



Understanding Dog Growling

Growling is a valuable means of communication for a dog - something that dog owners should appreciate and respect rather than punish. Of course, we don't want our dog to growl at us, but neither do we want him to fail to growl if something makes him uncomfortable; that's very important information in a successful canine-human relationship.

It's very common for dog owners to punish their dogs for growling. Unfortunately, this often suppresses the growl - eliminating his ability to warn us that he's about to snap, literally and figuratively. On other occasions, punishing a growling, uncomfortable dog can induce him to escalate into full-on aggression.

So, if you're not supposed to punish your dog for growling, what are you supposed to do? The next time your dog growls at you, try this:

Stop. Whatever you're doing, stop. If your dog's growl threshold is near his bite threshold - that is, if there's not much time between his growl and his bite, get safe. If his growl doesn't mean a bite is imminent, stop what you're doing but stay where you are. Wait until he relaxes, then move away, so you're rewarding the relaxed behavior rather than the growl.

Analyze the situation. What elicited the growl? Were you touching or grooming him? Restraining him? Making direct eye contact? Taking something away from him? Making him do something?

If you need help to create and implement a behavior modification protocol, contact a qualified behavior professional who is experienced and successful in modifying aggressive behavior with positive, dog-friendly techniques.

For more details and advice on modifying dog aggression, purchase Whole Dog Journal's ebook, [Approaches to Modifying Dog Aggression](#).

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