



The teddy bear story – Blue is sleeping in his basket

Blue is peacefully sleeping in his basket. Sarah wants to say goodnight to Blue and approaches to kiss him gently. Blue opens his eyes and sees Sarah bending over his head. He looks frightened and growls. Sarah does not understand the message and kisses Blue again. Oh dear... now Blue shows his teeth and Sarah goes away crying.

Why is Blue snapping?

While Blue is asleep he feels something touching him. He is surprised and growls. Despite his growl, Sarah persists and so he now feels threatened and really wants her to stop.

How to prevent this situation?

Children – Children should learn to first call their dog in a polite way, rather than approaching him by surprise. If the dog responds to being called by name and then approaches the child voluntarily, he is likely to be happy to interact with the child. However, if he does not come when called and remains in his basket, he might not feel like being cuddled at that time. It is important for children to recognise and accept a “no” from their dog. Children themselves might have experienced moments when they preferred not to

be touched or cuddled, and might remember how it feels to be overwhelmed by a family member in such situations.

Parents – Parents should set a good example by interacting with the dog in a consistent way, always call the dog before starting an interaction with him. In this way, he becomes accustomed to a consistent ritual that avoids cuddling by surprise. It is preferable to place the dog's basket in a quiet area rather than one where there tends to be a lot of activity. During moments where lack of supervision is unavoidable, or when children appear unable to leave the dog alone if this is necessary, it is advisable to use an indoor kennel where the dog can sleep quietly without being disturbed.

Dog – Dogs do not necessarily act in a defensive way when someone approaches their sleeping basket. Their reaction depends on several interacting factors. Some dogs tend to hide rawhide or bones in their basket and so become defensive for that reason. Older dogs with impaired vision or hearing may be caught by surprise more easily. Dogs suffering from illness or a painful condition might act in a different way when touched or cuddled. In addition, previous bad experiences associated with someone approaching the basket (punishment or painful experience) might help trigger a defensive reaction.

What about your dog?

How does your dog act when sleeping in his basket? How does he behave when a family member passes by? If you observe signals of threat (barking at you; growling, showing teeth) or fear (flight, hiding), then contact your veterinarian or an animal behavioural counsellor for help.