

You Can't Ban Snoopy
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I was working with two families in semi-private sessions. The mothers were friends and got puppies at the same time from the same breeder. They wanted to work together with their pups and children in semi-private sessions: I accommodated them. One mother had many complaints about her puppy – twelve weeks old at the start of our sessions. I will concentrate on this pup. The puppy would bite and grab, snarl and lunge at the children – especially her younger boys ages four and twelve. The puppy had singled out the youngest on several occasions and even drew blood. The pup was a real terror. When I was not at the house, I could expect at least one call each week regarding the puppy's behavior. What if I told you the puppy was a pit bull?

Right now you are probably thinking: "Get rid of the dog! This breed is dangerous and should never be owned. They need to be banned for public safety. This is what the owners get for buying this breed!"

Here is a little more about the home environment the puppy was living in. Two parent household, pretty affluent region. Mom is at home primarily. She supposedly had time to devote to a pup and she taught parenting classes in the evenings. Dad was locally respected. They have three boys ages four, twelve and seventeen. The breed of dog that best fit their home was well researched: books were read, people talked to, a good breeder found. Mom read eight books on dog training and care alone before getting the pup. It was impressive the time and effort they put into the choice of a dog for the family. They knew the importance of early training and socializing so as soon as the pup was fully inoculated, they contacted me. Mom focused intently during our sessions and took notes! The middle child took part in lessons. The pup was a demon. She was wild and bit him a lot. What if I told you the pup was a Rottweiler?

Right now you are probably thinking, "Get rid of the dog! Rotties are a dangerous breed and should not be kept as pets. No matter how good a family is, the dogs are too risky! They should be banned!"

The puppy was very active and the breeder bred for strong traits. Working dogs. The pup was self-willed, driven and high energy. Mom knew the importance of teaching the puppy it was not good to use her mouth on humans. Mom was very worried about the pup's increasing "aggression" to the younger boys. Well, when mom left the room to answer the phone (remember semi-private sessions at her home with another pup) the younger boys immediately started playing with the pup in ways that taught the puppy it was good to bite people! I stopped the boys and the middle son said this was how they played with her all the time – especially when mom was not there! The pup was playing as roughly with the boys as she did the other puppy. However, if she got too rough with the other puppy, the other pup would yelp and let her know that play needed to tone down – and it would. Cannot play nice, play will stop. However, the boys did not do this. Puppy learned that tackling and biting hard was a good game with people! When I

pointed this out to mom, she just commented that boys would be boys. I explained that this is why the pup was a biter – her boys' actions. Stop the boys and have them play different, safer games, do some retraining of manners and the pup would turn around.

I reminded mom that the pup needed about three to five short practice sessions a day plus integrating lessons into daily life. Mom could not squeeze out the time to work with the pup – or the boys. Remember, she is mainly an at-home Mom. I asked about the exercise the pup was getting. She was a high-energy girl with a lot of drive that needed to be directed to good activities. Mom said the pup spent much of the day in the kitchen because she was such a terror. The pup needed a good combination of exercise and quiet time – but all she was getting was confinement to a small area in the kitchen! Then mom told me about all the different techniques they were using throughout the days to teach the puppy. The pup had no consistency. The pup was confused as she never knew what to expect, what cues would be used or anything. This was contrary to what I explained our first meeting. I had explained that if they did not see improvement in a week of one technique, I would trouble shoot and teach another the following week. Expecting something to work the first time is unreasonable. So, pup being taught biting humans is good, pup not getting enough balance of exercise and quiet time, pup confused. Bad combination.

Mom called to say the pup was a real menace but they had to stop sessions because they did not have the time to devote to formal classes any more, as their schedules got more hectic with activities every day during and after school. She did not have the time to supervise the boys and the puppy's playing. The pup would stay in the kitchen and maybe they would re-home her if her biting and rough play got worse. Dad already was set to send the pup out. Now, what if I tell you the puppy was a Beagle? You know: Snoopy? You are probably thinking, "Oh that poor pup! It is going to suffer because of owners who did not care enough to give the pup what it needed and teach it manners. Owners like this should not have dogs!"

Why is there a difference in opinion? Is it because Beagles are cute and cuddly? If I continued to say the pup was a pit or Rottie, would your attitude have stayed the same or would you pity the dog? Rarely is it the dog that is the problem. No matter what breed this puppy was, her behavior was caused due to lack of action from her owners. They wanted the perfect "Norman Rockwell" image and a dog would complete that. However, they were not willing to do the work it takes to make any breed or cross a good and well-mannered companion. However, we will never hear people crying to ban Snoopy. You cannot ban Snoopy! So why do we call for banning of other breeds as opposed to looking at the dog's environment as the root cause of most problems?

In addition, during that last call from Mom, I was told they had given up another dog not that long before they got the Beagle. The reason: "The dog kept biting the boys."