

## Help! My Puppy Is A Bully And Plays Too Rough

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG I have a news flash for you. Some puppies are just bullies. I'm not talking about the cute little Bull Terrier type bullies - of course, they are cute and they're bullies. I'm talking about your basic school playground, push you down in the mud, still your lunch money kind of bullies. Some puppies are just that. Today we're gonna talk about why it's important that you realize this and what you can do about it.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I'm gonna start this podcast with a story. In the mid-nineties, I had a Jack Russell named Twister who I bred, and she had one puppy. Now one puppy is horrific. One Terrier puppy in my mind is really bad. Why? Because puppies learn from littermates. They learn social cues. They learn so much.

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And so coincidentally, a friend of mine at the same time, the same day had a litter of seven Border Collie puppies. And Sally, shout out to Sally, was kind enough to let me borrow one of those puppies and allow little baby Wink to have a littermate. Now, as they grew up, they started to interact. And about three weeks so of age is when you'll see puppies attempt to play with another puppy.

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Now by this point, the Border Collie puppy weighed almost twice as much as the little Jack Russell puppy. And here's how that first interaction went. Border Collie puppy kind of stomps over and plops two paws on the little Jack Russell puppy. And Jack Russell puppy does nothing. And this is when I really got interested in the nonverbal communication between dogs.

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Because I saw what I referred to in podcast [episode number 157](#), the signs of the calming signals or signs of stress that this Jack Russell at three and a half weeks old showed the Border Collie puppy. Things like freezing, turning his head away and yawning. This little Jack Russell puppy did that to the Border Collie anytime the Border Collie would come and smash him in the head with his paws.

This went on for about two days and the third day the little Border Collie laid down and went up to the Jack Russell and just reached out one paw very gently and touched his nose. So, the Jack Russell went "Okay." and reached out and touched his paw.

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And as you can imagine, it didn't take long before these two became best of friends. So, it was his approach up to play that needed to be altered. And once a puppy gets that they will adapt to the other puppies and dogs in their environment. But what happens when they don't? You end up with a puppy that's a bully. And here's some reasons why it might happen.

You might have a puppy who was a [singleton puppy](#), and they didn't get a chance to learn from other puppies the appropriate way to read dog body language. So, they have to learn as they grow. It isn't just a coincidence that a lot of singleton puppies, meaning puppies without littermates grow up to be dog aggressive dogs.



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It's not just a coincidence because they don't get the chance to read those really important cues. Reason number two is you may have got a puppy way too young. Now it's common— it's not uncommon for breeders to want the puppies out of their home between six and seven weeks. Way too long. I would actually not take a puppy if the breeder needed it gone by that age. I have taken them at seven weeks, but I much prefer to get my puppy closer to nine weeks, maybe even 10 weeks, depending on the breed.

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So, if you have a breeder that says you have to pick up your puppy by six weeks by seven weeks, I would say respectfully I'm gonna move on to another. And you might even have that discussion up front, "when do you typically send your puppies home?". Here's what I've observed as a breeder myself. The first three weeks puppies are pretty much lumps that the mother just fully cares for.

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Then three to six weeks the puppies learn to interact, and they learn from each other. At first, the growling is like so out of control, and you think "my gosh, these puppies are crazy." They learn to tone it down. They learn to play respectfully. And around seven, eight, and nine weeks is when I see the mother come back in and really teach effective cues and the appropriate way to respond to adult dogs.

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And so that's why I love having puppies hang around till 9 or 10 weeks of age when possible. Now there may also be a case as there was with my dog Buzz, his mother just didn't like puppies. And when I picked him up at seven weeks of age, I asked can I get a picture with his mother? And the breeder said, "Oh, she doesn't like puppies."

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And she actually at three weeks of age bit one of the puppies and crushed its sinus, that should have been the sign for me. All puppies in that litter, dog aggressive, including Buzz. I wrote about it in [Shaping Success](#) - what I had to do to help him overcome his uncomfortableness with other dogs. So, there's a lot of reasons why puppies are inappropriate with their play style or why they just avoid play altogether.

