their adrenaline pumping, they can reflex out at anything or anyone who is within their proximity. These reactions are because they cannot get to or take care of whatever is creating their excitement, stress, or anxiety. For example, when two dogs overtly react to the doorbell, it is not uncommon to have the two dogs get into a skirmish on their way to the door or right at the door. The same can happen if they are overly excited by something they see out a window or sliding door. If you have ever walked down an alley and there is a yard with two or more dogs running the fence together, you have seen the dogs get so excited and overly stimulated that at some point they seem to turn on each other. However, this is usually just a short skirmish and then they go back to being involved with what is in "their" alley!!

This same reaction can occur when you try to intervene or get involved when your dog is in one of these overly excited, highly adrenalized states. They may growl or snap just like they would with another dog (displaced aggression) without thinking. They will most likely not even be aware they are doing this until after the fact, if then.

If you have a “critter dog”, one that has a high prey drive (like the terriers), when they have a critter cornered and you try to grab them, they may growl or snap. This is partly because of their overly stimulated state. But, it is also partly because in critter mode, the dogs are in major hunt/prey drive and will not want to be diverted from the task at hand and generally will not care to share their critter or kill with another dog, even if that other dog is you. At that precise moment, they truly will not comprehend it is you encroaching on their critter, their quarry.

When a dog is in an overly excited, stimulated, and highly adrenalized state, you have to DIFFUSE their emotional and physical state, not INFUSE it. Unfortunately, when the dogs are in this mode, owners usually yell at them, try to grab them, and any number of other things to try to get their dog under control. Basically, the owners are reacting in the same overly excited, stimulated, and highly adrenalized state as the dogs. All this does is further incite and increase the dogs’ emotional state and reactions. It is like throwing gasoline on a fire! Rather, what you should do is to react with a calm and controlled manner. Your actions, interactions, and verbalizations should reflect what you are wanting the dog to do...which is to calm down. Again, in these situations, diffuse the situations. Do not infuse the situations.

ALPHA GROWLS:

If you are not the alpha-pack leader and do not communicate in clear and proper alpha signals/language, your dog will determine they have to assume that role. Remember, there has to be a good, strong, appropriate pack leader for a pack to survive. If you do not fill that role, the dog will have no alternative but to assume the role for the survival of the pack even if they are not comfortable in that role. Granted, there are some dogs who really expect to be the alpha of their pack and will look for any “opening” to assume the alpha-pack leader role in the pack. When the dog is the alpha, this means they dictate and enforce the pack rules they set!! This can occur by default (you are not the alpha) or your actions give improper pack pecking order signals actually telling the dog they are over you. All of this and/or inconsistent alpha signals provide the “opening” for them to assume the pack leader role. As the alpha-pack leader, the dog will interact with you as they would with any other dog “under” them. They will communicate with you in the same dog speak alpha language. This will include telling you what you can and cannot do and reprimanding you for inappropriate pack pecking order behaviors because in these situations, you are part of their underdog pack! This can include growls, curled lips, and possibly warning or correction snaps. Some common situations when they would exhibit these alpha behaviors can involve food, possessions, and territory (couch, bed, crate, etc.)

Believe it or not, an alpha situation is easily dealt with. The ALPHA section of the book will provide you with the understanding and information to establish, implement, and communicate a proper, secure, established, and reinforced alpha and pack hierarchy with your dog(s).

GROWLING OVER FOOD, POSSESSIONS, OR TERRITORY:

These situations are commonly based in the alpha/pack leader and appropriate pack hierarchy circumstances. Growly behaviors in these situations are relatively common in the human/dog world and do have to be handled. The ALPHA section of the book covers these issues in depth. They are relatively easy to handle when approached the right way and with the proper and consistent alpha/pack leader and pack hierarchy signals in place.

However, there can be other catalysts for the growls in regards to food, possessions, and territory. For example, a dog who is a stray who has had to scavenge for food and survival or a dog who has not been fed regularly in a previous home or a dog who lived with other dogs and was not allowed to eat (or eat enough) by the other dogs. These dogs will be very protective of their food and would have to be reconditioned to understanding they will have enough foods and/or will not be hurt or jumped when they try to eat. Dogs who have had very bad experiences when they had a bone, toy, or other possession will be very protective of their possession and also wanting to prevent any encroachment that could result in them being jumped or hurt. Dogs who have had bad experiences when they were in a place they considered to be safe and secure can be very reactive when any place or space they consider to be their “territory” is encroached on. All of these situations require reconditioning the dog to realize nothing bad will happen to them regarding these circumstances. Consider that even humans exhibit very extreme and overt reactions when they have lived and experienced similar deprivations and physical harm and they have to learn to trust and feel secure. The very same is true for the dogs.

