

Bully Breeds

What are bully breeds?

Bully breed is a generic term used to identify a variety of terrier-type dogs such as American Pit Bull Terriers, Bull Terriers, Bullmastiffs, Staffordshire Terriers, Boston Terriers, Boxers and French Bulldogs. The term bully dog also includes dogs who resemble these terriers in some physical way, but who may or may not actually have any genetic relationship to these breeds of dogs.

The term “bully breed” actually has nothing to do with the dogs' temperament or behavior and everything to do with their origin and history. Bully dogs are descendants from crosses between ancient bulldogs and a variety of British terriers. The crossing of the bulldog and the British terrier produced a breed called the Bull-and-Terrier that combined the muscle power and tenacity of the bulldog with the terrier's alertness, agility and speed. The bull-and-terrier was a favorite of sporting enthusiasts in England during the early-to-mid-1800s. The dogs were prized for dog fighting, bull baiting and badger baiting.

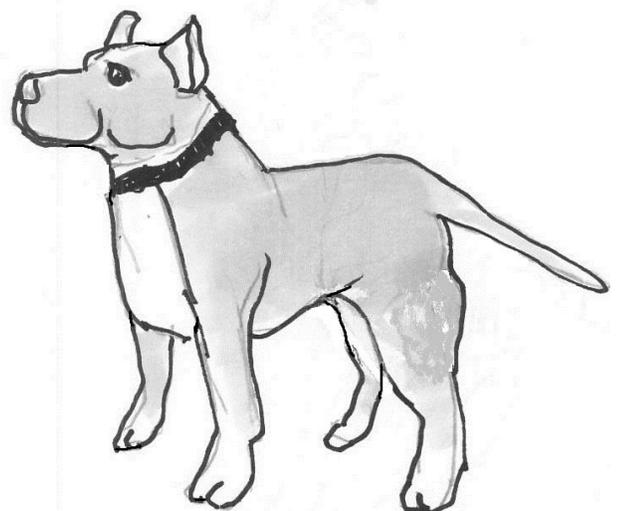
Since the beginning of the 20th century, bully dogs have been prominently displayed in American advertising, literature, movies and television. Companies such as RCA and the Buster Brown shoe company used bully breeds as mascots. A Pit Bull named Petie starred in the popular children's television show *Our Gang*. A Bull Terrier named Spuds MacKenzie became the mascot for Bud Light during the 1987 Super Bowl, and in 1999 Bullseye, a miniature Bull Terrier, became the mascot and trademark for Target Corporation.

Bully dogs have evolved into marvelous working and companion dogs. They compete in all types of organized dog sports and they can make loving pets for children and seniors, and everyone in between.

What are some common characteristics of the bully breeds?

Over the years, responsible bully breed breeders have worked hard to enhance the positive characteristics of these dogs. However, bully dogs may not be the best choice for everyone.

- They are loyal, fun-loving jokesters who tend to remain playful throughout their lives.
- They are loving and affectionate toward people.
- They are athletic, agile, and gentle, a perfect combination of softness and strength.
- They excel at a variety of dog sports, search and rescue work, drug and bomb detection, and as therapy dogs.
- They are active and exuberant. Meeting their exercise needs can be a challenge. Most bully dogs need at least forty-five minutes of exercise a day.
- Although many bully type dogs enjoy the company of other dogs, some are intolerant of other dogs.
- They are more highly motivated to chase prey than some other breeds. Fast moving small animals and children, joggers, bikes, and skateboards can trigger predatory behavior.



What are common bully breed myths and misconceptions?

Unfortunately, many people associate the word “bully” with the dog’s temperament. Many bully breed dogs are labeled as violent and aggressive, but in reality most are loving, loyal companions.

Bully dogs have locking jaws. One of the most popular bully breed myths is that bully dogs have a unique jaw and dental structure that locks and cannot be pried apart once they bite down. In reality, no such locking mechanism exists. Their jaw structure is not any different than the jaw structure of any other dog breed.

Bully dogs are naturally aggressive. Behavior is influenced by the interaction between a dog’s genetic make-up and the environment. Breed alone does not shape behavior. Socialization, training and management also have a strong influence on a dog’s behavior.

Bully dogs aren’t good with children. Bully type dogs can actually make great pets for families. In tests done by the American Temperament Test Society, bully dogs were generally less aggressive when faced with confrontational situations than many other stereotypically “friendly” breeds.

Bully dogs have more bite pressure per square inch (PSI) than other dogs. Testing has shown that the domestic dog averages about 320 lbs. of bite pressure per square inch. Recently Dr. Brady Barr of National Geographic conducted a comparative test between a Pit Bull, a Rottweiler and a German Shepherd Dog. The Pit Bull, with a bite pressure of 235 pounds PSI, had the lowest of the three.

Bully dogs don’t feel pain. Bully dogs feel pain and have the same nervous system as any other breed.