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And there's things that you can do about it. So ideally your puppy did get great puppy socialization, but guess what, if it didn't happen you can still help them. For example, Tater Salad was from a puppy mill. He then was sold probably around three weeks of age to a puppy broker where he got to live probably with his littermates. And then he was sold to his first home. Now it's not a surprise that he was thrown out of two puppy daycares because he had inappropriate play styles. And when we got him, that was something we had to teach him, is how to appropriately play with adult dogs.

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And so, if you are seeing signs that your puppy isn't appropriate, guess what, you can still help them. More on that in a second. So, when you have your puppy at a puppy socialization class, make sure that it isn't just a free for all. Observe your puppy's play style. And ideally you would like that your puppy to be in a group with puppies that are slightly above and slightly below his play style or her play style so that they can learn to adapt.



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So, if it's a softer puppy they're playing with, do they keep bullying that puppy and running him down and grabbing him and it's only one way play? Puppy play needs to be two ways. So, a bigger puppy or a maybe a puppy that's used to doing whatever it wants should show signs of self-handicapping with a smaller puppy. Like getting low, lying down, approaching gingerly, rolling on their back possibly. That's what you want to see.

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And if you don't see it, then you can use what I talked about in [podcast episode 158](#), a positive interrupter. Just use your sound to call your puppy back. Ideally, the other puppy is going to give cues to your puppy "I'm not gonna play with you when you keep doing this." So, you're going to let it go on, but not too long because that other puppy is not having a great time and can learn to just not like other puppies, AKA other dogs, later on in life.

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If you've got a big bruiser who let's face it is just not reading the room, you can— yeah not reading the room you know like bringing jello shots to a Baptist church picnic. Some puppies just don't effectively read the other body language of puppies. So that's where your positive interrupters are going to come in.

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Get your puppy back so your puppy will learn 'Hey, every time I jump on another puppy's head and flatten them, my owner calls me back.' Now you're gonna call them back and give them a treat, lower value treat. But it's going to interrupt that play. So, the puppy will learn "Well hey, when I don't play so rough my owner doesn't call me back." And so, the puppy may adapt their place style just based on how many positive interrupters you're giving them.

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Yes, you're being positive but hey playing with other puppies is also really, really positive. Now let's say you have the other, you have the puppy that is maybe physically a lot smaller, or they just may be softer. And they're the ones that are hiding under the table legs. Now, if it's a really good, structured puppy socialization area, they will have places for softer puppies to play.

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But if you're in a puppy class where the instructor just thinks, "Yeah puppy, all puppies will play, and they'll get along." then you've got to advocate for your puppy and say, "Hey I see that this puppy is more on the level of play as my puppy. Can they just have time alone?" So, when I ran puppy classes I would do that. I would just take maybe two puppies who were rougher and let them play with each other until I saw them bending to the other back and forth.

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Then I would bring in a lower-level puppy or I take two softer puppies and let them learn to interact safely where one isn't going to bombard the other.

So, if you're in a class where that's not happening just talk to the instructor at the end of class and say, "Hey, this is what I'm observing. And here are the signs. Boom, boom, boom. That show that my puppy is showing signs of stress or that they are uncomfortable. Is it possible to alter what we're doing?"



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Now I don't want you to, you know, watch [podcast number 158](#) and then come back and anytime you're probably stressed y'all just go "I got to get him out of there!" Stress is a sign of growth. Stress is a sign of learning. So, they can be a little uncomfortable. It's when you see this as a pattern or you see it in a severe case, like your puppy is pinned in a corner. You, you know, you've got to go and help them. Okay.

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What about, as I mentioned off the top, you have a bully puppy. Not a breed, a puppy that just doesn't read the room and you bring them home and they badger your adult dog. Here's a protocol that I would love you to adopt because your adult dog doesn't deserve to be put in that situation. Your adult dog shouldn't have to deal with that stress.

Here's the thing. Most adult dogs will give puppies a free pass. Now the free pass might go from eight weeks to six months. The free pass might go from eight weeks and one minute to eight weeks and two minutes. Some dogs just have zero tolerance for puppies. Buzz was one of those dogs. And it's not surprising based on his mother's reaction with puppies.

