



Introduction

Home, sweet home. That harmonious haven where you can relax, unwind, and escape from the stresses of the world, where you can bask in the companionship of your peaceful, happy dogs. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? And it *is* wonderful; that is, unless you have dogs who are not getting along. Then, home life is a whole different story. Having two or more dogs in the house who behave in a less-than-friendly manner toward each other, whether constantly or every now and then, creates a level of tension that can be very stressful. It is difficult for dog owners who have not experienced this type of situation to imagine the strain it can put on relationships and on everyday life.

I do understand, because I have lived through it myself. Both of my dogs were rescued from shelters. My husband and I adopted Sierra, a two-year-old husky-keeshond-mystery mix, in December of 2009. The following September we rescued Bodhi, a year-old malamute-German shepherd mix. We had introduced the dogs at the shelter and they seemed to get along fine. They had played together nicely in the getting-to-know-you area and had ridden companionably on the way home. But over the next few days, their play bouts began to escalate into aggression to the point that we had to intervene. There was friction between them in other situations as well, partly because Bodhi seemingly had no physical boundaries. Have you ever seen how Kramer on *Seinfeld* bursts into a room? That's Bodhi in a nutshell. Not only did he constantly jump on my husband and me while firmly clamping his teeth around our arms and legs (this was actually due to anxiety and insecurity rather than aggression), but he did not seem to notice that he was literally walking all over Sierra. Poor girl! She had been there first and loved receiving gentle affection from us. Now, whenever she was on her way to cuddle heaven, her new brute of a housemate would galumph over and clumsily try to shove his

way in on the action. That did not sit well with Sierra, and a sudden burst of violence would erupt.

There were other issues between the two as well. I could go on and on (and did, in my book *Hit by a Flying Wolf*), but suffice it to say that my skills as a professional canine behavior specialist were sorely tested. Of course, I knew all of the traditional protocols to address inter-dog aggression. Apparently, these dogs had failed to read the right books. While standard techniques had helped so many of my clients' dogs in the past, they were simply not working in my home. And so, I had to become creative in my approach to creating a peaceful relationship. I would not describe fixing a situation like the one I had with Sierra and Bodhi as fast or easy, and I admit that it was so challenging at times that I wondered whether we had made a mistake in adopting Bodhi. But it's now been over seven years since those tension-filled days, and I am grateful that we put in the time and effort to remedy the problems.

The situation with your own dogs may be similar. Or, perhaps it is milder—lucky you! But since you are reading this book, I suspect the friction between your dogs is at least somewhat serious. Maybe one of your dogs guards things from the other, or both are jealous of your attention and affection. Perhaps, as was the case with my dogs, play tends to escalate into violence. Or, maybe your dogs become so stimulated by the arrival of visitors that excitement turns into redirected aggression toward each other. Does any of this sound familiar? If so, you are not alone. In a study done at Tufts University¹, in a sampling of 38 pairs of housemates who were fighting, 46% fought over the owner paying attention to one dog over the other; 31% had altercations stemming from arousal, such as that incited by the arrival of the owners; in 46% of the pairs, conflicts arose over food; and 26% fought over toys or other items. If any of those situations applies to you and your dogs, don't despair. We will address each and every one of those problems. For now, if your dogs are fighting, turn directly to Chapter 14: *When the Fur Flies* to learn how to break up fights safely before proceeding with the rest of the book.

Again, I understand how stressful life can be when your dogs are fighting. I am sure you are feeling frustrated and perhaps helpless. It is understandable that the situation between your dogs is creating disharmony not only in their lives, but in your own. It is no fun to be

constantly walking on eggshells, wondering if a fight is about to break out. And it is incredibly upsetting to witness your dogs fighting or to see one attacking the other. Perhaps you have even come to the point where you are considering whether it would be the best thing for everyone involved to rehome one of the dogs.

