



FIGHTING DOGS

PITBULL ADVOCATES FOR COMPASSION & KINDNESS

Please note: the term "fighting dog" is broadly and sometimes inaccurately used to describe any Pit Bull-type dog found on or near a fight bust property. It does not necessarily reflect the dog's true history (i.e., whether or not the dog has been fought) nor does it reflect the sad truth: that the dog is the victim not the perpetrator of abuse.

With all the media hype about Pit Bulls and dog fighting it may appear as though the only breed that has ever engaged in dog fighting is the American Pit Bull Terrier. On the contrary, many common household breeds have a fighting lineage, or had a fighting breed crossed into their lines at one point in their breed's history - we just don't hear about it much in newspapers and TV news programs. Misidentification and misunderstanding of this breed has caused a tainted view of the Pit Bull.

Because a Pit Bull has been fought in the past does not mean that he is necessarily more dog reactive than any other Pit Bull companion. Terriers generally can be less tolerant of other dogs so they aren't "trained" to fight in the first place, they are conditioned for fighting. Any dog can be pushed to the point of ending up in a fight and then positively reinforced for it. An owner that puts his dog in a situation where his dog feels defensive and is involved in a fight (either accidentally or on purpose) can happen in a home, at the dog park or anywhere.

Therefore, a Pit Bull that has never been fought could engage in a fight just like any "fighting" dog. A dog saved from a fighting ring may not be any more dog-to-dog aggressive than a dog that has never been fought. Therefore the management of either of these dogs would be pretty much the same and based on the assessment of their individual temperaments. This also depends on how much the dog has been fought and reinforced for it or how much the Terrier trait displayed in the dog's behavior. It's definitely an individual thing. Good management, positive leadership, socialization and training are key in setting your dog up for success.

We do know that Pit Bulls have been used as fighting dogs. Throughout history humans often stood in the pits with their dogs during these events and would routinely reach into the fray to pull their dogs away. They would then handle their dogs, treat wounds, etc so any dogs that redirected their arousal onto their human handlers or were aggressive to humans in any way were not tolerated and would not be used in future breeding. This process necessitated a very human-responsive, human-friendly breed. However, dog reactivity can vary widely within this breed and among various breeds so a dog must NOT be judged by breed but by individual temperament. We've had dogs come from fighting busts that had absolutely no dog reactivity and dogs from local shelters that were very dog reactive.

It is true that some dogs that have had an extremely abusive past can be damaged beyond repair, and will never be suitable for adoption. However it's important to note that this can also occur in dogs that have never been fought. Dogs that are left in a yard all day, day after day (similar to what can happen to fighting dogs) with little socialization to dogs and humans can be very damaged. We aren't saying that dogs coming from these situations are never dog aggressive. This would not be a true assessment either. Of course they certainly can be.

We aren't saying that they are always dog friendly either. What we're saying is that the dogs that come from any abusive situation like a fighting ring should be assessed properly before deciding whether or not a dog is adoptable regardless of past history. Also, dog reactivity is very manageable in Pit Bulls due to the fact that they truly want to please their people.

Some individuals have said that dogs taken from fighting rings can never lead normal lives again. This is not true and we have absolute proof of this. Pit Bulls are amazingly resilient, and many dogs taken from these fight busts have gone on to live peaceably in homes with other animals and children. Being that dog aggression and human aggression are entirely unrelated, these dogs can be very safe and loving companions with socialization, training, and responsible ownership. Additionally, Pit Bulls respond extremely well to behavior modification.

Of course, the usual precautions of dog management still apply: all play sessions with other dogs should be supervised, and, when unattended, your Pit Bull should always be separated from other animals and in the home (in a crate or different room). But these are wise precautions for any multi-dog household, regardless of breed. Again, we must look at Pit Bulls individually, and for what they are first and foremost - dogs! We have found our bust dogs to be the best dogs we've had come through rescue. They are willing to please and love people of all kinds.

Please see "The Truth About Pit Bulls" on our website for more information about the common myths surrounding Pit Bulls today.

Marthina McClay, CPDT

Dog Trainer/Behavioral Counselor

Certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator

Tester/Observer for Therapy Dogs

Int'l Association of Animal Behavior Consultants