



Preventing Dog Bites – A Guide for Parents with Children

Having a positive, loving relationship with the family pet can help your child grow up to be a humane and caring adult. A child bitten by the family dog, however, may be scarred physically and/or emotionally.

All dogs have the potential to bite, and children are bitten more often than adults. Therefore, **if you are a parent and are adopting a dog**, you should:

- **Choose wisely.** Ask our staff to help you select a dog who has tested well on our temperament evaluations, seems to like children and is tolerant and gentle. Select your pet based on his qualities, personality and compatibility with your circumstances, not on inconsequential features like color.
- NEVER leave a child under the age of 10 alone with the dog, EVER.
- NO member of the family should encourage rough play or wrestling.
- Guard against potentially dangerous situations such as a child approaching a dog while the dog is eating or sleeping.
- Be mindful of your child's visiting friends. What your dog may tolerate from the resident children may be very different than what he will tolerate from an unfamiliar child.
- Teach your child about the many reasons why a dog might bite, including:

Excitement

A child's noises and movements in play may excite your dog, and dogs often play roughly with their teeth and claws. While they might not mean to hurt the child, they often will by accident. Teach your child to play gently and calmly, and if the dog gets too excited, teach the child to first freeze, then walk away calmly. Both the child and the dog should then have some "quiet time" to settle down.

Pain or Illness

If a dog is in pain, he may not know where the pain is coming from. A child touching the pet at such a time may cause the dog to bite because he may think that the child's touch is causing the pain. Teach your child to leave the dog alone if he appears sick or hurt, and to then get an adult so that the dog may get any medical attention needed.

Anger

Children are often the first to find out that the dog guards something he believes is his, such as his toys, food, bones or bed. Teach your child to respect a dog's "belongings" or territory and to avoid approaching a dog in those situations.

Fear or Surprise

Dogs may bite if startled by quick movements or loud noises, especially if the dog cannot or does not know

how to get away, and may then bite to protect himself. Teach your children to move quietly and slowly around dogs they do not know, always ask the dog's owner for permission to pet the dog BEFORE approaching and to leave the dog alone if the owner is not there or says no.

- Teach your child to watch and listen for warning signs that the dog may be upset, such as:
 - Ears laid back against the head; and/or
 - Legs or body become very stiff; and/or
 - Hair on the back is standing up; and/or
 - Growling or barking with teeth showing.

- Teach your child to act appropriately in response to the dog's warning signs. Your child SHOULD:
 - Freeze;
 - Count to five, slowly and silently;
 - Move away very slowly, sideways or backwards.

- If attacked and knocked down, your child SHOULD:
 - Act like a rock by curling up into a ball and covering his face and head with both arms.

- Your child should also know what NOT to do. Your child should NOT:
 - Stare directly at the dog – that's daring him to bite!
 - Run, jump or wave his arms around.
 - Scream.
 - Throw anything at the dog or hit him.

- If your child is bitten:
 - Your child should find an adult to take them to a doctor;
 - The wound should be washed well with soap and warm water;
 - Get a good description of the animal and where it went;
 - Report the incident to your local animal control agency.