

Dog breed behaviors and traits

The breed issues that are mentioned below are the most common breeds I get calls for. I'm not suggesting that every dog of the breed will behave the same; this is simply a record of my personal experience. After working for a decade as a professional dog behavior specialist I've noticed patterns related to certain breeds and the specific issues that prompted their humans to reach out for help.

Before listing these breed-behavior combinations let me first say, there are some behaviors which are common no matter the breed. When no one teaches dogs the rules, they will do whatever they want. Many of the most common issues are related to the dog's age and are expected to occur with just about every dog. The age range of dogs I get the most calls about is six to 18 months; the beginning of adolescence into young adulthood. It should be no surprise that an adolescent is going to push boundaries and strive to be more independent. Some typical issues that start during adolescence are, pulling on the leash, jumping on people, not coming when called, chewing things up, nipping or even biting people, and behaving inappropriately around other dogs. In many of these cases dogs have gotten off track simply because their people didn't know how to set boundaries and teach them the rules.

Pit Bull breeds are the number one type of dog I get calls to help with. There is no one Pit Bull breed. There are a group of breeds that fall into what are commonly referred to as Pit Bulls. They are the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier and, for the most part, any mixes that appear to look similar to these breeds. There are more Pit Bull type dogs around than other breeds. So, the reason there are more calls to work with them is strictly a numbers thing. Go to any animal shelter and at least half of the dogs will be labeled as Pit Bulls. Calls for help with Pit Bull dogs vary greatly and despite the reputation they have been given, most of my calls are not related to aggression. Usually help is needed with basic manners, like pulling on the leash and jumping up on people. However, when the call is

for an aggressive Pit Bull the aggression is usually directed toward other animals, and rarely towards humans. At the end of the day, Pit Bull dogs are extremely sensitive beings and it is usually fear that results in aggression. With Pit Bulls and most dogs the first aggressive incident usually happens between the dogs' first and second birthdays.

German Shepherd Dogs (GSD) are the next most common breed I get calls about. Typically, GSD are highly anxious and/or trying to dominate the home; usually they are a combination of the two. An anxious-dominant dog is the most likely type of dog to bite, and Shepherds are usually at or near the top of the list of breeds that bite the most people each year. GSD must be with their people! They do not do well as outdoor-only pets, as this causes them a great deal of stress. The result of this stress often is separation anxiety and frustration. Many GSD owners call because their dogs have become destructive, are barking a lot, and are showing aggression towards people. I love getting GSD calls because they are usually easy to fix. Shepherds are so smart and are huge rule followers. When the relationship with their humans is right they will do anything asked of them.

Labrador Retrievers are another breed known for having higher instances of separation anxiety. Otherwise, most Lab calls are due to adolescence and general manners issues.

Australian Shepherd and Border Collie owners who call usually didn't realize how extremely high energy and intelligent these dogs are. The average home does not provide enough mental stimulation and exercise to meet the needs of these breeds. These dogs want to control everyone in their surroundings and may nip people's legs while attempting to do so. They are often hypersensitive to sound and sights which causes them to bark a lot and overreact to seemingly mundane things. What may be normal behavior for these herding breeds would be considered ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) for most other dogs.

Australian Cattle Dogs (ACD) can be described as having the same behaviors as

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Australian Shepherds and Border Collies, but multiplied by ten. They are much more pushy and controlling. They are more likely to be aggressive. It takes a bold and confident person to get the respect of an ACD. Cattle dogs have no problem lashing out at those who come across as weak while handling them.

Huskies seem to be more popular lately as I am getting more calls to help with them. Most of the time the issues mentioned are typical traits of the breed. While most dog breeds are athletes, Huskies are super-athletes. They are independent minded and can be defiant with their humans. While they generally like other dogs, they can be quite dominant with them. Huskies often have a high prey drive, which means they may be easily triggered to stalk and attack small to medium sized animals. In groups they may work together and target larger animals. Huskies are also notorious for not coming when called. They are escape artists and need unusually high fences to keep them contained. When off-leash outside of a fenced area they are at risk of running far, far away very quickly.

Beagles are another breed that often cannot be allowed off-leash in open areas. Their noses will lead them away on a sniffing adventure in no time, and they will not respond to calls to come back.

Yorkshire Terriers (Yorkies) are so tiny and cute, however people don't realize how bossy they can be. They were designed to be lap dogs and as a result do not like to be left alone. Not being with their humans can be very stressful for Yorkies. Some of the most extreme cases of separation anxiety I've seen have been with this breed. Yorkies usually succeed in running the houses they live in and if they had their way their people would never be allowed to leave. Another issue Yorkshire Terrier owners call about is housetraining. This

breed is notoriously difficult to housetrain.

Doodles (Labradoodle, Goldendoodle, and Aussiedoodle) are almost always the same call from their humans. The dogs are jumping on everyone, pulling on the leash like freight trains, and barking too much. These dogs have such an exuberance and enthusiasm about life. However, many seem to have a hard time finding their impulse control. Most clients complain about their Doodles stealing things like socks and dish towels, and delight in being chased around as their humans try to get the items back. It is a concern as many of these dogs will swallow the items. In 10 years I've only had one aggressive Doodle call.

Golden Retrievers (Goldens) typically start off with the same issues as the Doodles, but do seem to find their impulse control by the time they are adults. I don't get a lot of Golden calls, but when I do they are usually aggression cases. Not the run-of-the-mill aggression case, but Cujo-like aggression. I am not usually fearful around dogs, even aggressive ones, but some of my most terrifying client dogs have been Golden Retrievers. Since it is so out of character for Goldens to be aggressive, these

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