

Why Dogs Bite: A Guideline For Children

Excitement

The noises and movements you make when you play are very exciting to dogs. When dogs play with other dogs, they often play roughly with their sharp teeth and claws. Sometimes dogs forget that they can't play the same way with you, and because they don't have hands, they use their mouths to grab things. A dog can hurt you by accident, just by being too excited.

What you should do: Play gently and calmly and if a dog gets too excited, freeze and walk away. Take some time out to give you both a chance to calm down.

Pain or Sickness

When a dog is in pain, he doesn't understand where the pain comes from. If you touch him, he may think you are causing the pain and will bite you to stop the pain.

What you should do: If a dog is acting like he is sick or hurt, leave him alone -- even if he belongs to your family. Tell an adult, and together you can get medical help for the dog.

Anger

A dog will protect anything that's important to him: his toys; his bed; his food and water bowls; his people; his yard; his house; or his car. If you come near something that a dog feels is off-limits to you, he may bite to make you leave his "property" alone!

What you should (or should not) do: Don't go into a yard where there's a dog you don't know. Don't reach through a car window or a fence to pet a dog. Don't pet a dog that's tied up. Don't touch a dog's "property."

Fear or Surprise

Quick movements and sudden or loud noises are scary for dogs, and they may bite to protect themselves. If a dog thinks you're a stranger who might hurt him, he may not know how to get away, so he'll protect himself by biting.

What you should do: When you're around a dog you don't know, be quiet and move slowly. Always ask the dog's owner for permission before you pet him. If the owner isn't there for you to ask, LEAVE THE DOG ALONE.

Warning Signs

Watch and listen for the warnings a dog will give you to let you know when he is upset. If his ears are laid back against his head, or his legs are very stiff, he is probably warning you that he feels threatened and will protect himself if he must. If the hair on his back is standing up, that's another warning. If a dog is growling or barking with his teeth showing, it means he is ready to bite. A dog's warning signs mean that you're doing something he doesn't like, so stop doing it!

What you should do:

- Freeze.
- Count to five, slowly and silently.
- Move away very slowly, sideways or backwards.
- If the dog jumps on you, act like a rock by curling up into a ball and covering your face and head with your arms.

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What you should NOT do:

- Don't stare at the dog -- that means "I dare you to bite me!"
- Don't run, jump or wave your arms around.
- Don't scream.
- Don't throw anything at the dog or hit him.

If A Dog Bites You

If you're bitten by a dog, or any animal, you should:

- Have an adult take you to a doctor.
- Wash the wound with soap and warm water.
- Write down the type, size and color of the animal. Was it wearing a collar? Did it have any identification tags? Where were you when you were bitten? Where did the animal go?
- Report all of this information to the animal control agency in your city or county.

The Garage

While dogs may be safer in the garage than in the yard, unless people spend time with them in the garage, they'll still suffer from isolation and, as a result, may develop any of the behavior problems previously mentioned. Most garages are very hot during the summer months and cold during the winter. Garages are often storage places for tools and chemicals that could cause injury to a curious dog. If the garage has an automatic door opener, the dog could run out into the street when the door is opened.

Changing Times

Some of us may have fond childhood memories of a family dog that lived outside, but times have changed. More mothers used to stay at home and children used to spend more time outdoors. The outdoor dog had company while mom hung laundry or gardened and the children played outside. With the advent of two-income families, television and computer games, the outdoor dog is more likely to spend most of his time alone.

No Alternative

If you must leave your dog outdoors, unsupervised for extended periods of time, please provide him with the following:

- An insulated shelter with a wind-proof opening. Some very short-coated breeds like greyhounds, beagles and labs, may not be able to tolerate extreme cold, even with a shelter.
- Shade in the summertime. All dogs need shade, but remember that heavy-coated dogs, such as huskies and chows, are more susceptible to the heat.
- Fresh food and water every day. In winter, you'll need a heated water bowl to keep the water from freezing. In summer, you'll need a tip-proof bowl so your dog won't tip the bowl over in an effort to get cool.
- Interactive play time daily.
- A daily walk.
- An escape-proof fence with a locked gate.
- "Busy" toys (see our handout: "Dog Toys and How to Use Them").



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Most dogs do enjoy spending time outdoors, but the time dogs spend alone outdoors must be balanced with quality time with "their people." With a little time and training, dogs can learn to be well-behaved around people and can come to respect the house rules. They can then be left inside alone without cause for worry and be trusted companions and members of the family.

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