

Understanding *Fear of* **NEAR**



What is fear of NEAR?

NEAR is an acronym for Noisy Exchanges, Arguments and Robust Play.

Think - dogs growling, barking or snarling, the ugly faces of an argument, or the body slams and pinning of boisterous play. These sights and sounds can trigger our hearts to race and adrenaline to flood our body. This is our Fight – Flight response kicking into action - a physiological reaction to situations that we deem dangerous.

**Noisy
Exchanges
Arguments
Robust Play**

What affects our fear of NEAR?

Dogs have a suite of weapons in the shape of their teeth, and jaws with bone-crushing strength. No wonder we have a primitive physiological response to those loud and combative interactions! Our brains are responding in the same way as our cave-dwelling ancestors who came face to face with a sabre-toothed cat. We are pre-programmed to fear threats to our safety.



A previous experience can also influence how we feel. If we found it upsetting, we may subsequently avoid situations that are likely to elicit similar feelings.

The subject of dog behaviour is also rife with bias and misinformation touted as fact. The media reports that dog bites are at 'epidemic' proportions or that particular breeds are more dangerous. When we hear things repeatedly, we may believe they are true and this can influence how we feel about dog interactions.

It is completely normal to have a fear of NEAR, and we should never feel obliged to go outside of our comfort level. However, understanding what is normal dog social behaviour can help us to feel more confident with these interactions. This can result in less stress for us and more freedom for our dogs.

NEAR Fundamentals

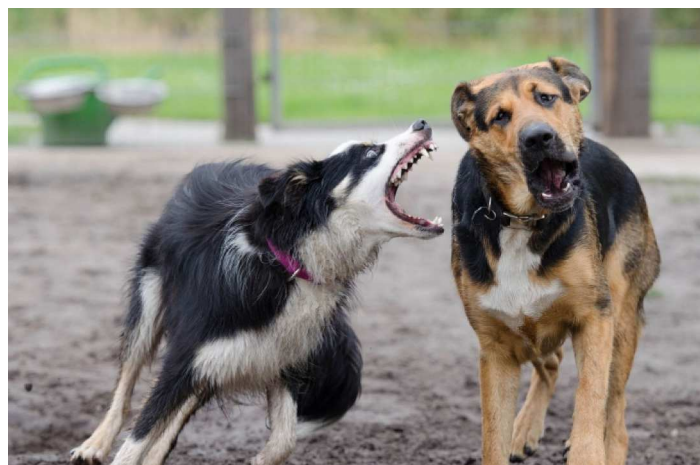
Noisy Exchanges

Some dogs are just plain noisy! Some bark and growl during play. Others snort and grunt. Brachycephalic breeds in particular, such as French Bulldogs and Pugs will often make such sounds, and these can be mistaken for growling and snarling. These sounds are likely caused by their narrowed airways. Whilst that may be a concern from a health point of view, it is not indicative of aggression.

An excited or frustrated dog may whine or bark to gain access to other dogs. This often occurs when they are on-leash or behind a barrier such as a gate or a fence. These dogs usually display good social skills when off-leash. However, some dogs have rusty social skills and trigger a noisy rebuke for their rude approach.

Dogs who are uncomfortable with the proximity of other dogs may issue vocal warnings to keep them away.

Noisy exchanges can occur for a variety of reasons. You may hear them as much in play as during an argument.

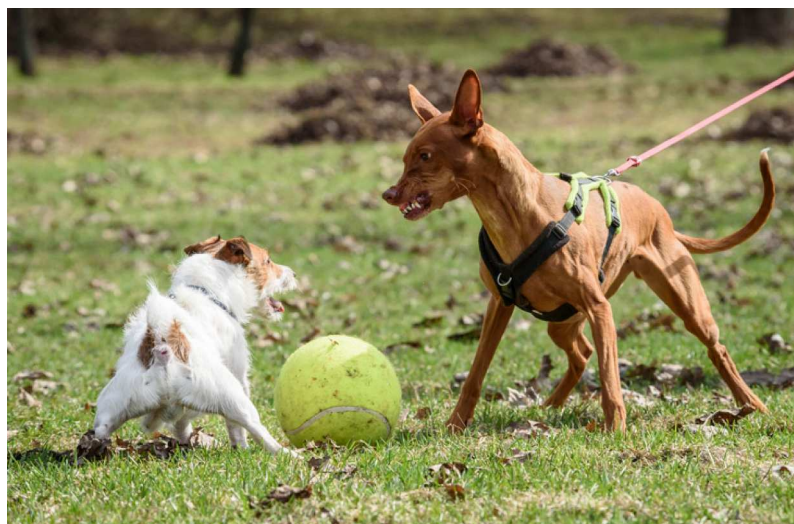


Arguments

Dogs are social animals, and like members of any social species, they sometimes disagree.

Arguments can be triggered when a dog objects to the behaviour of another dog, or when they feel they are too close to them or things they value.

Even minor disputes can look and sound breathtakingly serious. All that growling and baring of teeth can have us pressing the panic button before you can say 'squabble!' However, in the absence of being able to fire off a bad review or to hire a lawyer for the theft of their ball, they resolve conflicts using their species-specific system of communication. Examples include hard stares, growling, snapping, and biting with inhibited force (not using their full jaw strength). This system of communication is referred to as Ritualised Aggression.



Robust Play

Dogs have different styles. Some are 'Colouring Book Kids'. They play quietly and physical contact is gentle. No one worries about this type of play. Then there are the 'Ice Hockey Pros'. These are the no-holds-barred chasers, pinner, mounters, and wrestlers! It's often loud and can look brutal. It's this robust style of play that causes concern.

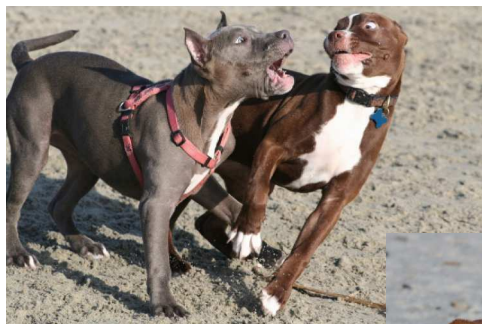
Overcoming your fear of NEAR

It is possible to overcome your fear of NEAR. You can learn some simple skills to improve your recognition of dog body language, normal dog communication, and good social play (play between dogs).

Dogs use body language that can give us information about how they are feeling. If you can identify the low-level signals that dogs use when they start to feel uncomfortable in a situation, you can take action to avoid the need for them to escalate their response.

Dogs use a range of behaviours (ritualised aggression) to communicate their objection to the actions of another dog. It is as normal as us writing a letter of complaint or quarrelling with a partner. Identifying these ritualised behaviours as an argument and not a slippery slope to something more serious, can help us feel more comfortable with them.

Learn to recognise the Four Pillars of Good Play (MARS). You can then identify whether even the rowdiest of interactions is indeed play. If you are unsure, you can conduct a Consent Test to check that all participants are having fun.



The Take-Home Message

Whilst a Fear of NEAR may be a normal human reaction, it can prevent us from allowing dogs with good social and play skills from having social contact with other dogs. However, it is a trade-off. By affording interactions, the chances are that even the most laid-back dogs will disagree with the behaviour of another at some point. It's important to keep our eye on the ball. It isn't the fact that dogs have arguments or how noisy and robust their interactions are that makes them risky but the absence of ritualised aggression and good play skills (MARS).

All my best,

Jane

Links to more info:

[Dog-Dog Play Video - Identifying MARS](#)

[Dog-Dog Play Video - How to Consent Test](#)

[Body Language - Low-level Signals](#)

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