

# **Seven Options Worth Considering For Dog Owners with Dogs With Very Serious Behavior Problems (Aggression)**



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To the best of my knowledge, there are only seven options available to dog owners when they have a dog with a very serious behavior problem such as aggression, particularly when that aggression is directed towards humans.

## I. Training

The first option is to try to train the behavior out of the dog or to an extent to where the problem is more manageable. I add the word “try” to “train the behavior out of the dog” because there are variables that impact how successful training might be that don’t always line up favorably with the reality of those responsible for the dog’s actions. Some (but not all) of these realities are:

### **Finding A Real Trainer**

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Sadly, easier said than done as the companion dog training world has historically been, and currently still is, driven and dominated by amateur dog trainers that when it comes right down to it may love dogs but in actuality know very little about the real science of behavior modification.

As a result, the average companion dog owner encounters ‘Might Is Right’, Alpha, Pack Leader, Dominant training about 20% of the time and ‘All Positive/Purely Positive/Force-Free/Never Say No/R+...’, treat, treat, treat the rest of the time. Neither of these ideologies has any applicable science to support the claims the amateurs make. [Amateur driven companion dog training ‘experts’ are a big reason so many companion dogs and dog owners find themselves in these situations.](#)

If you need some guidance on how to tell what to avoid and what to look for I'd recommend reading this: [What Are The Different \(and best\) Puppy and Dog Training Methods \(ebook\)](#)

## **Breed Genetics**

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Some dogs are wired as Ferraris but are being raised, trained and lived with more in a minivan manner. The problem is less the dog as it is the dog in question is too much dog for the owner(s).

## **Bloodline Stability**

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In North America, knowing the difference between a male and a female dog is all that is required to breed a dog. It is almost unheard of for 'breeders' to followup on their bloodlines in a manner that concerns itself with and leads to increased bloodline and breed stability. They irresponsibly typically embrace the belief that 'if there's a problem, they'll call.'

In the world of allegedly purebred dogs, the norm is breeding exclusively or predominantly for 'show' (fashion) as opposed to function and largely (and one might argue entirely) ignoring that far more critical long-term physical and mental stability, instead, in essence leaving it to 'chance'. This has resulted in a multi-million dollar 'Poor-bred' dog breeding industry, rather than legitimately purebred dogs.

Designer dog 'breeding' is now actually acceptable and normal as opposed to being viewed as completely lacking in ethics. In truth considering the practices of the majority of these (and other breeders), they are nothing more than puppy mills with better living conditions driven by willful ignorance and/or stupidity.

Because breeding dogs is an unregulated industry and most people looking for a dog are far more likely to research the next toaster they buy as opposed to the dog they plan on living side by side with for a decade-plus, the field is entirely open for horrible breeding practices.

For what it's worth there are many models in the livestock industry that improve upon genetics. If these same models were embraced, the impact on the dog world would be monumental from both a health and behavior perspective.

However, currently, there simply isn't any motivation for the dog breeding world to embrace these proven models, as unlike the world of agriculture that out of necessity to remain competitive embraces legitimate science, the vast majority of dog breeders have little to no understanding of the science that applies to genetics and behavior. Ironically, dog breeders often boast of their love of and for dogs and yet once would think that if they actually cared about dogs, ethically could show more than words, show ribbons and/or an income stream as their motivation for breeding dogs. [Breeders Vs Greeders VS Puppy Mills.](#)

## **Critical Imprint Period Impact**

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Breeders, veterinarians, and companion dog owners rarely understand what this actually is and does (not puppy socialization classes) and as a result, leave it out of their workflow and guidance recommendations or do so in a manner that certainly does far more harm than good.

This in spite of the fact the research (twenty years of research at the Jackson Laboratory (See Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog) behind it was completed in the 1960s by renowned behavior geneticist

and comparative psychologist Dr. John Paul Scott and biologist and early pioneer of behavior genetics, Dr. John L Fuller.)

As a result, our dogs develop behavior problems that would otherwise be avoided. (Fear - thunder, strangers, children, traffic, etc, and aggression). This ignorance often leads to the amateurs in these worlds making behavior modification recommendations that are inappropriate. A dog's critical imprint period occurs between 3 - 12 weeks of age and contributes to temperament and behavior as much as if not more than genetics. [Socialize Your Puppy for Everything by John Wade \(ebook\)](#)

## **Efficacy (Follow Through)**

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Not all owners follow-through regarding the safety and behavior modification recommendations (supervision, leash, use of crates when leash/crate may be impossible or impractical, etc.). Efficacy can be impacted by how much is left over at the end of the day by the dog's owner(s), the number of owners, how seriously they take the problem and therefore the safety and behavior modification recommendations associated with the rehabilitation process.

## **Owner Handling Ability/Experience**

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As mentioned earlier, some dogs are Ferraris and some dogs are mini-vans. When you combine the potential reality that someone may have a Ferraris and approached living with and training from a mini-van perspective, (as that's typically all they can find for guidance online and through companion dog trainers) they can get into trouble. The reality is that some dogs, some breeds of dogs require more ability and experience in their owners than others.

