

Could your dog bite someone?

Yes, it is possible that your dog could bite someone if he was pushed over his threshold. A dog's bite threshold varies from dog to dog. Thresholds can be different depending on what the dog was bred to do and some breeds are more reactive to movement.

For some dogs it may take only one factor to get them to bite while others it may take five factors. For example, a dog that is afraid of loud noises, afraid of people in hats, and possessive of his food might not bite over those factors individually. But if you put them all together: someone wearing a hat, approaches your dog while he is at his food bowl and a loud thunderstorm rolls in; this combination of three factors could push Fido over his threshold.

Two factors alone may not push Fido over his threshold. For instance, if a person wearing a hat approached Fido at the same time that a thunderstorm rolled in Fido might remain in his comfort zone and not bite anyone. But the combination of frightful events still could increase Fido's fear of both people in hats and thunderstorms. So this two factor experience could influence his threshold reaction for the next time.

A positive and observant relationship with your dog is crucial to better understanding what situations bother him or cause him to be fearful. Being aware of what situations and events make your dog react with fear allows you to redirect or anticipate his behavior so you can prevent a dog bite.

Dogs frequently have negative experiences. What can we do to alter the negative experience and transform the dog's reactive behavior? With my own puppy, here's an issue I had to deal with. My young puppy loved all dogs, but one day she was hurt and scared by a black dog. We had to restore her trust in black dogs. We took the time to give her positive experiences with black dogs. If we did not work on restoring her trust, she could very easily have bitten any black dog just out of fear.

In another instance a dog I know was picked up in a scary situation by a strange man. She is now very scared of all men she doesn't know. When something happens to a dog that is scary or hurtful, their mind snaps a picture. In the case of my puppy, her mind snapped the picture of the "black dog" and with the other dog she snapped a picture of the "strange man."

Have you ever wondered why a dog that is hit by a car is typically not afraid of cars afterwards? It is because at the time the dog actually gets hit his mind has snapped a picture of whatever he was chasing or being chased by. He was not focused on the car at impact.

Just as people need therapy after traumatic situations, so do dogs. If your dog has fear and distrust issues consulting a positive reinforcement dog trainer can help you. Speaking with a professional can help you determine what behavior modification is best for your dog. If you ignore your dog's initial fears, those fears can multiply and produce more undesirable behavior.