



“PIT BULL” TYPES

FACTS IN SHORT

Breed History

Pit Bulls originated from the English Bulldog, and were originally bred and used for what is called “bull baiting”: dogs fighting bulls for human entertainment. It is suggested that is how they got their name; pit-bull. In the mid 1800s it became illegal and they started dog-to-dog combat instead as it was easier to manage. Staffordshire Terriers (also bred from Bulldogs) share much of the same history and also fall under the “pit bull type” of dog. Immigrants brought these breeds to the US.

There are common references calling pit bulls and staffies “nanny dogs”, and it is true that these types of dogs are often amazing family dogs and companions.

HOWEVER, that does not describe the breed entirely, and their other side should not be denied or ignored.

Many pit bulls are calm, sweet, and loving, and many are very energetic, strong, and athletic. Some are social, some are not. Just like people are different, dogs are different, even if they are of the same breed.

Today, there are different opinions about American Pit Bull Terriers being different from American Staffordshire Terriers being different from Staffordshire Bull Terriers, however, regardless of how you want to look at it, these breeds are very similar and all fall under the “bully type”. In our shelters, what are referred to as pit bulls, or staffies, may or may not be an accurate breed description at all. Most likely, these dogs are mixes. So, rather than looking at any breed description and taking it as gospel, look at each dog’s personality and find out as much as possible about who that particular dog is as an individual.



Common Personality Traits

Athletic & active, very people-friendly, but high prey-drive towards small animals is common. They are typically eager to please, funny, but often quite stubborn.

Dog Sociability

There are many dog-social pit bulls/staffies, but also many with different levels of poor sociability. They may get along with some dogs and not others (“dog selective”), or be aggressive towards all dogs. Those dogs are only suitable to be the only dog in a home and should never be off leash or go to a dog park, dog beaches etc.

We don't recommend dog parks for any of our bully breeds, unless you had the dog for at least a year and have successfully socialized them with a wide range of other dogs. You need to know *for a fact* that your dog is rock-solid with all types of dogs, even with dogs who may act inappropriately. The reason is that, should something happen at the dog park or beach and your bully is in the mix, they will surely get the blame. Also, when an argument starts among other dogs, a pit bull type may be more genetically inclined to jump into the action. You have to be very conscious about the fact that these breeds were initially bred to fight other dogs and many of them retain that characteristic potential.

SOCIABILITY CAN CHANGE WITH AGE ! Most pit bull puppies and youngsters are social butterflies, but this frequently begins to change (often to the great surprise of owners who prided themselves on their dog-friendly pit bull) as the dog reaches social maturity (can happen anywhere between 8 months - 3yrs). Because the genetic predisposition for dog-aggression is strong in some dogs, nothing you do will ensure that your puppy grows up to be a dog-friendly adult. You can, however, increase the likelihood by providing your dog with frequent socializing opportunities with friendly dogs (see our Handout on “Socializing Dogs”).

If you have a dog-social pit bull/staffie and want to add another, it is wise to go with a second dog of the opposite gender.

Being a Responsible Pit Bull Owner

There is not necessarily a big difference to being a responsible dog owner versus any other breed. Everyone should be in control of their dog, and know what situations they can or cannot handle. However, due to their bad reputation, it is uniquely important to be a responsible pit bull owner and understand there is a stigma that comes with this type of dog. This reputation is unfair to many of them, however, when it comes to dog aggression, these breeds do have a high level of poor sociability, as described above, because they were originally bred to be dog-aggressive. So, perhaps more than with other types of dog, you need to ensure your bully type doesn't get into ANY bad situations.

Common Issues

The high energy of many bully breed dogs, especially when young, can be challenging for some people. They are strong and, if energetic even for a moment, can knock over a person just running into them, which makes powerful, high energy dogs not a good match for small children or elderly people.

There is a high incidence of leash reactivity/aggression with pit bull type dogs. Depending on their level of dog sociability or aggression, they may struggle to walk nicely on leash and pass other dogs on the walk without escalating. Their physical strength makes this especially important and potentially challenging. This is far from exclusive to these breeds, however, it is common among the bully breeds and it often takes work to teach them to walk nicely on leash.

Many dogs of this type are sensitive to poultry (chicken etc) and can get allergic reactions such as skin rashes from food containing poultry.

More Info

<https://www.vrcpitbull.com/pit-bull-facts/>

<https://pitbulls.org/article/dog-aggression-pit-bulls>

<https://badrap.org/breed-info/breed-history>

Bottom line is this: educate yourself about breed information because genetics cannot be denied, but understand that dogs are individuals. Select a dog that is suitable in personality, energy level, and sociability for your lifestyle, and understand that you will need to provide guidance to the dog throughout their lifetime.