Take a deep breath. The good news is, help is here. My goal is to give you as much specific, immediately useful information as I would if we were sitting at your kitchen table discussing your dogs. Throughout the book, I will offer questions for you to consider and will present helpful suggestions. *Part One* begins with an assessment that includes questions I would ask if I were taking a history during our in-person session. These queries will help you to consider your individual situation clearly and objectively. You also will learn how to keep a Behavior Diary to track your dogs' actions and aggressive incidents. Finally, you will create a Profile that pinpoints specific situations and triggers that cause tension between your dogs. This last document is crucial, as it will contain complete solutions by the time you have finished the book. We will also focus on the all-important topic of canine body language. If you are able to detect the subtle signals displayed by your dogs when they are first becoming tense, you will be able to intervene before the situation escalates. Lastly, we will discuss the much-misinterpreted concept of dominance.

Part Two outlines a Firm Foundation Program. Dogs who receive proper nutrition, exercise, and mental stimulation, are well managed, and have a confident leader are less likely to feel on edge and are therefore less likely to trigger easily. We will explore each of those factors individually so that you can make changes where necessary. Because your dogs may currently need to be separated due to fighting, we will also cover how to ensure safe separations, as well as the proper use of muzzles. Muzzles can come in handy when reintroducing dogs; if your situation calls for muzzles, it is best to begin gradually conditioning your dogs to them early on. This section also includes important information about how to safely break up a fight. Again, if your dogs are currently fighting, turn to those pages right away.

Part Three is all about teaching your dogs useful behaviors that will make your daily life much easier. The impact that training has on the amount of control you have over your dogs and on how they interact with each

other cannot be overstated. Don't worry if your dogs have never taken an obedience class. We will start with the basics of sit, down, and stay, and build from there. Your dogs will learn to pay attention, to come when called, to leave things alone when asked—including each other—and to master a handy skill called targeting. With the help of step-by-step instructions and photographs, it will be easier than you might think.

Part Four is where we get into the meat and potatoes of problem solving. You will learn valuable techniques and protocols to address specific situations, and will be able to apply the training skills you have taught. Whether your dogs guard resources from each other, are jealous over your attention, become overly stimulated by the arrival of visitors, or tend to turn playtime into slay time, the answers are here. Covered too are what to do when a new dog is not getting along with a resident dog (along with how to prevent problems from arising in the first place), and how to address the issue of a young dog pestering an old one. Lastly, we will discuss how to reintroduce dogs who have been separated, and how to safely take your dogs on walks together.

Training and behavior modification can go a long way toward helping your dogs to live in harmony. In addition, there are a variety of complementary therapies and products that are aimed at helping your dogs to feel calmer across the board, which can result in lower tension levels. In *Part Five* you will find information about pheromones, body wraps, TTouch, natural remedies, and pharmacological intervention. You will almost certainly not end up using all of those things, but you might find that a particular one is just the thing to take the edge off and help your dogs to relax, which will make your behavior modification programs that much more successful.

Part Six includes a chapter that will help you to consider a variety of options, should you feel that your dogs' issues cannot be resolved. My hope, of course, is that you will find this information to be completely unnecessary. By this point, you will have gained knowledge that will allow you to formulate effective solutions to the problems outlined in your Profile. Part Six will assist you in putting it all together to ensure that your initial document morphs into a cohesive overall plan. Lastly, you will find the *Resources* section, which provides links and information to all of the products, organizations, and professionals mentioned throughout the book.

Although you can certainly skip around or skim chapters, other than immediately reading about safely breaking up fights and conditioning your dogs to muzzles if necessary, I strongly urge you to start at the beginning and read all the way through in sequence. There are techniques that build upon earlier concepts, and the behavior protocols will be much easier to implement if you follow along and do the suggested training exercises first. Before we dive in, though, there is one thing I would like you to consider. Although I will be doing all that I can to assist you, if your situation is dire—for example, your dogs are fighting to the point that one or more have been seriously injured—I strongly suggest that, along with reading this book, you engage the services of a canine behavior professional. That advice goes double if there are children in your home, as it is all too easy for a child to become caught in the middle of a conflict.

I know, you're probably thinking, *Why am I reading this book if I'm going to have to hire a professional anyway?* Even if you do engage the assistance of a professional, it is still extremely important that you read the book in its entirety and complete the exercises, for two very good reasons: First, the issues between your dogs must be clearly defined in as much detail as possible. As the person who lives with them day in and day out, the Behavior Diary you create, along with the knowledge you gain, will help you to accurately pinpoint your dogs' behaviors and the reasons behind them. There is a huge difference between simply telling a professional that your dogs are fighting, and being able to provide precise details. The latter will contribute immensely to the creation of a successful behavior protocol. Second, by reading through the entire book, you will come away with an understanding of how your dogs' conflicts should be addressed. Not all trainers and behavior specialists are created equal, so it is imperative that you are armed with knowledge as to which types of training and behavior modification techniques should or should not be implemented. You might even choose to discuss the protocols suggested in these pages with the professional so that you can work through them together.

