

Free Bonus

How To Change Your West Highland Terrier's Temperament For The Better

What usually attracts the pet lover to a West Highland Terrier is his appearance. But the next after that is his endearing temperament. His cheerful attitude, coupled with a sense of adventure, makes him the darling of every family he joins.

Breeders too have a soft spot for this breed as they have a natural flair for being big winners in the show ring. But sometimes, despite the best of care and love, the jolly temperament of the West Highland Terrier is hidden and what surfaces is a biter or a very shy West Highland Terrier.

Why do some Westies become shy? It is said that if the Westie's genes display good temperament, no amount of careless handling can damage that. But, sadly, even good genes do not forgive bad handling and turn the best of West Highland Terriers into biters and aggressive dogs.

Degrees of shyness: There are degrees of shyness in West Highland Terriers that forms the root cause of various temperament problems. If he's just a little shy, he may not be suited for the show ring, but he's the perfect family pet. But if he's very shy, he can be very aggressive and can end up biting too, unless firmly handled. When this happens, your West Highland Terrier is said to display "fear aggression." Such West Highland Terriers may also suffer from another temperament problem—separation anxiety.

Aggression in West Highland Terriers: It is true that West Highland Terriers can experience aggression that manifests itself in various ways. In fact, this is said to be one of the most widespread problems that companion pets face. After all, what could be more frightening than finding a very angry animal attacking you?

To make a tame loving dog into an aggressive monster is really quite simple. All it takes is your meanness, and the job is complete and the dog chaotic. Naturally, in such a situation, your Westie is left with no defenses except to be angry and snarling whenever he sees you. This is chiefly a reaction out of his fear and anxiety, the feeling of not being confident in his own environment.

The influences on a house pet are many. This means that there are various sources from where he can pick up both positive and negative influences. Think of the West Highland Terrier who growls at you when you pick up his toy or ask him to get off the sofa. When he bites you in response, he is responding to the aggression that has built up inside him. So, to explain to such dogs that this is not the right response is an onerous task.

As a pet owner, you should aim rather to prevent aggression in your pet than attempt to get ride of it once it sets in. As you know, this embraces several factors: socialization, training for confidence, manners and social structure.

What to do with an aggressive West Highland Terrier: If your West Highland Terrier strikes you as being very aggressive, send him to the vet first, if only to rule out physical causes. For instance, if your Westie is in great pain or discomfort, he may demonstrate this by being very mean or irritable. But before you get into figuring his behavior out, first determine that he is physically fit.

The causes of aggression are many. So, it would be worthwhile for you to identify the cause of his aggression and then give him the relevant help. The next step is to give him obedience training—both to socialize him and to prevent aggression from occurring.

Kinds of aggression: West Highland Terriers express their aggression in various ways. These are:

Chained reaction: This is the combination of fear and territorial aggression as a result of chaining a dog. New pet owners take in a dog and then chain him up for long hours a day while he watches the rest of the family go about its business from where it lies chained. This builds up a feeling of anger and resentment in him and he expresses this by barking, jumping on those around him, particularly kids who enjoy this. They laugh at him and then go away, ignoring him once more.

As time passes, he develops a territorial feeling about his space and no longer wants a game. He feels cheated by the fact that the very family who professed to love him ignores him now and is happy to leave him in chains. One day, when he can't tolerate it any longer, he reaches out and bites the person closest to him.

If you, as a pet owner, cannot have your West Highland Terrier around the house, mingling with your family, then please don't bring him home.

Possession aggression: This happens when we make the mistake of going over to our pet while he's eating. Your Westie probably interprets your presence as your coming over to take back his bowl of food—something he will never want to part with! This feeling stems from the basic fact that dogs don't share their things. Such a dog usually guards his possessions—whether they are his food, toys or even his master.

One way of overcoming this is to attack the problem while in puppy hood. Begin by giving him something and then taking it back. After a while, return it to him. From this he will learn that though someone may have what he wants, if he is patient, it will come back to him. To make it easier for him, teach him to respond to "give."

