

“He’s only playing” – Or is he?

We’ve all seen it, the over exuberant roughly 18 month old Labrador on his way to the park dragging his owner who can barely keep up, behind him on a lead. He’s so excited that when he reaches the gate his owner can hardly get the lead off him. The second the lead is removed he races off, breaking a land speed record, straight into a group of dogs bowling them and their owners over. Another group of dogs capture his attention and he’s off to another area of the park leaving the bewildered dogs and owners in his wake. It seems this dog is on a mission to meet everyone at the park as quickly as possible.

He grabs dog’s toys, taunts them, body slams and jumps all over his new found “friends”, some who turn and growl or snap at him. He’s oblivious to it all.

Dog owners look anxiously over at his guardians who simply smile and say “It’s OK, he’s only playing, he’s just so happy to meet with other dogs”. He may be only playing but a rude pushy dog only alienates those around him, human and canine and that’s no way to make good friends

This dog’s brand of play is unpleasant for most dogs. His hyperactivity and steamrolling gets him into trouble, and if he makes a new found friend he can’t calm himself down enough to play nicely, so he bites chases and body slams, over and over again. Some dogs will become nervous at this “play” and will attempt to tone him down with submissive body language. They may roll on their backs, tuck their tail under them or lick at Buster’s mouth. When this fails Buster’s friend becomes even more nervous and resorts, in self-defense, to threats such as growling, baring teeth or snapping the air. When the offending dog fails to recognize or simply ignores these cues a fight is sure to break out.

This dog has poor social skills and comes on way too strong. He is often unable to read the subtleties of dog body language much less deliver appropriate body language himself. Dogs, like humans, need to get to know one another before engaging in rough play. This

over-zealous Labrador would do well to engage in little precursory bum sniffing and play bowing before releasing his onslaught onto some poor, non-consenting dog.

When dogs play normally their body language includes play bows, happy faces, paw raises and clumsy, bouncy style movements. There are also frequent role reversals during fair play, play biting one and chasing another, just to name a few.

When observing dogs play, watch their body language and ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Is my dog over-excited and/or annoying other dogs?**
- 2. Is my dog the target of over-excited and/or annoying dogs?**
- 3. Does my dog look scared or intimidated?**
- 4. Does my dog's 'playmate' look scared or intimidated?**

If you answer yes to any of the questions above, act swiftly to avoid the play spilling over into a fight. Remove your dog from the situation. If your dog is on the receiving end talk to the owner of the other dog, politely of course, and explain that your dog is uncomfortable or scared. If your dog is the perpetrator try removing him from the situation, distracting him, giving him a time out or, when all else fails, take him home.

Help is here NOW for owners with these types of dogs. Talk to your trainers today and get the support you need to make your dog happy and comfortable around the home and one who fits into the community.