



Common Sense Pet Handling IV

by Donna Anderson

Once, just once, I had the unpleasant task of informing a prospective client that I would not accept the dog-sitting assignment. There were multiple reasons for this decision, not least among them was the fact that this 120lb. Marema Sheepdog” would lunge and attack anything that moved. Cars, kids, bicycles, squirrels and cats were the usual targets. Kids, squirrels and cars I would be able to avoid, but since these prospective clients lived in the city, cars would be impossible to avoid. The owner agreed that the dog did indeed drag him a good part of the way. I felt confident that I would be able to stop the dog from dragging me with leash techniques I’ve learned over the years. But this dog had bitten the owners several times. What would he do to me if I frustrated his plans to pull me around? If while out for a walk he decided to get rid of the nuisance on the end of the leash (me). I would not have the strength to stop him. Since I did not want to put myself in that position, I refused the assignment.

Generally people with large and powerful, or known aggressive dogs, will not try to hire a pet-sitter. They usually realize the potential danger. In the case just mentioned these pet owners not only put the sitter in danger, but their beloved dog as well. Common sense dictates what to do in cases

like these, refuse the visit. Sometimes though, problems can pop up when walking client’s dogs. That are totally unexpected. For instance:

- The occasional dog in a “Dogfight”
- Your client’s dog turns on you
- Your client’s dog slips his collar
- Your client’s dog breaks away

The last two problems can easily be prevented. Make sure the dog’s collar fits snug enough not to slip over the head. Some dogs have necks larger than their heads. In this case use a well fitting slip collar (chain or fabric), or better yet invest in 2 or 3 sizes of “Premier” martingale type collars. They look like regular buckle collars, but adjust to fit a multitude of neck sizes, and when pulled, actually tighten just enough to prevent the collar from slipping off. I keep several in my car to use if a client’s collar looks suspect.

If you always check the dog walking equipment before each walk, keeping in mind the size and power of the dog, breaking equipment won’t be much of a problem. It’s always good to have your own backup collars and leashes available in your car. The leash should be stout enough for the strongest dog. I recommend an excellent quality leather leash

kept in good condition. Another strong leash is one made out of mountain climbing rope, a company called “Alpine Pet” makes these and

When you meet a loose dog on your walk let the two dogs meet and sniff on a SLACK leash. Just like humans, dogs need to greet each other and “shake Hands” so to speak. They need to greet each other and figure a few things out. When you panic and pull the dog to you on a tight leash you do two things. One, you prevent your dog from showing appropriate body language greetings, and Two, you relay your concern right down the leash and create fear or concern in the dog.

When the approaching dog does not see the usual greeting pattern, instead sees mixed messages, he reacts accordingly. He may react aggressively depending on what your dog is able to communicate in his confined state. Remember, all dogs talk to each other with body posture. When you pull a dog to you and hold it you prevent it from effectively communicating. The other dog may misunderstand. Let them sniff and greet; most fights can be averted this

they are guaranteed not to break. The best length to get is 6 feet.

way. Be alert however, a fight may still ensue of neither dog takes the submissive position.

That brings me to the last two problems. A “dogfight” and the dog that turns on you. I recommend that you carry a personal protection device such as “Halt”, pepper spray or a mace. Postal workers always carry “Halt” and use it when necessary. There is also a product on the market that is called “Pet Agree”. It emits a high frequency sound that only dogs can hear. It’s extremely irritating to dogs. Do not ever point the device at a human ear at close range. It is actually painful and may damage the eardrum. It seems to be very effective on dogs. Carry one of these products with you when you walk the client’s dog, for personal protection against assailants and aggressive dogs, including the one you are walking. Having the client’s dog attack you while out for a walk is extremely rare, but can and does happen occasionally. Protect yourself, get the dog home and call the owners, or other contact person.

Donna Anderson has been a trainer with the Richmond Dog Obedience Center, specializing in problem, aggressive dogs and also works as a pet sitter for Pet Pleasers, Inc. She also owns and operates the Virginia Canine School.