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And so, what I would do with Buzz is I would not let the puppies interact with him. But two times over his lifetime the puppy escaped and ran right up to Buzz and what he would do is he would pelt them. Meaning he would give them an inhibited bite on the nose. Always would leave a little mark on their nose that a day later turned into a scab. Pelting, an inhibited bite that made it very clear to the puppy "I am not your BFF. You and I, we can cohabitate, but we will never be playmates."

And so, I was protective of Buzz. I didn't want to put him in a position where he had to do that. Once the puppies learned to read body language better, for most puppies it was five or six months old. They could be in the same room with Buzz. They could cohabitate with him, and everyone was fine. I never ever had a problem. I never ever had a situation where I had to gate one dog for life against another dog because the otherwise there'd be this all-out battle.

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And we're gonna avoid that by being protective of your adult dog. Because if that adult dog keeps getting badgered by the puppy, then what that adult dog will do is just snap. At one point, they're just gonna go at that puppy. And it may not be inhibited. So, let's talk about how to help those puppies who are a little bit more exuberant, who maybe haven't learned how to read the room and haven't got all of those signals on how to take in, receive process, and understand what other dogs are saying to them.

So, first off you need to know how to introduce a puppy to an adult dog. And I wouldn't, if I had a dog like Buzz, I just wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do it in four months down the road. If I knew my dog did not like puppies, I would not make them cohabitate.

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I would do as I mentioned podcast [episode number 72](#), the togetherness project. A week after I got the puppy home, I would start project togetherness through barriers so that my adult dog learns there's another puppy in the house and everything's cool. So, if you have a dog that doesn't like other puppies, don't even try. Don't even try. Project togetherness will help them learn to cohabitate. And that is all you could ever hope for.



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But let's say you have a dog you know oh they love puppies, or they at least tolerate puppies really well. But the puppy is inappropriate.

As I showed in podcast [episode number 157](#) with Bling and the puppy Acre, Acre was relentless jumping on Bling's head, punching her in the head, grabbing her biting, trying to jump on her back. It was relentless.

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And so, Bling needed help. And the first thing we're gonna do is make sure both puppy and adult dog are safe in their own spaces. Which means you need a puppy den. You need a puppy playhouse and ex-pen. I've talked about how to set up your gated community for your puppy in podcast [episode number 30](#).

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So, you're going to have an area where the puppy is safe and you're going to have an area for your dog where they still get attention from you, but they feel safe. Number two thing you're going to do is you're gonna teach that puppy a positive interrupter. As I talked about in podcast [episode number 158](#), that is a cue that the puppy knows means come to me.

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And so, you're going to work on that for several weeks before you try to reintroduce the puppy and the dog meanwhile project togetherness for your puppy and your dog.

Number three, when you decide to give that dog another chance in being around your adult dog, you're gonna set up the environment so that adult dog has an escape. Either a chair in the room that they can jump up on that the puppy isn't strong enough or tall enough to get up there as well. Or you're gonna do this in a gated area that has a low door that you can tell your adult dog to jump up and over.

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The things that I would be working on in the three weeks between allowing them to interact and their first session back together would be of course my positive interrupter. All of the puppies [Recallers games](#) and the recall so that I'm building a bond for me so it's easy for that puppy to come away from the adult dog to want to come back to me.

Number four, you're gonna ask around and ask if any of your friends have adult dogs that are very appropriate with puppies that your puppy could learn more appropriate body language from.

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So, in Bling's case, she showed all the appropriate calming cues to Acre. Acre didn't receive them, and Bling didn't follow it up by saying, "Listen, I don't want you to do this anymore." Bling just kept saying, "Yeah, puppy license is ongoing. You can keep doing anything you want to me and I'm a hundred percent okay."

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Now, if your adult dog does decide to discipline your puppy, you might not like it. Your adult dog may go like make this guttural growl. Your puppy may yelp, and you've got to be okay and do not discipline your adult dog. Now, if the puppy runs away and the adult dog keeps growling and chasing it, then you can use your positive interrupter to get your adult dog away from the puppy.



