

Aggression In Pembrokes

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Unfortunately, the Pembroke Welsh Corgi breed has a world-wide reputation of biting that's been well-earned by certain members of the breed. Why is this? Is it due to their herding ancestry where for this smaller breed to herd cattle they had to push hard and nasty if the cattle pushed them? Maybe, maybe not. It should not be, as the herding instinct is a predatory drive instinct, while human/dog or dog/dog interactions are pack instincts. But I am not the one to say. But although Pembrokes generally make good family pets, enough individuals of the breed have problems that it is a breed problem. Many come from puppy mills or backyard breeders who don't screen out bad temperaments from their breeding stock, some come from show breeders who don't care, some come out of the blue from good temperament bloodlines, but most problem biters are caused by owner mishandling. Note that Cardigans have very different temperaments than Pembrokes, and have their own breed temperament problems.

There's a range of degree of problems, from Pems that nothing could have prevented their aggressiveness (uncommon), to most that with proper upbringing and timely behavior training would not have problems but otherwise become biters, to dogs that would have no problems no matter how they were brought up (most Pembrokes).

Also, note that many dogs, even of good temperament, will quickly become defensive aggressive once attacked or badly scared by another dog. Corgis, being such fast learners, will often start attacking other dogs after being attacked themselves only once. Always keep your dog out of situations where he could potentially be attacked or scared. Off-lead dog parks or other areas where other uncontrolled dogs are loose are bad. Always be aware of any situation where leashed dogs could reach yours due to their owner's inattention to their and your dog, ignorance of proper dog behavior. Be extremely careful at dog events especially in close quarters, passing others in parks, and in dog classes. Remember, it can only take one incident for your nice dog to become the nasty one!

Dog/People Aggression

Pems, in general, will try you. They will push you, they will give you the finger. And those most pushy ones, if you let them get away with such, can become aggressive. They will growl at you when you try to take food away, they will bite you if you pet them where they decide they don't want to be petted. They will snap when you try to move them off their favorite spot on your furniture. If you do not provide a firm leader (often the term "alfa" is used) status for the family, they will become the leader, and this is where trouble starts. Our rescue groups receive too many of these dogs. Many, once given a firm hand by someone who knows the breed and behavior modification, are fine. Unfortunately most rescue groups are not allowed to accept any dogs with a biting history due to liability, so pet owners NEED to stop such behavior before it becomes the literal death of the dog. Biters are euthanized if given up.

What's the answer?

Try to find a puppy that is from a good temperament background in the first place. Get references about a breeder from other pup buyers. Look at the dam and sire if on site to see how they react to strangers, men, and children (a child along even if you don't have one). Avoid pups that bully others in the litter or are easily scared. Don't buy from a pet store. Don't buy pups that are offered to go home before they learn proper littermate socialization, usually after 10wks old.

Note that puppy nipping is not necessarily aggression, and should not be treated as such. You must determine the difference before trying to solve the problem. Puppy nipping is due to herding instinct (nipping at other's heels when running), lack of proper socialization as a pup (often due to being removed from parent and siblings before 7wks of age), and improper play or teasing the pup or dog by adults and especially children.

Firmness, stubbornness, consistency in training, not allowing yourself to be pushed, or given the finger, not allowing the dog to get away with things. Be the leader of the family, and the dog will respect you. But what is necessary is NOT being firm physically, as things like hitting or choking the dog with it's collar often leads to escalation of a war, but being firm with your mind. Why did the dog give me the finger? How can I stop it from happening again? How can I stop it today?

EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, *Nipping Problems In The Bud*. Eliminating a problem after the several incidences is way WAY harder than eliminating a behavior after a dog's only done it once. The dog is much more likely to offend later even with strict training, leading to a continual battle of trying to stopper up the behavior. And, you get driven into a deadly circle once a dog threatens you. The dog threatens, you become afraid of bites (quite rightly) and back off from the dog, the dog says hey I'm more alfa and pushes you more. So, best to Nip In The Bud before you get to this stage.

Good behavior modification training exercises for owners.

These simple exercises are non-confrontational so will not start a war, and do a good job at decreasing a dog's ranking over you. These are good to use with pups/dogs that show signs of wanting to control you, and many are good to use after problems occur. Many are good to do with pups no matter what, avoiding the start of any problems in the first place (indicated with a *).

