



Canine Bite Prevention

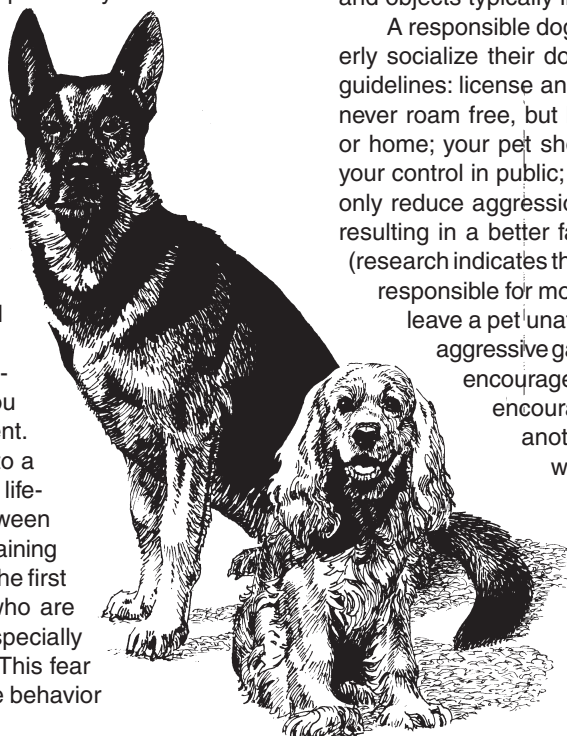
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Each year between 2 and 3 million dog bites, ranging from simple bites to fatal maulings, are reported to local authorities and millions more go unreported. Approximately 70 percent of all fatal dog attacks involve children under 10 years old. It is important to teach children how to safely handle dogs and protect themselves from dog bites. It is also critical that dog owners learn how to properly handle and restrain their dogs and minimize the threat of aggressive/vicious dogs to the public.

Despite the problem of dog bites, pet ownership has a valuable impact on society. Research supports a positive correlation between the strength of a child's bond with a pet and his or her empathy for other people according to Robert Poresky, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Human Development at Kansas State University. Dr. Poresky's study and another study conducted by Gail Melson Ph.D., Professor of Child Development at Purdue University, found that pet ownership seemed to increase a child's awareness and understanding for other's feelings. When children have the opportunity to provide love and companionship for a pet, including the responsibility of the animal's daily needs, they apparently develop an appreciation for the value of life and compassion for all living animals. Pet ownership can be a positive experience for a family but with ownership comes responsibility.

Responsibility of dog ownership includes proper training and restraint of the dog in an effort to prevent bites. Young children often do not have the ability to alter their behavior or presence of mind to react correctly to an aggressive dog, therefore preventing a bite attack. Owners have the responsibility to ensure their dogs have been properly socialized and are supervised when around children.

Socialization is the process of domesticating your puppy to live with you and other humans in your environment. Successful socialization is the key to a positive pet experience along with a lifetime of effective communication between owner and dog. This socialization or training process needs to take place during the first 16 weeks of a puppy's life. Dogs who are not properly socialized to people, especially small children, will often fear them. This fear may lead to fear-biting or aggressive behavior



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towards people as the puppy matures. People socialization is the most important part of domestication or training of a new puppy. Through socialization the dog learns to trust the people with whom they will be living. The puppy needs to socialize around people of all types i.e. ages, shapes, and races. To familiarize your pet with a variety of people, have the dog take several trips around the neighborhood or town always making sure it is a safe and controlled experience. The dog should be on a leash and controlled by the owner at all times. Expose the pet to a variety of environments such as shopping centers, playgrounds, parks, etc., meeting many friendly humans that are involved in a variety of activities. This gives your dog a chance to have several positive experiences with humans where there is no cause for fear. It is very important to familiarize your puppy with the normal behavior of small children or babies so they won't fear or misinterpret normal, small, human behavior as a threat. Always supervise your puppy to prevent any accidents or harm to humans or pets. Socialization also involves exposing your pet to other animals and objects typically in their environment.

A responsible dog owner should not only train and properly socialize their dog but also follow several other safety guidelines: license and vaccinate your dog; your dog should never roam free, but be confined in a properly fenced yard or home; your pet should always be on a leash and under your control in public; neuter your dog—sterilization will not only reduce aggression, but it decreases roaming behavior resulting in a better family pet because the pet is at home (research indicates that intact male dogs 1-5 years of age are responsible for more bites especially severe bites); never leave a pet unattended with small children; do not play aggressive games with your dog such as tug-of-war or encourage wrestling/growling activities; and never encourage your dog to be aggressive or attack another person or animal. Be aware of the warning signs that indicate a tendency toward aggressiveness like dominant behavior such as refusing to obey, growling or nipping, or unprovoked attacks on other animals. If you have any questions concerning your dog's behavior, consult your veterinarian because he or she can often identify early signs of aggression.

