

Separating Dogs in a Fight

Just like people, dogs need time to build relationships with new siblings—or with the new dog next door. The key to relationship-building is to keep the early stages as quarrel-free as you can. For advice, see our handout Dog-Dog Introductions. Even with the best efforts, however, dog fights sometimes happen. If you find yourself having to break up a fight, remember never to use your hands or body to intervene, you might get inadvertently bit.

THINGS TO TRY:

- Keep leashes on the dogs so you can pull them apart.
- Use water to distract them—either have a bucket or a hose ready.
- Throw a towel or blanket over the aggressor to disorient or distract him.
- Scream or make a loud noise using a whistle or horn.
- Spray something unpleasant towards the dogs' noses (canned air, citronella, bitter apple, carbonated beverage etc.). You may need to do this several times.
- Ring the doorbell in hopes of distracting the dogs.
- If a word or phrase really motivates your dog (car ride, cookies, walk) try saying it in a loud but jolly tone.
- Take a baby gate or another barrier and bring it down between the two dogs. Continue to bring it up and down until the aggressor let's go. Once the aggressor let's go, immediately slide the gate and your body between the dogs and use the gate as a shield to pin the aggressor against a wall or through a doorway.
- Anytime you try to break up a dog fight, there's a risk of being bitten, so always start with the least invasive and safest techniques. If at all possible, work with a behaviorist to advise you on which method is most appropriate for each situation.
- You can contact Dr. Berger, SF SPCA's board-certified veterinary behavior specialist. Or, if you don't live in the Bay Area, search locally for a veterinary behavior specialist (Dip ACVB), a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB), or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT).