



## Child and Dog Safety

Children and dogs can be a great mix, but without management of the household, training for the dog and early education for the children, injuries can happen to the children and/or dogs. As a parent, your children must be your first priority, but the health and welfare of your dog is also your responsibility. Knowing how to read dog body language, teaching your children how to safely interact and be kind to dogs as well as regular check ups for your dog is vital to everyone's safety.

Prevention is of the utmost priority for safety of the child, but also the dog. Once a dog has bitten, re-homing them can include liability later on down the road if the dog bites again. Many rescues will not take a dog that has bitten, shelters that do take them don't typically have the resources to modify behavior and be selective of who adopts the dog, so the high majority of these dogs will be euthanized. It is very unfortunate to see an otherwise well behaved, healthy dog euthanized because we didn't teach our children how to properly interact with dogs – a dog bites a child it is automatically the dogs fault. When I was a child, if I told my Mom a dog bit me, she would have said “what did you do to the dog”; today, parents say “who can we sue” regardless of the circumstances.

### Dog Bites

4.5 million people are bitten each year – and these are just the bites that are reported. One in five bites, or 885,000 require medical attention and in 2006 the number of people who needed reconstructive surgery after a bite is 31,000.

Who is at risk? The most vulnerable age group is children age 5-9. Adult males are more likely to get bitten than adult females and adults with 2 or more dogs in the household are 5 times more likely to be bitten than households without dogs (ref cdc.org).

Dog bites are mainly preventable. Wise choices and early education can reduce the chance of a dog bite.

- Choosing the right breed for your family is part of prevention. For instance, if you have several young children and bring in a Border Collie or Australian Shepherd, you can bet that your kids will be “herded” constantly with nipping at the kids' heels and lower legs.
- Dogs with any history of aggressive behavior are not suitable for a house with children.
- Obedience training creates a well behaved dog.
- Dogs that are spayed or neutered often have less aggressive tendencies – that is NOT to say that spayed/neutered dogs don't bite – **all dogs bite.**

- Never leave babies or young children alone with a dog of any size, breed or temperament.
- Don't rough-house or play aggressively with your dog.
- Learn, understand and observe your pet's body language and teach it to your children

### **Safety tips for children:**

- Do not approach a dog you don't know.
- Do not run from a dog or scream
- If an unfamiliar dog approaches, don't move (be a tree).
- If a dog knocks you over, roll into a ball and lie still (be a log).
- Do not play with any dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies.
- When approaching a person with a dog – always ask the owner if you can pet it before reaching for the dog.
- Don't try to break up dog fights.
- Don't tease any dog.
- When meeting a dog for the first time, walk slow, talk low (soft) and let them sniff you to say hello!

### **Health Concerns**

Many parasites that affect your pet can be transmitted to children and adults including roundworm, giardia, scabies, salmonella and ringworm. Children are at a higher risk simply because they do not wash their hands before putting them in their mouth and some children will eat dirt, 30% of playground dirt has infective roundworm larvae. Be sure to monitor your children and teach them the importance of good hygiene when interacting with animals. All dogs should be examined, vaccinated and have their stools checked for parasites at least once a year.

External parasites like fleas can be controlled through monthly flea prevention that you get at your vet's office. Over the counter products do not work near as well and are not as safe for your dog or children. Intestinal parasites can be prevented through monthly de-wormers such as Interceptor, Comfortis and HeartGard. For more information on these and other zoonotic diseases visit the Center for Disease Control's website at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/browse\\_by\\_animal.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/browse_by_animal.htm).

### **The Environment**

Management of your household can affect the safety of your children and dogs also.

- Feed your dogs away from where your children play and teach them to leave the dog alone while he is eating.
- Do not allow your dog to have access to your children's bedroom or play area where there may be small toys or articles of clothing that your dog can chew and swallow.

- Make sure your dog has a safe place to go where the children aren't allowed to bother him.
- NEVER leave a child and dog alone unsupervised – **all dogs bite!**
- Dogs should be restrained when riding in the car with a child.

### **Educate Yourself and Your Children**

Teach your children how to properly interact with dogs from an early age. No roughhousing, laying on, crawling on, hitting, pulling, kicking or grabbing any dog. Teach them not to reach for the dogs face, but to pet it gently on the back of the neck, chest or back – stay away from the face and the rear end.

Teach your children how to read canine body language. This is a great website to visit with your kids <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/dogs/dogbodylanguage.cfm>.

No matter how much training you do or how well you educate your children, dogs will be dogs and kids will be kids. Supervise, supervise, supervise! It is ultimately the adult's responsibility to keep everybody safe and happy. Good luck and good training!

Gentle Paws Dog Training  
Patty Homer, CPDT-KA, ABCDT  
[pattythepuppypro@gmail.com](mailto:pattythepuppypro@gmail.com)  
206-370-2728  
[gentlepawsdogtraining.com](http://gentlepawsdogtraining.com)