If aggressive signs develop, contact a professional trainer as soon as possible because proper training can usually eliminate undesirable aggression. If your dog develops aggressive behavior that you are not able to control with training, do not give your dog away to another home, rather contact your local veterinarian for advice. As a dog owner, never nurture aggressive tendencies such as organized fighting contests or contests of strength involving baiting of live animals or animal parts.

The following are bite prevention strategies for people of all ages. Leave all stray dogs and cats alone. Report all stray animals to the authorities! Never bother a dog while it is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies. Also, do not take bones, balls, sticks, or other toys or items the dog considers special away from the animal. Never enter a strange dog's yard or pet a dog that is on a chain. Also, do not reach over or through a fence, or any type of enclosure like a car window to pet or tease a dog. Always ask the dog owner permission before petting a dog, especially a strange one. After getting an owner's permission to pet the dog, allow the dog to sniff or smell you before petting (even a dog you know). Avoid running past or away from a dog because this may stimulate their natural instinct to chase and catch, which may result in an attack if the dog views the person as prey. Always leave wild animals alone!

Basic dog bite prevention also includes recognizing the behavior signs of an aggressive/upset dog. An aggressive/upset dog may growl or snarl with teeth showing; the tail and hair along the back are up. Ears may be up and forward in the case of a dog attacking in an offensive threat. If the dog is frightened, his ears may be laid back in a defensive position, but this dog is still a biting threat. Do not stare at an aggressive/upset dog's eyes. This is often considered a threat to such a dog. Never run away from an aggressive/upset dog. If a strange dog approaches you, especially in a threatening manner, stand still with your feet together, your fists under the neck, and elbows into the chest (BE LIKE A TREE)¹. Let the dog sniff you, wait for the dog to leave, then slowly walk away. If you are lying down when a dog approaches or knocks you down, then lay still, face down, legs together with fists covering the back of your neck and forearms over the ears (ACT LIKE A LOG).¹ Another method is to curl into a ball using your forearms to cover your ears and your fists to cover the back of your neck.² Let the dog sniff, wait for the dog to leave, then get up and slowly walk away.

Some experts recommend that people climb on or into a nearby car or onto a fence or some type of structure to get out of reach of an attacking dog.³ They advise "giving" the attacking dog an object like a purse or coat that will distract the dog long enough for you to get away.³ These defensive techniques are appropriate for adults or children with the assistance of an adult, but there is concern that a child may not have the presence of mind to safely climb out of reach without falling which may stimulate or provoke an aggressive/upset dog to attack in an even more vicious manner. A child may also find it difficult to give an object to an attacking dog. A faltered attempt may result in a more severe injury.

Teach children to tell an adult immediately when they are bitten by any type of animal. If they are bitten by a strange dog, be sure to note the breed, size, color, and which direction the dog went after the bite. Contact the local animal control department so they can apprehend the dog. Wash the bite with soap and water and seek medical attention as soon as possible. Always report the bite to the local health department.

The companionship and love of a pet can be a fun and enriching experience for a family. A dog is often a lifetime family member. Part of the joy of ownership involves teaching your pet good manners. Pet owners should properly care for, train, and handle their dogs, being sure that they educate their family concerning basic bite prevention.

For more information on bite prevention/ dog behavior

Animal Safety is Fun — J. Michael Cornwell, DVM, 3712 N. High St., Columbus, Ohio 43214

Childproofing Your Dog — by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson - Warner Books

Do's and Don'ts Concerning Vicious Dogs — D.A. Clifford, DVM, MPH, PhD, et al, produced by AVMA Professional Liability Insurance Trust

Dog Bite Prevention — VT 729 - VHS Tape - Available from OSU Agriculture Communication, 111 Publication Information, Stillwater, OK 740478

¹ *Animal Safety is Fun* - J. Michael Cornwell, DVM, 3712 N. High St., Columbus, Ohio, 43214.

² AVMA brochure entitled "Don't worry, they won't bite..." created through a cooperative effort by State Farm and the AVMA.

³ *Do's and Don'ts Concerning Vicious Dogs* - D.A. Clifford, DVM, MPH, PhD, et al, produced by AVMA Professional Liability Insurance Trust.

The purpose of this educational fact sheet is to briefly highlight pet owner responsibilities, safety precautions around dogs, along with bite prevention tips. The defensive techniques described in this fact sheet are designed to prevent or minimize injury from dog bites. The fact that no one single defensive technique can guarantee to prevent all dog bites or injuries and because of the unpredictability of this subject matter, the author, OSU College of Veterinary Medicine, and the Cooperative Extension Service-Division of Agricultural Sciences, assumes no responsibility for injury that may result from using the defensive techniques in this fact sheet.

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