Cage rage: You cage your pet for no reason for indiscriminately long periods. And what do you expect? First of all, anger. Then, the feeling in your West Highland Terrier

that the cage belongs to him. This feeling comes out of caging your pet and then forgetting all about him. This angers him and he flares up. Further, he feels trapped and immobile when the whole world is doing things and happily too! So, he stays in his cage and fights the way he knows best.

Cage rage can also manifest itself as hyperactivity. This may just be a temporary reaction, which goes away the moment the dog's independence is restored to it.

Dominance aggression: This happens when each of your dogs wants to establish himself as the boss. This feeling could also come about between pet and master. Further, it could also be experienced by strange dogs and dogs of a household.

If you have more than one dog that experience this problem, the solution lies in leaving them to sort out their differences. Usually, they don't take long to resolve their differences. So, if you interfered only to expedite the solution, it will only aggravate the problem, with no solution in sight.

When you take your West Highland Terrier out and he gets aggressive with strange dogs, you need to watch them all carefully. Whatever happens there, as the pet owner, you need to play leader in this situation. If you find yourself being ruled by your pet, it can be the seed of a lot of problems in future. But if you find yourself being in the eye of a storm, you could immediately implement the following:

Obedience classes: Here, put yourself first. Even if you go with your pet, be the first to walk through the door, first up the stairs, first to enter class, etc. Don't give him the option of figuring out when he wants to be a pet, or when he wants to be the first in the car. Don't let him tower over you, either while sitting or standing i.e. don't sit while he stands on a chair or sofa or on the stairs. Height is a determinant of power and leadership position.

Don't give in to him easily. Does he want something to eat or drink? First, make him sit. Then, let him work for it. Or maybe he could just do a trick or two for it. The idea is that aggression breeds aggression. If he is aggressive with you, he needs to learn to accept it from you too. This doesn't mean you punish him as that will only worsen the problem.

Fear aggression: manifests itself when a dog feels cornered, and feels he must fight his way out of a situation. Ears laid flat against the head, head held low and tail tucked between his legs while growling are sure signs of fear aggression. Remove your dog immediately as he may be a fear-biter, and take steps now to properly socialize him. Obedience classes are a must for a fear aggressive dog.

When a dog is aggressive to other dogs, it is an indication that he was not properly socialized. A well-trained and socialized dog will want to play rather than maim another dog that approaches him.

Fighting fear aggression: To get over this problem, your West Highland Terrier pup needs to be trained in a puppy kindergarten class where he will be given obedience training. Here, he should learn his lessons with the use of positive reinforcement training methods. By this we mean that the pup be praised, given treats and positive attention for good behavior. He should also be socialized or exposed to various social situations in a positive light.

Remember never to pat your aggressive Westie on his head or behind his ears. Instead, you should pat him on the nape of his neck and on his chest. This is so because these signs show dominance and can cause aggression in your West Highland Terrier, as they can either scare him off or challenge him to show his might. This, according to him, is a power struggle, which he has to win.

Does he bite you? You should not really tolerate him biting you or tearing your clothes. Say “no” very firmly whenever he does this. You could also take his muzzle in your hand and shake his head gently, while saying “no.”

Once he learns the connection between his action and your reaction, he will learn not to do it. Meanwhile, you can move on to something else: distract his attention by giving him a toy. Once he changes his ways, give him positive reinforcement by saying “Good boy” to him several times.

Don't be an indulgent parent by cuddling him whenever he makes a mistake. This gives him the wrong signals that you appreciate his behavior when you really don't. Be careful of how you treat him at this stage because it could be that this biting is because he is teething.

If your dog is a biter of things, you can make him grow out of this habit by saying “give” gently, while also asking for the toy that's in his mouth. Once he gives it to you, reward him generously. From this, he will learn that if he gives you what you want, he will, in turn get something better.

Obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD): This condition manifests itself in those dogs who are stressed, anxious or bored and can prove to be a very testing time for the pet owner. In such a condition, he is very dangerous to those around him and can be so destructive that he breaks things around the house and yard, attacks angry neighbors, and is completely uncontrollable. They display odd behaviors such as obsessive digging, continuous biting at their own feet, barking at nothing and attacking inanimate objects.

If he is bored, you will see him digging, barking at no one in particular and chasing his tail. Take this as your cue to increase your Westie's physical activity level. Tire him out by playing with him, taking him on long walks, opening up a fun avenue for him. Do this and you have a happy West Highland Terrier. That apart, such activities bring you closer to your pet, while also reducing certain health risks, such as accidentally swallowing poison and overeating.

Depression: A fallout of physical ailments, the commonest are Distemper, Parvovirus and Coronavirus. These are often fatal and therefore should be checked in time.

Rabies also leads to inexplicable aggression. This ends in death and is highly contagious too. Brain tumours, neurological disorders or seizures can also cause aggression.

Submissive urination: Your West Highland Terrier may also suffer from another kind of condition, different from anything discussed so far. This is called submissive urination and is all about your Westie's urinating all over you the moment she gets to see you at the door. How do you cure your West Highland Terrier of this? Simple. Just ignore it and it will go away.

What you have to realize is that through this unusual means, your dog is saying something to you. But what? And why is it using such body language to convey its message? Actually, when your West Highland Terrier begins by showing you his belly, then pees a little, he is saying, "I love you, boss. Let me please you." But to you this is disgusting and you are angry to see him pee all over you. As a result, you scold and punish him. This confuses the pet and he realizes he will have to try harder to please you, but is at a loss to do this, as his only weapon has been taken away from him.

This is why it is best to ignore the problem. If he wants your attention, go up to him and say "Hi" quietly and clap your hands while asking him to "sit." This will put him in a position of obedience. Now's the time for you to praise him, let him out for a walk while you quickly clean up his mess so that he does not associate your warmth with his mistake. Soon, your West Highland Terrier will realize that urinating on you is not the best way of welcoming you home, and this odd behavior will gradually disappear.

Of course, there are those pets who cannot get over this problem. They insist on greeting long-lost friends with a puddle. Scolding him in the usual way will do nothing to solve the problem. Instead, lay washable throw rugs at the entrance of your house and keep a roll of paper towels handy to absorb his puddle. But remember, if it comes from his love, you should accept his "love" with a grateful smile.

What to interpret when you see your West Highland Terrier with:

His ears back and growling too! Why is your West Highland Terrier sending you messages he doesn't meant to? So, you have perhaps caught him doing two contrary things, such as wagging his tail at you while also growling a bit fiercely.

So, how will you interpret his behavior? If your Westie has his ears pulled back, it proves he is scared and upset and may even bite you if you reach out to be nice to him with a pat or kind word. So, ideally, you should walk away calmly and leave him alone.

His tail tucked between his legs: Your West Highland Terrier is frightened and nervous about being close to people. With a little help from the vet and a counselor, he will be more confident and a happier pet to have around.

Protecting his pillow: If your West Highland Terrier protects his pillow, it means he's trying to guard something that he thinks belongs to him. The reason why he growls is that perhaps he has been receiving praise and rewards from his owners every time he guards something. Since they don't understand his anger, they calm him down with a small treat. Now, every time your West Highland Terrier is hungry, all he has to do is to growl at you.

As a remedial measure, you, the Westie's owner, must ignore such behavior till the time the West Highland Terrier gets up and walks away from the pillow or whatever he guards. Once he does this repeatedly and of his own will, begin rewarding him with a lot of your attention. Let him know he's been a "good boy." Reward him with a treat.

Ears pulled back and a tail tucked in: Obviously, your West Highland Terrier is scared. So frightened is he that he avoids making eye contact and may even crouch in a corner. He may also display another kind of behavior called the "approach-avoidance" where your Westie may run continuously towards one person and then away from him. Such a dog is frightened and the hair on his coat will often stand on end.

Hoping this information adds to your enjoyment of being a pet owner.

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