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Annie Sloan

IS COMING TO AMERICA

AND

DROPKICK MURPHYS

Are Coming to Boston
And They're Turning Up the Green



IS NEW BEDFORD REALLY ALL THAT
DANGEROUS?

We Ask the Tough Question

HOW MUCH OF A LIABILITY IS
YOUR FAMILY PET?

SOME ANSWERS & SURPRISES

FOOD, FUN, AND FASHION OF SPRING



Sloan

good breeding



Do You Have Your Dog's Back?

by Kathy Anderson

A

fluffy white
bichon frise
prances over
to grandma
wagging his
tail, a floppy-
eared basset
hound saun-

ters over to Uncle Charlie, and a lively chocolate lab bounds over to his best friend with 80 pounds of unbridled enthusiasm.

A misread movement by any of these people could change the attitude of one of these pooches in an instant and their sharp canines could sink into the flesh of their human friend.

“Any dog with teeth can bite, given the right circumstances,” says Cheryl Malone, a retired animal control officer from Dennis, Mass. After 24 years of visiting homes after a dog bites a person, Malone has gained an experienced and compassionate perspective.

“Massachusetts law requires any time a dog bites and breaks the skin it must be reported,” says Malone. “And the dog must be quarantined for 10 days.” After a dog bites someone, an animal control officer and an animal health inspector visit the home. The animal health inspector decides whether the dog requires “home confinement” or needs to be taken to a shelter/boarding facility (at the owner’s expense) for the quarantine period. This decision is based on the severity and viciousness of the bite, the health of the dog (up-to-date vaccinations, etc.), and the family’s ability to cope with the situation.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) “4.7 million people in this country are bitten by dogs every year—children being the most common victims—and 800,000 Americans receive medical attention for dog bites.” The National Canine Research Foundation estimates approximately 92 percent of fatal dog attacks involved male dogs, 94 percent of which were not neutered, and approximately 25 percent of fatal dog attacks involved chained dogs.

Massachusetts law has strict liability for injuries inflicted by a dog, says Eric Parker of Parker Scheer LLP in Boston. “It’s not just the dog’s owner who could be liable but the ‘party in control’ of the dog,” says Parker. This could be a family member, dog rescuer, or pet sitter. Unless it’s proven that the victim was teasing or tormenting the dog before the attack, the victim does not have to prove fault, but only show that the dog inflicted the injuries.



Junkyard dog Byron

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“It’s not just bites,” says Parker. “If your dog knocks someone over and they break an ankle, the dog owner is liable.” Under Section 159 of the Dog Bite Statute, if a dog has been ordered by animal control or another official to be restrained because of a previous bite and the dog bites again, then the dog owner is liable to triple the amount of damages, he adds.

Parker, who has been representing victims of dog bites for 25 years, says the single most “preventable” mistake dog owners make is not getting renter’s insurance when they rent an apartment.

“Insurance carriers will not insure homeowners who have certain breeds of dogs,” says Peter Covill of Humphrey, Covill & Coleman Insurance Agency in New Bedford, Mass. “These breeds or any mixture of the these breeds include pit bull, Akita, Dalmatian, husky, cane corso, wolf hybrid, Doberman pinscher, bull mastiff, presa canario, Rottweiler, American bulldog, chow, German shepherd, and Staffordshire bull terrier.”

Dog owners who are unable to procure

homeowner’s insurance through the major carriers, can apply through the Massachusetts Property Insurance Underwriting Association (MPIUA), says Covill.

For dogs that are not on the “exclusion list” of breeds, an insurance company could carry them but cancel them after a “first bite” claim is made, says Covill. “Any breed of dog can get the American Kennel Club (AKC) Canine Good Citizen Certification, which may help them get homeowner’s insurance coverage,” he added.

The AKC Canine Good Citizen Program teaches responsible pet ownership and basic good manners for dogs. According to the AKC website, a dog must pass the 10-step Canine Good Citizen test to receive the certificate.

“Dog owners should make sure they have sufficient personal liability coverage in their homeowner’s insurance policy,” advises Carmen Mello from Kaplansky Insurance in Fairhaven, Mass. “They may be able to get homeowner’s insurance, but in some cases the dog may be excluded.”

Besides dogs biting humans, dogs

biting dogs can have extreme emotional and legal ramifications. While chasing seashells on her private Fairhaven beach, Sweetie, a nine-pound foxie poo (cross between a fox terrier and poodle), was viciously attacked by an unleashed bull mastiff. "I'll never forget the look of horror and fear on Sweetie's face when that dog went after her," says Claudia Martin, Sweetie's owner. The bull mastiff's owner managed to pry open its mouth, and Martin rushed Sweetie to the vet.

Little Sweetie had stopped breathing but was revived and sustained a punctured lung, lacerations, and broken bones. Through ex-

tensive veterinary care, a body case, and vigilant home care by Martin, she survived. "I put my hand in her crate at night to stop her crying," says Martin. "It was a long recovery, and she had to learn to walk again."

The brutal attack was only part of Martin's nightmare. The owner of the mastiff did not want to take any responsibility for Sweetie's vet bills that had mounted to over \$10,000. Martin was left with no choice but to sue him. She did and won a judgment of \$10,000.

Lack of education about how to behave around dogs and negligence on the part of

dog owners are both contributing factors to why people get bitten by dogs says Malone. "Not leashing dogs or being casual about letting them out in their unfenced yard is the number one reason dogs bite someone," she said. "They let the dog out in the morning but one morning, it sees an unfamiliar person near its territory and there's a problem."

But how does this threat of dog bites affect potential dog adopters who are adopting an animal they don't know? "Visit various shelters. Go to a reputable shelter or rescue group," recommends Malone, who did not want to discourage adoption. The dog will have been around experienced dog handlers, who will be familiar with its behavior and may know how the dog reacts in different environments and with other animals, she notes. "Also, there's a growing trend in shelters to have temperament assessment," which evaluates the dog's personality and its human companionship potential.

Giving dog owners and children knowledge about how to safely handle themselves around dogs is crucial to the safety of all. Training is essential, says Malone. She recommends the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (apdt.com) and the International Association of Canine Professionals (canineprofessionals.com) to find local trainers.

"Know your dogs," recommends Covill. "I have two golden retrievers, and if someone is visiting and the dogs seem anxious, I put them in another room."

Malone recommends healthy socialization for dogs. "Taking a young dog or any dog out in a relaxed, happy environment where they can meet different kinds of people reinforces a positive attitude toward strangers," she says.

From May 20 to 26, the American Veterinary Medical Association (avma.org) sponsors National Dog Bite Prevention Week and offers tips to prevent dog bites and educational programs to teach children how to interact with dogs.

The physical and emotional scars from a dog bite are long lasting. And an otherwise good-tempered dog could face euthanasia because its human guardian failed to be responsible for its proper upbringing. "The best thing for people to do is to take action," says Malone. "If a dog owner sees behavior problems with their dogs, don't wait. Take action before it happens." ★

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