

Study: Dogs React to Aggression With Aggression

University of Pennsylvania researchers conduct year-long study on dog training methods.

Posted: February 26, 2009, 5 a.m. EST

Staring down dogs, striking them, or intimidating them with physical manipulation to [tame aggression](#) doesn't work, University of Pennsylvania researchers found. A new, year-long survey of dog owners who use such confrontational training methods also showed that most of these animals reciprocate aggression.

According to the study, published in Applied Animal Behavior Science, dogs elicited very few aggressive responses when training techniques are modified to include non-aversive or neutral methods, such as additional exercise or rewards. The study highlights the risk of dominance-based training, said Meghan Herron, lead author.

"These techniques are fear-eliciting and may lead to owner-directed aggression," she said.

The survey consisted of a 30-item questionnaire that asked dog owners how they treated aggressive behavior, whether there was a positive, negative, or neutral effect on the dog's behavior, and whether aggressive responses resulted from the method they used. A total of 140 surveys were completed.

The responses revealed that 43 percent "hit or kick dog for undesirable behavior," 41 percent indicated they "growl at dog," 39 percent "physically force the release of an item" from a dog's mouth, 31 percent "alpha roll" – rolling the dog onto his back and holding him, 30 percent "stare at or stare down" a dog, and 26 percent "grab dog by jowls and shake."

Herron said these methods of training dogs – all of which may provoke fearful or defensively aggressive reactions – have been made popular by TV, books, and punishment-based training advocates.