

Preventing Dog Bites

Companion animals bring many benefits to individuals and to our society. Most of the time we co exist with dogs without any cause for concern. In today's society we tend to forget that dogs are a different species and so we expect them to assess situations as we do which can be a recipe for disaster.

It is estimated that the dog population in Australia is around 4 million but no complete reporting system exist for dog bite statistics. The majority of dog bite injuries are not serious and the chances of a dog attack resulting in death is extremely low but it is estimated that there are approximately 1400 people whose injuries are severe enough to put them into hospital.

It is thought that over 60% of dog bites occur either at home or at homes of friends, neighbours or relatives.

It is also thought that around 60% of serious dog bite injuries occur in children under 10, where most injuries are to the face, head and neck. Most bites to adults injure the hands and lower limbs.

The media likes to highlight certain breeds of dogs in attacks on humans but in reality a large percentage of dog bites are from dogs where the breed can not be accurately determined. It is probably also fair to say that when a breed does seem to be involved in more biting incidents it is usually reflective of how popular a breed is at the time. The more people that own a particular breed, the more chance there is for that breed to be involved in an incident.

Any dog is capable of biting so banning a dog simply because it is a particular breed or has a certain appearance will not fix anything. Most dog attacks are caused by people due to poor selection of a breed that is unsuitable for their life style, being ignorant to what is needed to care for a dog and behaving inappropriately around dogs, add also children not being properly supervised around dogs and it a wonder the incidents of attacks aren't greater.

Steps in preventing dog bites

- ❖ Never leave any child unsupervised with a dog (No matter how much you trust them both)
- ❖ Don't have your children **HUG** a dog. While dogs can be taught to accept and even welcome a hug it is not a gesture of affection to them. Anything that looks like a hug in the dog world is normally connected to mating or dominance. It also isn't wise to have a child's face that close to the dog's teeth.
- ❖ We all know how tiring it is to have someone follow you around all day, even if they mean well, so make sure your dog gets some time out away from the children. Most children don't understand the concept of the dog's personal space.
- ❖ Never let children disturb a dog that is eating, sleeping, chewing on a toy, sick or looking after puppies.
- ❖ Train and socialize your dog from a very early age. Puppies (and Children) need to be taught very early what is acceptable behaviour.

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- ❖ Never approach a strange dog. Always have the owner's permission first. Then if the owner agrees let the dog come to you and smell the back of your hand (finger curled inwards) Don't pat the dog over the top of its head, pat it under the chin, neck and shoulder. Don't stare at a dog, you don't know, directly into its eyes as the dog may interpret this as very threatening, dominating behaviour. Teach your children never to approach a dog without an adult even if it looks hurt or lost no matter how cute it might be, every dog has the potential to bite.
- ❖ Teach your children, as well as yourself, never to run or scream from a dog even if you think it is going to bite. Running, screaming or flapping your arms around will just provoke the dog natural instincts to chase and you will not out run a dog. Freeze with your arms still by your side, look at your feet (do not make eye contact). When the dog doesn't see you as a threat and loses interest slowly back away until you are out of sight.
- ❖ Teach that if a dog does knock you to the ground curl up into a little ball and remain as still and quiet as possible.
- ❖ Teach your children that even when playing with a dog they must be calm. Do not let them run and scream as most dogs can become very excited by both these things.
- ❖ Teach your children never to tease or be cruel to a dog
- ❖ Teach your children that just because a dog is wagging its tail doesn't mean its friendly
- ❖ Teach your children to let an adult know if there is a strange dog hanging around or if a dog has made them feel fearful.

There are also behaviours that are commonly seen when dogs are stressed and would like to be out of a certain situation. Some of these are:

1. Yawning and lip licking – A dog often does these things when it is feeling stressed. It will stick out its tongue and lick its lips with a quick flick.
2. Shaking off – Not unlike when a dog shakes off water when wet. They can do this when something has made them uncomfortable and this usually occurs when they are walking away from the situation.
3. The Freeze and Stare – This often happens when a dog is very uncomfortable and is usually a last warning before a dog will snap. They become very still and their body is made to look very tall and ridged and they are most likely staring very intensely
4. Learn Dog Body language