

Why do tiny 'purse dogs' growl and nip?

We have all seen them, those cute little dogs in the "dog purses," including Paris Hilton parading around with her Chihuahua "Tinkerbell."

Sure, she may look fashionable but is she doing the dog any favors by carrying it around in a purse?

I'm sure you have all experienced the lap dog that is protective and will growl or try to bite you if you motion towards the owner. Since they are typically toy breeds people think the dogs are funny and will just laugh at them.

Why are these dogs like that? Are toy breeds just that way? I don't think so. It is lack of proper socialization.

As a dog trainer I have worked with many different breeds and yes there are differences between toy breeds and large breed dogs however a toy breed can be well mannered.

One of my clients has a Chihuahua and the first time I meet the puppy it was in a dog purse. She took the dog out of the purse and brought out a blanket and put the puppy on her lap.

I asked her if she would put the dog on the floor. When she did the dog was clearly stressed.

The puppy trembled and stood on her hind legs to be picked up. I requested that she

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leave the puppy on the floor and not pick her up. This was difficult for the pet parent but I assured her I was not being mean and that it was in the puppy's best interest.

She agreed and we spent the entire hour working on building the dog's confidence. We did this by offering treats, praise and petting whenever the puppy ventured away for her "mom."

The pet parent did not realize the harm she was doing by confining the dog and limiting her exposure to new experiences.

I stressed how important socialization was — bringing the dog to different places and allowing her to meet different people and other dogs, and not by carrying the puppy in a purse but by putting her on the ground and on a leash.

The next session, the pet parent arrived with the dog walking on a leash. I applauded both of them! The puppy now had confidence and with weeks of training became a totally different dog.

Darlene Koza offers dog training classes at Scooter's School of Sit & Stay. You can enroll online at www.sitandstay.org or call 755-7647.