1. Never use confrontational methods like rolling a dog on it's back, holding it's throat, or hitting in a dog that has shown signs of aggression problems to people. This can lead to increased problems such as serious biting or full scale attacking. The idea is to gradually lessen the dog's ranking and increasing yours, without battles. Or, preferable, never let the dog get ahead of you in the 1st place.
2. *Never allow a dog to avoid something (nail clipping, punishment, doing something they're told to do, coming) by hiding under the deck or bed where you can't reach them, or running away from you in a big yard when you want to reprimand them or get them to do something (ie they're giving you the finger). Instead block off the hiding area, leave a long lead on them when in the yard that you can latch onto and reel in when they run. Or simply stalk them down until you catch them. This is a common problem in many teenage dogs of all breeds, but put a halt to this in Pems.
3. *Dogs should understand that you are the leader who provides them their creature comforts such as food, water, playtime. Dogs with problems should not be free-fed, they should be given meals that they finish in 10 minutes or it will be removed. All dogs should learn to sit stay for a short while before being allowed to eat. This reinforces your rank as boss. If you need to if the dog isn't good at that initial stay or protects his food after 10 minutes, use a leash to restrain or remove the dog from the food.
4. *Train the dog to allow you to take things like his dinner, chewies, and toys away from them without possessiveness in the first place. Reinforce this training thruout the dog's life. Before you have any problems, even if the dog promises to never be a problem dog, teach the dog that you taking things away from him is good. Take an item (food, toy, chewie, etc) away, quickly give them a treat reward if they don't object, then quickly give the item back. The treat must be more attractive to them than the toy or chewie, so get a better treat if they prefer to hang onto the toy/chewie. Repeat later, keeping the item longer each time.
5. If a dog has just started showing signs of possession about something, don't let them have it unless they're good. Take it away and let them know that This is MINE thank you, and I only give it to you by my grace. Stare them down, speak firmly No, Mine. And allow them to have it again if they're good again, but remind them often that that is yours to give them, not theirs to take. I once put Ty on a brand new floor cushion as a pup. Then I sat on it and he immediately got PO'ed and tried to push me off. He had decided that he was in control, not me. So, I sat there, letting him learn that that was MY cushion thank you, not his. And I thereafter sat in his doggie bed too, to show him that it was mine first, his if I allowed it. When Jordan first came to me as a pup, he was food possessive with other dogs, curled around his dinner dish and growled at my others. I took the dinner away from him when he did this (he wasn't people food possessive or there would have been the danger of him biting me, not recommended!). He learned to accept other dogs' noses right up against his dish, and eats just fine with all the others.
6. Do not take things away from a dog that has been more possessive or you are asking to get bitten. If the dog has shown possessiveness, work with another person that controls the dog with a leash. First, offer the dog a good treat while the leash handler holds the leash with the toy/chewie somewhere else. Then, offer the treat when the dog is near but restrained from reaching the toy. Next, let the dog have the toy/chewie and offer a treat at least 6 feet away from the dog. and when the dog goes to you for the treat have the leash handler move so the dog cannot return to the toy, praise and treat, and as above let the dog have it's toy again. Do this awhile then with the dog securely held, go and pick up the toy/chewie, giving the dog a treat and returning the toy after a certain time if the dog is good. If the dog shows possessiveness, do not praise or allow the dog to have it again until it is good. Keep the toy longer each time. If these do not work quickly or things escalate, go to a good behaviorist as retraining a dog that can seriously injure you needs to be done under the direct supervision of an experienced person, not from online advice such as this.
7. *All treats must be earned, even if it's a simple sit or down. Dogs with problems should not get human food as this increases their thoughts that they're equal or better than you. Do not give food to begging dogs, only give treats when you initial the thought of treat-giving.
8. *Leaders control entryways. When you and the dog go thru a gate, door other other opening, make the dog do a wait before allowing it thru. Do not allow it to rush thru uncontrolled. Body block if needed, go to obedience training class if the dog needs to learn waits/stays. If the dog does know sits stays, don't open the door until it does sit and stay. Note that this used to be leaders go thru the gateway first, but it's control that matters more.
9. *Leaders control territory. Do you step around your dog if it's in the middle of the hallway or sit in a less favored chair if he's in your favorite chair? Don't do this. Make the dog move from YOUR territory. Nudge the dog in the hallway with your foot (no kicking), lead him off the seat he's on. Remember tho, non-confrontational. If the dog shows aggressive tendencies when you try these, save this for later after you work on other exercises.
10. *Leaders mean what they say. If you give a command, enforce it. If you tell the dog to sit and it doesn't, don't repeat the command, simply scoop it's butt under. Then praise! Never give a command that you cannot enforce, such as "come" when the dog is off lead and you can't make it come. Simply wait till another time when you can