Bully dogs are the most likely dogs to bite. According to testing in 2013 by the American Temperament Test Society, 86.8% of American Pit Bull Terriers passed their test for stability and friendliness.

Bully dogs aren’t good with other animals. With proper management and supervision, most bully dogs get along well with other animals.

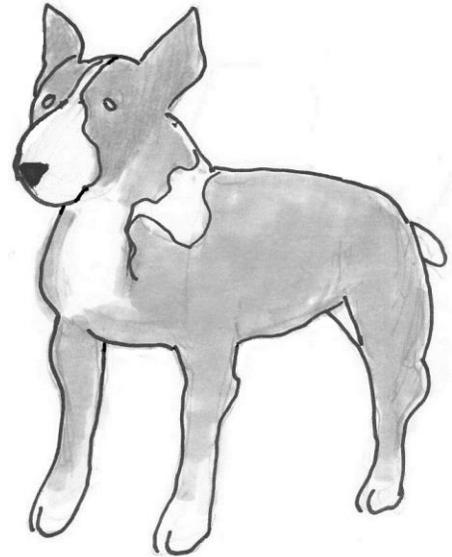
How can I be a smart bully breed guardian?

Choose a dog who is suited to your home, energy level, lifestyle and work schedule. Although some bully type dogs tend to be couch potatoes, most are very athletic. They require daily physical and mental exercise. If you plan to adopt a dog from a rescue group, animal shelter, or humane society check to make sure the organization does temperament testing or behavior assessments. Temperament testing not only weeds out potentially dangerous dogs, it also helps to identify the dogs who are friendly and dogs who have the greatest potential for success in any household.

Develop a good relationship with your dog. Your relationship with your dog is arguably the most important aspect of living with him. Clear communication and mutual respect are paramount. He needs to know that you have his best interest at heart. It is important to earn his trust. He needs to feel comfortable with you, and he needs to know that you will protect him and keep him safe even when he’s frightened or when things are odd or distracting. When he trusts that you will keep him safe, he will look to you for guidance rather than making decisions on his own.

Manage your dog. Because we cannot control every situation, good management is critical and must continue throughout his life.

- Understand how to anticipate his reactions under many different situations.
- Be aware of your surroundings and learn to predict situations that can trigger unacceptable behavior.
- Avoid scary situations that may make him fearful and don't put him in stressful situations.
- If he is apprehensive or nervous around other dogs, strangers and/or children don't allow them to invade his personal space.
- Teach him to use a crate. A crate will come in handy in many situations such as when he needs a place to "chill" or when he gets too excited. (Please review our **Crate Training** handout.)
- Gates, tie-downs, and long-lines are all good management tools. (Please review our **Tie Down** handout.)



Learn to read your dog's body language. Some cues are very subtle. Pay close attention to your dog's facial expressions, muscle tone, posture, eyes and tail carriage. Once you're able to read the subtle cues he is giving, you will have better insight about his emotional state. (Please review our **Body Language – Speaking "Dog"** handout.)

Monitor your dog's play with other dogs. If he enjoys playing with other dogs try to find some *compatible* dog friends for him to play with.

- Small playgroups with known dog friends are preferred over dog parks. Most dogs do much better when playing one-on-one with another dog. Adding even one more dog to the mix often leads to problems.
- Supervise your dog's play sessions. Interrupt him often and separate him before he becomes overly aroused.
- Bully breeds have a propensity to stare at other dogs. Watch your dog for hard stares and teach him to focus on you rather than other dogs or the environment.
- Take time when introducing him to a new dog.

Monitor your dog's arousal level. Bully dogs can become aroused easily and high arousal can quickly turn to unwanted behavior. Once aroused, a dog can take a long time to recover.

Play with your dog. Bully dogs by nature are affectionate jokesters. They love to play and one of the reasons we love them is because they make us laugh. People who regularly play with their dogs develop understanding, respect and communication with them. Since play is a source of continuous reward, behaviors integrated into play tend to become stable and reliable. (Review our **Play – Tug & Retrieving Games** handout.)

Provide your dog with plenty of mental and physical exercise. Bully dogs are intelligent, athletic dogs with active minds. They require daily mental stimulation and physical exercise. This is not just about burning off excess energy; exercise is also about providing socialization and interaction in different environments. Appropriate physical and mental exercise will increase your dog's ability to focus and it will help prevent problem behaviors. Puzzles and problem-solving games are also a great way to provide him with mental stimulation.

How can my dog be a Bully Breed Ambassador?

Training Classes! A "must" for your bully breed.

Attention: Teach your dog to pay attention to you and respond to his name. Bully breed dogs are often so focused on other dogs that getting their attention on you is easier said than done. When you call his name—no matter what is going on around him—you want him to look at you and, better yet, start coming toward you. A class situation will give you a chance to practice and learn various techniques you can use when you are out and about with him. (Please review our **Attention** handout.)

