

# Creature COMFORTS

*Hi Daisy,*

*Our Maltese, Sadie, often turns aggressive and bites me and my husband. We don't understand what triggers it, and we want to help her recover from this. Do you have any suggestions?*

It's times like these I wish humans and animals spoke the same language. Actions can indeed speak louder than words, though, and you're off to a good start by trying to find the message in your dog's biting problem. You'll never know Sadie's potentially troubling past, but that doesn't mean your future together can't be great.

My friend Kari Bastyr has a wonderful motto: Every animal deserves a chance. Kari is an animal behaviorist whose Denver-based practice, Wag and Train, has helped dozens of animals break their bad habits. "Aggression needs to be taken seriously in every instance," she says. According to Kari aggressive behavior often goes back to dominance issues. We are, after all, pack animals. While past trauma can come into play, an overly pampered pooch will develop an alpha-dog complex, usually with dangerous consequences—in Sadie's case, biting.

If you really want to nip Sadie's nipping, find an animal behaviorist in your area who can get to know her and teach


you how to manage and modify her aggression. To find the right professional, ask your veterinarian or friends, or search online. Each dog has specific needs, but Kari has a few thoughts. "I hesitate to recommend any punishment or discipline, because it will often make it worse," she says. Instead she suggests treating the underlying anxiety first and then implementing a program to replace a pet's aggression with relaxed, confident behavior. Rather than using choke collars and other harsh "corrective" methods, you can use visual and verbal cues to break your dog's bad behavior patterns, redirect her toward positive behavior, and then reward her for her good manners. One thing you can do now at home is set the record straight with Sadie on who is boss, because although almost all dogs think they want to be the leader, the truth is they feel much happier when they know their humans are in charge. "One of the best



## ASK DAISY

ways to show a dog who the alpha is—the human—is to not allow her to get on the furniture or to sleep with you," says Kari. "It's really hard for some people to detach from their dogs like that, but it helps immediately."

To ease your furry one's anxiety, some vets might prescribe serotonin reuptake inhibitor like Prozac—yup, the same stuff humans take. For alternatives, consult a holistic vet about giving your pet flower essences or herbal supplements. Also, stick with foods free of fillers such as corn or brewer's rice, as these starches turn into anxiety-triggering sugars.

As Kari also likes to remind us: "Dogs are not little kids in fuzzy coats. They only speak dog language." With the help of a professional trainer, as well as some dedication and love on your part, you can become fluent in Sadie's language and finally persuade her to trade in her bites for loving licks! 

**Daisy wants to hear from you!** If you need expert advice on health-care, nutrition, or training for your companion animals, send an email to [daisy@alternativemedicine.com](mailto:daisy@alternativemedicine.com), or mail a letter to Ask Daisy, *Alternative Medicine*, 2995 Wilderness Place, Suite #205, Boulder, CO 80301.