- enforce the command. Consistency is very very important, don't let the dog wander off out of a stay one time and enforce it the next, as all you're teaching the dog is sometimes you mean it sometimes not, and it has no idea when so it won't obey. This is not fair to the dog.
11. Leaders initiate and terminate fun. If you play ball throwing or have nice petting sessions, make sure you initiate it, don't let the dog push you into it by shoving the ball at you or bugging you until you pet it. This is the dog controlling you! And, before the dog tires of petting/ball chasing, stop, put the ball out of reach and don't start again. Also, don't play aggressive games like tug of war that are confrontational games.
 12. *Straddle adult dog or hold pup in your arms gently confined, with pups preferably on their backs. This lets the dog know that you're in control. If he struggles, don't let him go until he's calm for awhile. If it's a pup that tries to bite you, put bitter apple on your hands. This is a very good tool that *all* pups should have gone thru when they're just a few weeks old, and should be continued as they go thru the teenage stages and occasionally later. Alfa rolls are NOT recommended despite their past publicity, especially on a dog that already has dominance problems. Alfa rolls and scruffing are a direct conflict and can lead to biting.
 13. *Do belly rubs. -Do lots of grooming/massage. (no wire slicker brushes please, those hurt!). Regular grooming/massage is good, gradually work over all of the dog's body parts so he's used to everything being touched. You should be able to handle feet, ears, toenails, balls, and stick your fingers in mouth and ears. All dogs should not object to any body part being touched (visiting kids wouldn't know not to touch those toes-chomp!). This is very important for a puppy. Sometimes it's tough with an older dog that already has a particular spot he's sensitive about. Work on getting closer to that spot, giving good treats as you go. Never do these in association with "bad" things like nail clipping or getting mats out of the coat.
 14. If the dog has a problem and isn't neutered, male or female, neuter it! Hormones do NOT help!
 15. Don't let dogs with problems sleep on your bed, this makes him consider himself an equal, not a subordinate.
 16. Do long down stays with dogs with problems. Make sure you can keep your eye on the dog to enforce this, no breaking that stay! Down is a subordinate position.
 17. Sometimes you have to loose a battle to win the war. Is there just one problem, like the dog bites while nails are cut? Give in to that, let a groomer do it or muzzle the dog. Does the dog not sit immediately when told? Not great but if they do sit eventually, ok. If they have a certain toy that they're very possessive about, or type (like rawhide), simply don't allow that in the house if the dog won't retrain to allow you to take it away or if the dog fights with other dogs over it.
 18. Leaders are consistent, kind, and fair. Understand that a dog is not a human. Consistent: They don't understand why you said one thing one day and mean it, then not the next. Keep to black and white, not shades of gray. Stay means stay till told "ok," not wander off before then. Kind: if you loose patience or have had a bad day, quit then and there, don't try to train. Fair: Remember dog mentality. You: "Dog, come!" (dog is busy with squirrel, doesn't come). When dog finally comes, you punish him. To you, you just punished him for not coming. To *him*, you just punished him for coming. Oops! Think immediate action/reaction with dogs. They're not people.

Dog/Dog Aggression

A few too many Pembrokes tend to love to go after other dogs. Again, not all, not the majority, but enough of them so this is a breed problem. As above, sometimes you just can't do anything about it, some Pems just are very nasty and attack others no matter what. However dog aggression could be stopped in the majority of dogs if the owner had Nipped The Problem In The Bud. That phrase is all so important in training dogs.

When you're looking for a pup, make sure you see the dam when she's with other adults, and see the sire interacting with other dogs if he's on site too. If either are nasty with others, stay away. Some dams are hormonally inclined to be aggressive to other dogs around their puppies (defending them) but it's best to stay clear anyhow. The excuse that stud dogs can't be around all other dogs including females isn't a good one, this is poor temperament. Some can't be with certain other males, this is generally ok.

The first time a dog decides to stare down, growl at, or nip/bite another dog, you need to reprimand it severely enough so it remembers and doesn't think of doing it again. Remember, being harsh on the dog now for a little while will pay off for years to come, in having a well mannered dog instead of a dog that always has to be kept separated from all other dogs at all times. Reprimanding does not mean you knock it's brains out. A good sharp whack on the nose. Put a lead on (gives you good control and authority) and haul off to a crate or pen for the rest of the day. Then for the next week take away all rights of the dog such as toy playing, treats, walks, etc. It must earn any little thing, like sit stays to go outside or being allowed to eat. Bedtime is locked in the bathroom or in a crate instead of on your bed. Note that only the initial smack on nose is punishment for the aggression. The rest is behavior modification that reinforces that the dog is allowed to only do what you want it to, you are alfa, and it is not allowed to do things like take control on it's own (ie try to control that other dog). This advice is only for first signs of dog aggression, and is not for fear aggression. These need other training techniques.