

## Dog Bite Safety

Keeping a dog as a pet has been shown to benefit physical and mental health in both adults and children. They can be wonderful companions and the interactions experienced by growing up with a dog can offer many positives to child development.

Along with these positive aspects, however, is a negative side. Each year, about one million people report having been bitten by a dog. It is estimated that another million people experience a bite, but fail to report it. It has also been shown that about 60% of the dog bite victims are children, boys between the ages of 6 and 9. Most of these bites on children occur on the face, and the dog bite injuries can cost insurance companies hundreds of millions of dollars. In 1996, for example, \$250 million was spent, and because of this, many companies do not offer coverage to dog owners whose dog has severely bitten someone. In order to prevent a costly setback because of a dog bite, it is a good idea to learn how a dog's behavior is influenced, how to prevent aggressive behavior, and what to do if you find yourself around an aggressive dog.

There are a variety of things that influence a dog's behavior, including inherited traits, the type of situations and stress the mother sees during pregnancy, and the type of socialization/training the puppy gets once it is born. The only one of these influences that humans are easily able to control is the puppy stage. The critical age for young dogs to learn socialization skills is between three and fourteen weeks. The opportunity for positive interactions with children and others can influence the dog's future greatly during this time. Some other basic guidelines for raising a puppy to be non-aggressive are as follows.

1. Expose the puppy to children of all ages while it is young. No two children act or sound the same, and the more exposure they receive the better. Continue this until the puppy is at least one year old. This is probably the best way to create a dog that interacts well with most people.
2. Wait to have a family first, and then obtain a dog. It is better for a dog to be introduced to a new family than have a child be introduced to a dog who has been living with the parents for a while.
3. Involve children in any obedience training, feeding, grooming, and walking. Both the child and dog can benefit from this. Dogs learn appropriate behavior and to respect these children. The children learn to use rewards to encourage behavior instead of punishment, which can help them in areas not only restricted to dogs.
4. Teach others to recognize the signs of aggression in dogs. A fearful dog will have its ears back and its tail low. Aggression will show through growling, bared teeth, and a stiff body. In contrast, a relaxed dog will have ears forward or sideways.
5. Encourage friendly retrieval games such as fetch, or hide-and-seek with a toy rather than aggressive games like tug-of-war.
6. Always supervise when a dog is interacting with young children.

If an encounter with an unknown or aggressive dog does occur, some basic tips for both children and adults include the following.

1. Never approach an unknown dog, whether it is roaming on a street, fenced in a yard, or injured.
2. Always ask an owner for permission before petting a dog.
3. If an aggressive dog approaches, stand still and do not make eye contact. Running or making loud noises may only aggravate or excite the dog even more, resulting in a bite.
4. Look around for the owner of a wandering dog, and wait until the owner can restrain the dog before continuing on.
5. Never pet a dog that is busy or unaware of your presence, such as one eating, chewing on a toy, or sleeping.
6. Most importantly, stay calm and don't panic. If a bite does occur, seek medical attention and try to find out if the dog has had a recent rabies vaccination. Report the event to animal control.

When choosing and raising a dog, the following points are important to consider as well.

1. Obtain your dog from a reliable source. Research breeds and characteristics so you can choose a dog that fits your needs and lifestyle.

2. Dog training classes that teach normal behavior, training, and how to prevent future problems are extremely beneficial for a puppy. Start these when the dog is young, and training through the dog's life will be much easier.
3. Spaying or neutering a dog can decrease aggressive behavior greatly. It reduces aggression in males, and saves females from many medical issues.
4. Make sure all your dog's vaccinations are up to date.
5. License your dog and follow the leash laws that are in place in your area.
6. Dogs are living things, and are therefore affected by things such as isolation, tiredness, hunger and thirst. Providing for these things can affect aggression levels.
7. Never leave a dog unattended with a child, or in an unfamiliar situation. If a dog is fearful, biting may occur.
8. Start young with obedience. Use the attitude of prevention for aggression, rather than waiting for it to happen and then trying to fix it.

Aggression is not a cause for bad behavior in dogs; rather it is often times a symptom of other problems. Only after assessing the cause of biting behavior, the risks, and the likely hood to bite again, can a dog be treated. Behavior evaluations are available from most veterinarians, and if not, he/she can refer you to one that is able to offer such a service. And although it is ideal to start young when trying to avoid aggression, older dogs can learn new tricks as well.

### About the Author

The law firm of O'Brien Wolf can provide a [personal injury attorney and lawyer in Rochester MN](#) and specialize as a [dog bite lawyer or attorney](#).

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