SUDDEN AND ABERRANT ONSET OF GROWLY BEHAVIORS:

If your dog has been fine for years and suddenly begins to exhibit growly behaviors that seem inexplicable to you and completely out of character for the dog you have known and loved, you have to consider what could cause this sudden change and aberrance in their behaviors. One common situation is when something really dramatic or traumatic has occurred within the home or family (pack) that has completely changed the dynamics of the pack and the dog's sense of security. Your dog can become very stressed with major changes in their life and/or their living conditions or routines. When this happens with children, they will often act out, become incorrigible, or display aberrant behaviors. The same can apply for the dogs.

When this is the case, you need to try and understand what your dog is emotionally going through and dealing with. Children can have very extreme behaviors under similar circumstances and they have the ability to reason and understand situations better than the dogs can. The children may not be able to emotionally handle what is happening in their lives, but they do have at least a minimal grasp of what is happening in their life. They may not understand “why” but they know “what” is happening. The dogs can encounter these same situations and they are unable to assimilate any aspect of their situation except that it is happening!

Try to understand what your dog is going through and experiencing. Have extra patience with them. Work to help them adjust to the changes in their life and help them to gain some understanding of their new world. Above all, help them to associate the changes in

their life as a positive rather than a negative. (*Note: I do discuss some situations of this nature in more detail later in the book.*)

Another major consideration when the dogs inexplicably begin to exhibit aberrant behaviors is a medical condition. If there has not been a major life or routine change for the dog, you would need to get a full veterinary evaluation. This should include a “complete” blood panel and specifically test their thyroid. In behavior work, one of the first things we commonly ask people to do is test the thyroid. *Note: Some breeds can have their thyroid come back as “low normal” and even though it is in the normal range, they still need and will be helped by thyroid medication. Giving them the thyroid medication and retesting in 30 days will answer the question. If the retest comes back in the middle normal range, they would be well served to remain on the medication.* There can also be brain tumors or other medical conditions which can only be assessed by a vet or a veterinary specialist.

GROWLS OF CONSEQUENCE:

There are growls which are significant and should not be ignored. The dogs have a “low, throaty growl” which always means business. Often, people cannot hear these growls and sometimes the only way to know a dog is emitting the low, throaty growl is if your hand is close to their throat and you can feel the vibration. However, other dogs can “hear” these growls from many feet away. Generally, these growls will precipitate an attack if any further encroachment occurs. (*Note: Do not confuse these low, throaty growls with a normal dog communication which is saying something is not right. The dogs can do low growls, but the “lowness” of them is more volume than anything. A low, throaty growl is unmistakable.*)

Additionally, this low, throaty growl is usually accompanied by very distinct body posture. This posture is stiff and staid in appearance and usually the head is lowered, possibly neck level or even lower. This type of body language can occur whether they are standing, sitting, or lying down. The threat is unmistakable. If this situation presents itself with your dog or another dog, be concerned and do not encroach or do anything that would represent a further or continued threat to the dog. At this point, you have to be 100% in self protection mode. If your own dog is using this with you, this indicates you have a problem that is more significant than you alone can deal with. You would need to seek the help of a professional. *Note: Even in this circumstance, you would need to consider whether your alpha/pack leader signals are proper and consistent. If they are not, this could be the underlying catalyst as the dog is seeing themselves in the alpha/pack leader role.*

Another situation that indicates a growl may precipitate a bite is when your dog has been growling in one tone and the tone dramatically changes or builds to a crescendo. In this situation, your dog has communicated in dog speak, but something you are doing or not doing is not accommodating their emotional needs or reactions to a specific situation. Rather, the dogs are going to the next level. This would occur if they are exceedingly frightened or threatened and they have tried to communicate this, but your actions

increase their fear or sense of being threatened. This is not as untenable as the above situation because your dog is “trying” to communicate and be dog appropriate. They only move to the next level when left with no other alternative. Remember most dogs in most situations will try to be dog/dog appropriate. But, they have limited ways of communicating in the human/dog world. They can only communicate in dog speak as is understood within the dog/dog world which is constituted by their vocalizations, baring their teeth, body posture, warning snaps, and ultimately bites if pushed to that level.