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But most adult dogs will do it once and then show a calming signal to the puppy. They may show several calming signals to the puppy. I had a dog who was actually the grandfather of my now seven-year-old dog Momentum. And he was phenomenal with puppies. If he had to discipline them, he'd like squish them underneath lay on them. And then he would, if they ran away he would get on his belly and chase him down and start giving them calming signals and get them to reengage with him.

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That's the ultimate for an adult dog puppy interaction. I wish I had videos to show you of how great Quid was with puppies. And so don't be freaked out if your adult dog has to discipline your puppy, but always be aware of it should be quick, it should be over with fast. There shouldn't be any kind of a mark on your puppy.

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So even if you get the pelting like I got with Buzzy, that might be too far for the first-time discipline. And that could be telling you that your dog just doesn't want to be around this puppy. But again, always, always be safe. If you aren't sure about your adult dog, then work on project togetherness before you do that first introduction.

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Okay. So now we are going to try to reintroduce the puppy to the adult dog. You're gonna do a few things. Your adult dog has that escape route. You can use your positive interrupters. You can physically, as they're playing, just walk in between them. Which is going to give your adult dog a chance to get away.

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You can actually like be a goalie and kind of protect your, if your puppy tries to dart around you. You could also just grab the collar, give a cookie and just kind of stroke your puppy and tell you see signs that "Oh. Oh, okay yeah. It's you." And if you don't see that clip the leash on, get them out of the environment, allow them time to calm down and then bring them back.

So positive interrupters physically going in between the dog and the puppy, doing a collar grab and giving a puppy a cookie to help them calm down. Or just getting in between the two, calling the puppy and getting them out of that area.

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We want you to be the interrupter that tells the puppy "When you've gone too far, you've jumped, you've bitten, and you haven't read the signs. I'm going to interrupt your play." Yes, we're going to interrupt it with fun stuff from us, like a collar grab and a cookie or a positive interrupter or chase me out of the room. But at the end of the day, what the puppy might want is more play with the adult.

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And so, they learn "Heck when I play like the Border Collie puppy did at three weeks, kindly my mom doesn't interrupt me. But when I play like a bull in a china shop—" What does a bull in a china shop really look like? I'm not sure. "When I play like a bull in a china shop, my mom keeps interrupting me." Eventually, your puppy will read the signs from you that they aren't reading from your adult dog. And that's when you know you're on your way to your puppy and your dog [getting along well](#).



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The last thing that I would do, and the final step is introduce your puppy to the [Hot Zone game](#). I'm gonna leave a link in the show notes, how you can learn more about the Hot Zone game. But it's a game where when the puppy gets older, you can give your positive interrupter, have the puppy come back, hop up in a Hot Zone and you can reinforce that behavior rather than always [chaining](#) 'I bite this dog. I get a cookie. I bite this dog. I get a cookie.'

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Now when your adult dog is put back in the situation where you're reintroducing the puppy, make sure that you reinforce them. So, if they jump up in the chair because they want to get away from the puppy, give them cookies for that. Good choice. "Thank you for letting me know how you feel."

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It's not just about always reinforcing the puppy, which is why it's great if there's two people that are doing this. Working one might reinforce the adult dog, one might reinforce a puppy and you could switch off. But hey, I've done this by myself many, many times.

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Okay. There, you have it. A complete strategy for you to help your puppy learn how to read a room better and how your adult dog can learn to at the very least cohabitate with a new puppy, and maybe ideally learn that it's safe to play with that puppy and you are gonna be there and have their six. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 157: Dog Body Language: Understanding Canine Communication Signals And Emotions](#)

[Blog Post: Socializing the Singleton Puppy: Swagger's Big Adventures](#)

[Podcast Episode 158: Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter](#)

[Book: Shaping Success by Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 72: Preventing Dog Aggression: Introducing Dogs or Puppies with Project Togetherness](#)

[Podcast Episode 30: Why Dog Crates Are Not Dog Cages](#)

[Recallers](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Living with Multiple Dogs Tips with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 32: 20 Easy Ways to Exercise Your Dog at Home](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Behavior Chains in Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)



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### About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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