

## Killing Another Animal

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Saturday, 16 February 2008  
Last Updated Wednesday, 18 March 2009

Question: If the dog has tasted blood and the purpose was playing with another animal and then "accidentally" killing it, can this dog be re-trained and trusted once again?

Over the years and with the help of research into canine behavior, we've been able to learn a lot about dogs and their behavior. But we cannot enter their minds; therefore we cannot understand purpose -- the dog's intent. We may only make some educated guesses.

I would guess that if a dog were "playing" with an animal and killed it, that the dog intended to kill that animal. An exception might be a very, very young puppy going after a rabbit. I understand that rabbits can die from fright, have a heart attack.

However, if you've ever observed a dog go after a fledgling bird, there would be no doubt in your mind of the dog's intent. The action to take down/kill is so terribly swift that it would be clear to you that the dog was exhibiting a predatory instinct.

All dogs are predators. They may not all exhibit as high a predatory drive as some other dogs. In fact, some dogs' predatory instincts have been channeled and developed into other pursuits, such as herding or retrieving.

Have you chanced upon Raymond and Laura Coppinger's wonderful book, *DOGS: A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior and Evolution*? It was published by Scribners in 2001. As pertains to your question, in this book, Raymond Coppinger, a biologist who has studied dogs and their behavior for more than 30 years, explains the genetic basis for dog behavior and also the developmental behavioral conformation of dogs.

He explains that there are critical ages-of-onset for certain behaviors as well as ages-of-offset, termination, for certain behaviors. Thus, if a very young puppy is socialized with certain other animals while that puppy is very young, then that puppy will not consider such animals to be prey when that dog matures. That's why we can have livestock protection dogs who will safeguard their charges.

Dr. Lore Haug pointed out here that a dog exhibiting predatory aggression who kills an animal for survival reasons is one more likely to do so again. Whether or not a behavior will be repeated by the student dog is a function of its reward

history for that behavior. It certainly isn't about "tasting blood," but rather, as Dr. Hore explained, if the dog needed to kill to survive on its own.

In addition, there are other reasons for predatory aggression, such as what may be termed "sport" killing, that is killing another animal for the fun of it, just because the opportunity presented itself. An example of that would be a large-sized dog who may go after, grab and bite to kill a very small dog at a dog park. For the large dog, its predatory instinct was triggered by the provocative stimulus of seeing a small fluffy little white dog scamper about. There are many such illustrations.

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