These situations require that you learn to understand their communications and find a way to not push them to each successive level of their dog/dog world communication path. Then, you work to help them develop coping skills to handle whatever situation set this scenario into play. I will also say there are many actions and interactions we have with the dogs that can create this situation. The dog is not being inappropriate, the human is being inappropriate for what dogs are able to handle even in the human/dog world. If this is the case, you should cease and desist immediately from engaging in these inappropriate behaviors or not own a dog.

We bring them into our lives and we must follow the rules of human and human/dog decency. To expect a dog to accept inappropriate human behavior just because we are the humans and they are the dogs is utterly improper. If owners engage in behaviors that frighten or threaten their dog and the dog cowers or runs and hides, we think this is okay. Granted, the owners may be upset that they have such a wimpy dog which is how many owners perceive these reactions. Remember the dogs, in certain situations, have only one of two reactions available to them, FIGHT OR FLIGHT. Well, the previous scenario represents the “flight reaction”. But, some dogs will react in the other mode of FIGHT! If an owner’s inappropriate and improper actions elicit the fight or flight reaction in their dog, you cannot fault their “fight” reaction any more than you would fault their “flight” reaction. You caused this to occur and your dog has only one of two ways to respond for their own survival, at least in their minds. *(Note: In some situations, the ALPHA circumstance, as previously mentioned, could be the catalyst. You would need to assess whether your actions are inappropriate because of the dog having gained the alpha-pack leader status in your home or whether your actions are just plain inappropriate by any standards of human/dog world interaction.)*

SOME ADDITIONAL INPUT FOR HANDLING GROWLY SITUATIONS:

If you have the proper alpha/pack leader signals in place, you have a right to not want your dog to engage in growly behavior. *Note: You should be open to and accepting of play growly sounds. You should take into account when the dogs are just talking, especially if you have a “talker” as discussed previously.* I do hope that you have come to understand many of the reasons and catalysts for growls and no longer just arbitrarily assess all growls as bad dog behavior. They are being dogs and reacting as dogs. But, as with many dog behaviors which are acceptable in the dog/dog world, the growly behaviors can be assessed as being unacceptable in the human/dog world. This requires you helping them to learn acceptable behavior within the human/dog world, not just expect them to know these behaviors. This is not possible as this is contradictory to the

basic nature and communications of a dog. However, with the proper approach, you can help them to learn the behaviors you deem to be appropriate and the ones you deem to be inappropriate. The key here is HELP THEM LEARN, pattern train them. This can only be done by understanding where they are coming from as a dog and also how your manner of handling and dealing with these behaviors can positively or negatively impact/affect these behaviors and reactions.

You can use the sharp “EHHH” sound and then say settle, be nice, or no growl. Remember, whatever you say should be said in a calm, controlled tone of voice. Do not allow your voice to incite a reaction or infuse/validate their growly behavior. You can lift their front paws off the ground. You can gently and firmly grab their chin hairs and then give your calm, controlled verbal admonition. I have told people to use the chin hairs method and initially they are skeptical. I had one lady incredulously ask how I could want her to do this when she was afraid the dog would bite. I told her to try it. She called me back the next day and said, “I cannot believe it, but chin hairs are magical!”

Keep in mind that any physical interaction should not incite, elicit, or validate their growly behaviors. This means no quick, sudden, harsh, or overbearing physical engagement. Rather, you want your actions (as with your voice) to reflect that you are their strong, compassionate, in control, respectful, and indisputable pack leader. If you attempt to handle these situations in a more aggressive or overt manner, you can further frighten or threaten the dog. Additionally, aggression breeds aggression! A strong and effective alpha/pack leader does not rule their pack through intimidation, through threats or by being a bully. They rule by their sheer presence and the alpha/pack leader signals they convey continuously which communicate a security and solidity of pack. The alpha conveys this by being very controlled. They expect certain appropriate “underdog pack” behaviors and deal with indiscretions in a firm, stern, but fair manner.

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