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BC SPCA - Why Do Dogs Bite?



The vast majority of dogs are safe, reliable companions. But even a friendly dog may bite if threatened, angry, afraid or hurt. Some dogs can be described as dangerous - bred or trained to be aggressive, with predatory instincts that may cause them to chase and attack a fleeing child.

The reality is that most dog bites are from dogs known to the victim, either the family dog or neighbour's dog. It is often through play that excites the dog that most dog bites occur. It is also the case that most dog bites aren't reported because it is the family dog or the bite is not severe enough to warrant a hospital visit.

Dogs Protect Things, Places and People

Just as humans do, dogs protect things they care about, whether their food, puppies, or favourite toys. They also protect spaces - their own and their guardians'. Eating and sleeping areas, yards, porches, and parked cars are all commonly defended by dogs. A child reaching through a fence or arriving unannounced at the door, can turn a neighbour's warm, loyal pet into a growling, aggressive protector. Dogs provide us with protection. We must ensure that children understand this and are aware of situations that may frighten or anger a dog.

Other Reasons Dogs May Bite

- Cornering, crowding or standing over a dog, particularly a small one, may make it feel defensive. Children should stand back and never put their faces close to a dog's mouth. The face is the most common site of serious dog bite injuries.
- Stray dogs are in danger and may be dangerous. Any dog that is loose may be lost, frightened or injured - and more likely to bite.
- Sick or injured dogs may be afraid or irritable and should be avoided by children.
- Elderly dogs may have impaired vision or hearing, or more sensitive to touch which can cause them to be more easily startled.
- Some dogs are inadequately socialized. Dogs living with or around children need to be able to tolerate a degree of rough treatment without resorting to biting. Choose your dog carefully and discourage even play-biting by puppies, to avoid problems later.
- Most children's dog bite injuries occur during play with a dog they know. A dog that is excited or nervous can bite by mistake. Children should be taught not to play fight, tease, yell at, or chase dogs or other animals.
- Dogs can feel left out, especially when a new baby or pet joins the household. Give a dog extra love and attention at these times.

Things to Remember with Dogs (and All Animals)

- Ask permission before petting someone else's dog.
- Leave mother animals and their young alone.
- Do not try to pet dogs that are tied up, sleeping, eating, behind fences, or in vehicles.
- Do not chase or tease dogs, or pull their ears or tails.
- Do not grab their food, bones or toys.
- Do not try to stop a fight. Call an adult for help.
- Always act kindly and gently. Animals have feelings too.
- Remember that cats can bite and scratch unexpectedly.
- Leave wild animals alone.
- Report the details of injured, stray and threatening animals to an adult who will call the SPCA/humane society or animal control authorities.

Guardian's Responsibilities

Under the law, guardians can be held liable for their dogs' actions - including bites. You can reduce the likelihood of your dog biting someone by observing these points:

- Socialize and train your dog. It is best to start while your dog is a puppy, however, most dogs can be socialized to not be aggressive;
- Do not let your dog run loose. Provide a fenced run and leash your dog when you go for a walk. Avoid having young children walk dogs they cannot control;
- When you meet children while out for a walk, be sure they approach your dog properly. This ensures their safety as well as protecting your dog;
- Teach children to observe the simple rules of safe and considerate behaviour around dogs. In particular, teasing, chasing and yelling should be discouraged. Your dog may tolerate it, but another may not;

- Choose your dog carefully. Pups should be evaluated in light of the parent dogs' behaviour. Select dogs that have been bred to be non-aggressive family dogs;

- The importance of sterilizing your animal *cannot* be overemphasized. Spaying and neutering your dog tends to reduce aggressive tendencies significantly. A U.S. survey of over 200 fatal dog attacks showed that in all but two cases the attacks were carried out by unneutered or unspayed dogs;

- Do not leave babies or very young children alone with a dog;

- Children should be taught to never hug a dog. Many dogs tolerate such behaviour but others don't.

<http://www.sPCA.bc.ca/AnimalIssues/whydogsbite.asp>