## Safety

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Weighing the safety of others during the rehabilitation period (which on average runs from 3 months to a full year.) vs the risk of another incident and the associated liability.

## Quality Of Life (Owners)

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The potential negative impact that keeping others safe and getting done what has to be done with the dog will have on the quality of life of the dog owner(s).

## Quality of Life (Dog)

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Even when companion dog training positively impacts a dog's ability to exert self-control, even when the new safety measures have reduced risk to acceptable levels it's important to look at the dog in question from the perspective of quality of life. If the training and safety results in a dog that is constantly suppressing as opposed to being relaxed and non-reactive, that, if it's ongoing is a stressful existence. Whereas the dog owner's problem may have been 'solved', the dog's may not have been.

## 2. Physiological Issues

Although it's rare for it to turn out to be the root cause, disease and injury can contribute to changes in a dog's behavior. Hypothyroidism, for example, can cause aggression. A broken tooth, vision issues, etc, particularly if the behavior is out of character and especially if the dog is over 3 years of age and has lived with the same owner without an issue.

When visiting the veterinarian it is important to provide him or her with a clear understanding that you are not looking for a peripheral 'check-up'. A proper examination should include blood work, X-rays, vision and dental consideration, etc. [Best Time To Get A Blood Panel - Video](#)

### 3. Revisit Efficacy

The third option is to consider whether past recommendations (assuming they were provided by a truly experienced and knowledgeable companion dog trainer) were embraced seriously enough by everyone in a position to influence both safety and behavior modification, and if not whether doing so (getting serious and giving the dog its best chance) might be worthwhile.

### 4. Impact of Additional Safety Strategies

The fourth option is the implementation of higher than average safety strategies. Some people might consider safety protocols such as mandatory crating when there are potential aggression targets around, muzzle training, more secure fences, and gates, etc. as a long term workaround however in most cases it rarely does much more than delay potential future incidents as opposed to extinguishing the bite potential. This is not really an option from a long term perspective, but it might be required for the short term if the possibility for rehab exists in the dog's current setting.

## 5. Rehoming

The fifth option is finding the dog another home. Possible but not probable as even rescues struggle finding homes for dogs without any aggression issues. The idea that a home can be located, “where there are no children,” “no other dogs” or “on a farm” is more mythology than reality. There are no homes where there are no children. They mightn’t live there, but they will be visiting or living nearby. Same regarding no other dogs. Farmers don’t want aggressive dogs any more than anyone else, especially when getting an unaggressive dog is so easy. The only time this option works out is when typically the dog hasn’t yet bitten and fixing the problem has a high probability but the reality of the household the dog currently lives in is such that bringing about the changes is unlikely whereas in another home someone with the right type of experience and lifestyle has a high likelihood of turning the dog around.

## 6. Second Opinion

The sixth option is to get a second opinion. Not from a veterinarian, vet tech, pet store employee, breeder, rescue volunteer, or amateur companion dog trainer, but from a highly experienced and knowledgeable companion dog trainer. None of the aforementioned group are trained in canine behavior, particularly when it comes to dogs with serious behavior problem but this rarely stops them from pretending expertise and speaking with an authority they have not been educated in, or earned. Sometimes a second set of eyes, if they’re the right eyes, can catch something that may have been missed. ([See Skype Consult Option.](#))

## 7. Euthanasia

The last option is a tough one, and that option is euthanasia. However, when a dog is a risk and all of the above options have been eliminated, then responsible dog owners are left with this choice. Setting aside the legal liability aspects of owning an aggressive dog, while I wholeheartedly agree that owning a pet is to be taken as a serious responsibility, that responsibility does not absolve us of our ethical and moral responsibility for the safety of those that live within striking distance of the aggressive dog.

## 8. Guilt

The irony with regard to euthanasia is that this decision along with all of its horrendous emotional fallout lands on the shoulders of the dog's owner. Whereas anyone with a basic understanding of genetics and behavior would understand that in the vast majority of cases it was not the owner or the dog that was the real problem. Almost without exception, they took in a product that was genetically less than just a roll of the dice.

Again, almost without exception, they accepted that the training guidance they were or are offered is based on legitimate behavior modification for life skills in the real world rather than the 'All Positive/Purely Positive/Force-Free/Never Say No/R+...', treat, treat, treat or 'Might Is Right', Alpha, Pack Leader, Dominant ideological pseudo-science nonsense that the dog training and veterinarian world almost solely offers.

Considering the intimate role that the companion dog plays in so many households around the world, and the number of households they exist, one would think that more than “I love dogs” therefore I am a breeder or a dog trainer should be driving breeding and training.

It is the companion dog owner that ultimately signs the responsibility cheque with regard to having to put a dog down or re-home or surrender to a rescue, but more often than not it is the ignorance of breeders and trainers that put them in the position where that cheque needed signing.

Long story short, if you're faced with the final option of euthanasia, in spite of the current animal rights trend to make people feel guilty for putting a dog's 'rights' above their and other's safety, my advice is to ignore it. Your dog, your decision.

Regards,

John 'Ask The Dog Guy' Wade

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