

Dog Bite Prevention for Parents



How to keep your kids safe

By Chris Pals

The information in this brochure is aimed at reducing the staggering number of dog bites that occur to children each year. Many times, it is not a stray dog that causes a bite, but the family pet. These tips will help you teach your child how to properly interact with dogs they know and how to avoid dogs they don't know. Each tip is followed by the answer to kids favorite question, "why?".

Be sure they always ask the dog's owner for permission before they get near the dog.

Why? Not all dogs like kids and the owner would know best if interaction is safe.

Be sure they never go near any loose dogs

Why? There is no way to know if the dog will be friendly and no one available to control the dog if it gets excited or mad.

The child should stand like a 'tree' (very still and quiet) if a loose dog gets near them.

Why? Dogs like to chase moving objects. Even friendly dogs are more likely to bite if the child runs and/or screams. A stationary, quiet human is boring and non-threatening.

Never look directly into a dog's eyes.

Why? In dog language, that's a serious threat. If a dog is frightened, even if it normally is not bothered by direct eye contact, its fear may override it's past training. Accepting direct eye contact from humans is a 'learned' behavior in dogs.

Be sure children never run anywhere a dog can see them.

Why? Quick movement can trigger a chemical reaction in the dog's brain called 'prey drive'. This is not a thinking reaction; it's like a reflex. It is also the reason a 'nice' dog might chase and bite. If a dog is unable to get to a running child, they can get very frustrated, causing the dog to possibly bite if they get loose.

Don't let kids get near a dog that is eating or playing with a toy.

Why? Dogs tend to be protective of their food and toys. Bothering an eating or playing dog is one of the top reasons kids get bitten by their family dog. When excitement levels are high, such as when they are playing with a toy, they are also more likely to accidentally bite.

Never let a child tease a dog.

Why? Ian Dunbar says it best: "When dog's get mad, they don't sue, they bite!". Dogs have feelings and don't like to be teased any more than a person would. 'Keep away' type games can cause possessiveness and aggression.

Never let a child cause physical pain or discomfort to any animal.

Why? Most dogs will try to leave an uncomfortable situation, but if they feel trapped by a leash or the containment of the house or yard, they will fight back against pain. Even dogs that tend to tolerate abuse like tail or ear pulling can 'snap' or have a less tolerant day.

Don't let kids around a dog that has puppies.

Why? Dogs are very protective of their pups and could see a harmless act as a threat to their pups. It is safer to have the kids interact with the pups one at a time away from the mom.

Never leave kids unattended with a dog.

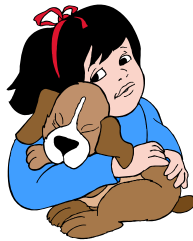
Why? Dogs and kids are unpredictable. When unsupervised, kids tend to try the things that they have been told not to do (like pulling the dog's tail or poking it in the eye). Toddlers and babies can look like prey animals to a dog (and they usually smell like food). Crying or screaming can make them sound like injured prey. When triggered, "prey drive" is a chemical reaction in the dog's brain, not a 'thinking' action, so even dogs that are "good with kids" should be supervised. Usually, if a dog bites an unsupervised child, the dog is blamed and maybe even killed. Supervision can prevent a tragedy for both the child and the dog.

Don't let kids eat near a dog.

Why? Dogs are opportunists. If they see a snack within reach, it is pure doggie nature to try to get it (and they might get fingers along with the food). Training can help, but can't 100% guarantee the dog will never try for an easy treat.

Don't let your dog view or use your child as a toy.

Why? Letting them 'play bite' or tug on kid's clothes can get ugly very quickly.



If you have a dog, there are some things you can do to help reduce the chances that your dog will bite someone.

Socialization is critical

Socialization is introducing the dog (in a pleasant way) to as many different things, people and places as possible. This is best done before the pup is 14 weeks old, but can be done anytime and should be a life long process. This is the first step to a well-adjusted adult dog that is less reactive and less fearful.

Manners Training

Dogs have vastly different social behavior from humans. They can't learn proper 'manners' without our help. Just like kids, they prefer consistently enforced rules. Training doesn't have to be difficult or 'abusive'. Simply, if your dog is doing something you like, reward that behavior. Things like not chasing the kids, not chewing on your stuff, lying quietly while you work, etc. If the dog is starting to do something you don't like, redirect the dog to a behavior you can reward. Trade them your shoe for a chew toy, instead of chasing the kids, throw a toy for them, if they are racing around, give them a job to work on like a peanut butter filled Kong toy. These methods work for teaching kids manners too! Reward the good and redirect the unwanted behaviors to ones you can reward.

Keep your dog home

Dogs tend to get into trouble when they run loose. They can get hit by cars, teased or abused by kids or adults, or picked up as a stray. By keeping them safely contained in a fenced yard or inside your home will go a long way to preventing them from biting someone. Don't forget that dogs get bored with their same surroundings everyday. Take your dog for frequent walks on a leash, this helps with socialization too! With the dog on a leash, you control who meets the dog and how. If someone disregards the tips in this brochure and does something likely to get them bitten, don't hesitate to explain why they shouldn't do what they are doing.

Protect your dog

When you accepted a dog into your life, you took on the responsibility to keep the dog safe and provide proper care for them. Protect your dog from kids that don't know any better. If kids are teasing your dog, remove the dog from the situation and explain to the kids why they should stop. Anytime kids approach you and your dog, it is up to you to be sure the interaction stays safe.

For more information about dogs, bite prevention and dog training, please visit the Dog Scouts of America website at: www.DogScouts.org