Speaking of professionals, in most parts of the United States, there is no license required to become a professional dog trainer. You could hang out a shingle tomorrow and start booking clients. Sounds great, eh? Actually, it's a travesty. That lack of enforced standards means that you need to carefully research all potential candidates. I have seen "professional" trainers who have no education or experience whatsoever and have very poor training

skills. Fortunately, I have seen and know many skilled, experienced trainers and behavior specialists as well. While we are on the subject, you may hear professionals refer to themselves as *trainers*, *behavior specialists*, or *behaviorists*. What's the difference? Technically, anyone can call themselves a trainer or a behavior specialist. Many *trainers* teach basic obedience, conduct group classes, and offer private, in-home lessons. They might address issues such as potty training, jumping on visitors, house manners, and more. Some trainers limit themselves to those types of problems, while some also handle more complex issues such as aggression, fear, and separation anxiety, which require a greater degree of understanding of canine behavior. The latter may refer to themselves as *behavior specialists*. Some trainers and behavior specialists choose to become certified through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT), which requires passing a written exam, having a certain amount of experience, and more.

A *veterinary behaviorist* is a veterinarian who has completed a specialized training program in veterinary behavior and has achieved board certification through the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists. This is the only one of the aforementioned classifications that is able to prescribe drugs. Although there are all too many trainers who call themselves behaviorists, technically, they do not carry those credentials. Working with a veterinary behaviorist may not be necessary, however, as even if your dog does require medication, a qualified behavior specialist can work hand in hand with your veterinarian to address your dog's issues.

So, how do you find the right professional? Begin your search by visiting the websites of the organizations mentioned in the *Resources* section. Their Trainer Search functions will allow you to search for a professional in your area by city, zip code, and distance. Interview each potential candidate in depth. Topics to ask about are years of experience, areas of specialization, and the amount of experience and success the trainer has had specifically in working with dogs who are fighting in the home. Also—and this is crucial—ask about *training methods*. Don't take "We use positive methods" as an answer. While that is a good start, I have yet to hear anyone say "We use negative methods" or "We jerk your dog 'til he stops!"

Unfortunately, some trainers address unwanted behaviors by using harsh physical punishment, which can range from a hard jerk on a choke chain

to a shock from a collar worn around the neck. While those tactics might well stop the behavior at the moment, they will not solve the underlying problem, and they can cause stress, frustration, and further problems. For example, when two dogs are fighting, some trainers will put a shock collar (also called an electronic or e-collar) on one or both dogs, and will press the remote to deliver a shock when the dog looks at or makes a move toward the other. This is not a good idea, nor do I recommend shock collars. A dog who is feeling pain while looking at another dog could immediately associate the pain with that dog, which could create a lasting negative association or cause an existing one to worsen.

Also, things can go wrong when using punishment. I once had a client who had been instructed by his previous trainer to put shock collars on his fighting Labrador retrievers, Jake and Bailey. One day, Jake gave Bailey a hard stare and the man pressed the button on the remote. Jake noticed this, and associated the man with the shock. The next time the man pressed the button, Jake attacked him. The man was badly bitten, and the issues between the dogs escalated. *Pain has no place in dog training, and could very well traumatize your dogs.* What you want is a modern, enlightened trainer who will help you to figure out what your dogs' specific triggers are (which you will already have a head start on, thanks to this book) and will create a protocol to address those triggers efficiently by the use of compassionate, scientifically valid methods. Do not be afraid to ask professionals about what sorts of specific tools and techniques they will or will not use. They should be more than happy to answer your questions. If you do not feel comfortable with someone for any reason, move on. There are plenty of well informed, skilled, friendly professionals who will be happy to assist you.

Whether you choose to employ the services of a professional or handle things on your own, it is now time to get started. Turn the page and let's begin our journey toward restoring harmony between your dogs and peace to your home.