

Avoiding Small Dog Syndrome
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Small Dog Syndrome is often used to describe toy breeds or any small dog that is a nasty, snippy thing. Dog aggression issues more often than not stem from the owners. How people act with small dogs are the reasons so many become tiny terrors. Even worse are the owners who laugh the behaviors off because tiny Spiffy is so funny when she lunges after great big Uncle Joe. No matter what size a dog is, a bite is a bite and can lead to major medical and legal issues. Even a small dog is capable of delivering a severe bite, especially if the victim is a child or the bite is to the face. The golden rule of small dog ownership: if you would not allow a large dog to get away with a behavior, neither will you allow a small dog. What can owners do to help prevent Small Dog Syndrome?

1. Realize that no matter what the size, dogs are dogs and not toys. These are not babies to be doted on with frilly clothes or treated like human infants. These are dogs and driven by the same inherent behaviors that all dogs are. Yes, there are differences in temperament breed to breed, but in general, you will see varying degrees of the same inherent behaviors in all dogs.
2. Small dogs are NOT fashion accessories. Sadly, too many “celebrities” own dogs as accessories and this means others will get dogs for the same reason.
3. Do not carry your dog all over. This can result in various behavioral issues because the dog is now unnaturally elevated. In addition, you are depriving your dog of exercise and the ability to be a dog.
4. Do not pick your dog up or allow others to without signaling the dog. A dog who does not wish to be picked up will react. Then when put down, he will learn that acting aggressively will stop the humans. Teach your dog to be picked up on cue so there are no surprises.
5. Do not allow your dog to walk all over you while you are on chairs/bed/floor nor should you give into demands for attention. All these can elevate the dog’s position above you.
6. Do not allow your dog to get away with snapping at people while in your lap. If this happens, DO NOT stroke your dog, you are encouraging and even praising these behaviors in a dog’s mind. Instead, give a quick “Uh! Uh!” and put the dog promptly on the floor. Reward the dog for behaving while on your lap or being held, dog goes on the floor when not. Also, call in a trainer to help as your dog is reacting in a dangerous manner.
7. Do not hand feed your dog. Unless there is a medical reason your dog has to be force fed, things like feeding your dog from your plate or only feeding your dog from your hand can add into undesired issues. Of course, your dog must learn to take treats and not to develop food aggressions, but it will not kill your dog to eat meals from a bowl. Never put your dog on the counter or table for meals and feed from your fork. It is not natural for a dog to sit in a highchair and wear bib for meals.

8. Do not take size as an excuse for failing to housetrain. If a woman who is in a wheelchair can housetrain her toy breeds while coping with Montana winters, you can housetrain your small dog.
9. Train for the behaviors you want from day one.
10. Do not allow children to treat your dog like a toy, pick up, dress up like a doll or tote around. Even a small drop can cause severe damage to a tiny dog. If your child “pushes the envelope” too far with the dog, there can be a nasty nip or even a bite in store.
11. If you must use clothing for your dog, make sure it is practical and properly fits. Clothes that constrain movement and are knock-offs of human clothes can cause stress which can lead to undesired reactions and behaviors. Choose clothes that allow for full free movement of legs and the ability to easily meet bodily needs.

Now, small dogs do have special considerations. They see the world far differently than larger dogs. Humans tend to do things with them that they would never think of doing with a larger dog. Lie down on the floor, look up and now have someone stand over you and act silly. This is scary. Well this is what your dog deals with on a daily basis. Ask people to kneel down when greeting your dog. However, your dog must learn it is bad manners to jump into laps without permission. Ask people not to coo or fawn all over your dog or get the dog's face. Do not allow them to encourage bad behaviors like jumping or growling. Do not allow them to loom over your dog or swoop in for a sudden pickup. It is not cute, no matter what Great Aunt Edna thinks: it is a potential lawsuit should a poorly behaving human get nipped or even bitten. Not to mention that any work you have done could be set back.

Small dogs need not become ankle-biting menaces. If you are seeing worrisome behaviors in your small dog, please consult with a trainer who is familiar with the issues facing small dogs but who also knows how to cultivate the desired behaviors you should have in any dog regardless of size.