Group classes or private training will give you the tools necessary to teach your dog basic behaviors such as sit, down, wait, and polite walking. Teaching these behaviors will not only help him learn self-control, it will strengthen your bond with him. Once he has learned the basics, consider having him become an AKC Canine Good Citizen.

Understand and Manage Prey Drive: Dogs chase people, animals or things that move quickly because of their predatory instinct. Chasing is a self-reinforcing behavior and once a dog becomes focused on what he is chasing, it can be impossible to interrupt him. Learning to manage your dog's prey drive is critical. A dog with a strong instinct to chase things can be a danger to himself, his guardians and whatever he's chasing.

- Do not leave him unsupervised, even in your yard, where he has the freedom to chase people or other animals that pass by your fence.
- Avoid dog parks or other off-leash play areas frequented by small dogs.
- Unless you are in a controlled class setting, avoid off-leash activities where there are small dogs and children running around.
- Introduce him to activities that allow him to channel his prey drive in acceptable ways. Sports such as Treibball, Nose Work and Agility are good alternatives. Games such as hide-and -seek, fetch, Frisbee and tug can help to satisfy your dog's desire to chase.
- On walks try to distract him *before* he has a chance to notice and chase squirrels, cyclists, skateboarders and joggers.

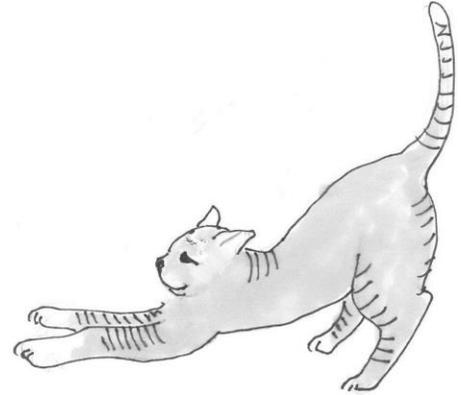


Can my bully breed dog live with a cat?

Your bully breed's prey drive and keen interest in small, fast-moving critters can make introducing him to the cat a challenging adventure!

Management: It is your job to make sure there are no cat chasing opportunities and that your cat feels safe and comfortable.

- Make sure your cat has a safe place, such as a room secured with a baby gate or an easily accessible high place. Cat trees, ledges and paths can create interesting and useful vertical space where she can relax away from the dog.
- Crate train your dog to provide a secure resting place for your dog when you aren't able to actively supervise interspecies interactions. (Please review our **Crate Training** handout.)
- Use a tie down with your dog when the cat is in the vicinity to ensure that he can't chase her. (Please review our **Tie Down** handout.)
- In conjunction with a tie down or a crate, provide a stuffed Kong or very special chew treat every time the cat is around. This can help keep him occupied and calm. (Please review our **Dog & Cat Introductions** handout for more ideas.)



Training: Communicate house rules through a solid training program.

- Your dog needs to maintain some distance between himself and the cat. He needs to learn that he can't stare at or chase her. This is where your attention work will come in handy. (Please review our **Attention** handout.)
- Train an automatic "Leave It" with your cat as the cue. (Please review our **Leave It** handout.)
- Praise and reward him if he sees the cat and doesn't stare or try to chase.
- Ensure that you have a strong "Come" cue in the event a chase looks imminent. (Please review our **Come When Called** handout.)

Relationship: Create a positive, respectful relationship with your bully breed so that following house rules and training cues are rewarding and desired. (Please review our **Connect with Your Canine** handout.)

What about getting a bully breed puppy?

Adopting a bully breed puppy can be exciting and fun, but please take the time to do some research before you plunge into puppy parenthood. Make sure you adopt your puppy from a reputable rescue group, animal shelter or breeder. Training should begin the moment you bring your puppy home. (Please review our **Puppy World** and **Puppy Health** handouts.)

Socialize your puppy. Expose your puppy to as many people and dogs as possible. Take him to malls and watch people go by. Let him visit with known, friendly adult dogs of many breeds. You can do this before he's had his full set of shots as long as you are careful about the adult dogs. (See our **Puppy Socialization** handout.)

Enroll your puppy in a Puppy class. Puppy classes can help get you and your puppy off to a good start. A class will teach your puppy some beginning training, and also teach your puppy, through safe, well-supervised play, to communicate with other dogs. A puppy class will also provide you with advice on puppy issues and will help you become proficient at understanding canine communication. Make sure to choose a trainer or training facility that uses force-free training methods.

Playtime! Encourage your puppy to play with toys, balls, and tugs. Closely monitor your puppy when he plays with other dogs. If your puppy or the other dog gets too rough, remove him from the situation.

Training Resources:

Marin Humane Society's **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes, including obedience classes specifically geared toward puppies and bully breeds. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumaneSociety.org.

Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by the **Marin Humane Society**, visit us at MarinHumaneSociety.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.