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### **Dog aggression**

Reading about tragic maulings and deaths of young children by dogs reminds us of the potential in any strong-jawed, toothed creature to cause harm.

All dogs are potentially dangerous. Given that the dachshund has been recently given recognition as the most aggressive breed in an American survey of owners (followed by the Chihuahua) it makes sense to respect all dogs equally. Certainly large muscled, powerfully jawed dogs will do more damage when they bite, but there has been no scientific proof linking breeds to bites, or even a genetic link to aggression. Statistics only come from bites that are serious enough to be reported to the police or receive medical attention, which is why it is always the larger breeds that are over-represented as being aggressive.

Bite statistics show that children and the elderly are much more likely to be seriously harmed. In Australia, most bites occur in family homes, in summer evenings when visitors are around. If more than one dog is present, the risk increases. Children are the most common victims for a number of reasons; children are excitable, make high pitched noises, tend to look dogs in the eye and often make jerky or uncoordinated movements. They also may not respond to a dog's subtle warnings as an adult might. Children may also unintentionally scare the dog or harm it. Their short stature means that a bite is more likely to injure the upper body or head.

Aggression is always specific to the context or situation in which it is seen. There are very few, if any, dogs that are aggressive for no reason. Most bites are provoked. Dogs are part of our domesticated lives because of their instincts to guard territory and chase prey. They have natural instincts to protect their young and defend themselves from threat. Some dogs may nip (herding dogs), some may shake and kill (terriers), and some may sustain their bite (staffies). There is no scientific evidence to suggest that prohibiting certain breeds would reduce the bite incidence; in fact, in countries where breed specific legislation has been introduced, there has been no reduction in dog bite incidents.

What is of prime importance is to be a responsible owner, which includes educating children and guests, being aware of incidents that may provoke aggression, keeping the public safe from your dog, and keeping your dog safe when with the public.

## How to avoid bites:

**1) Learn the language of dogs:** dogs will posture with their whole body, including the tail, eyes and ears, use their voice, and raise their hair to communicate with us (they use a lot of other signals too, such as pheromones, but we can't read those).



Warning signs of a scared or threatened dog include;

- a crouched body,
- tail tucked under the body,
- ears back or down,
- no eye contact being made
- standing still or trying to move away from the perceived threat
- raised hair over the shoulders ("hackles")

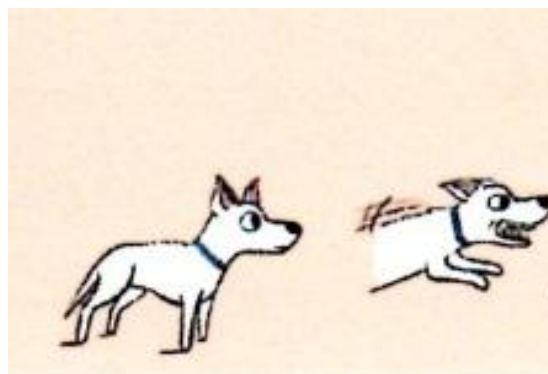
These dogs will bite if the threat continues to approach. These dogs would rather escape from the danger. Punishing a scared dog is totally inappropriate as it will only enhance their fear.

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Other warning signs that a dog may bite include:

- tail up,
- ears up,
- hackles up,
- a stiff-straight-legged stance,
- direct eye contact
- moving towards the threat
- lips pulled back to show their canine teeth.



This is not a scared dog but a dog which is prepared to fight for something it wants to protect, or a resource it wants access to.

Some dogs will display a mixture of signals.

*Remember, if a dog is wagging its tail, this is not necessarily a sign of friendliness. This purely means the dog is willing to interact.*

## 2) Avoid dangerous situations

- Do not approach dogs in cars, on chains or cornered dogs
- Don't run past a dog in case it triggers a chase
- Don't approach a dog eating, chewing, sleeping, caring for pups or recovering from illness (or in obvious pain)
- Do not tease or play rough with dogs
- Be cautious around older dogs. Their hearing or sight may be impaired making them more likely to startle, and may have arthritic or dental pain
- Do not break up dog fights with your hands. Use a stick, throw a blanket over them to disorient them
- Do not put your face directly in front of a dog's
- Never approach a strange dog without the owner's permission
- Never leave babies or infants alone with a dog.
- Always supervise children's play with dogs

Teach this to your children:



# How to Greet a Dog (and What to Avoid)

Appropriate greetings are common sense. Imagine if someone greeted you the way many people greet dogs!

Human to Human INCORRECT	Human to Dog INCORRECT	Human to Dog CORRECT
 Avoid reaching into their safety zone.	 Avoid reaching in or towards the dog's car.	 Stand a safe distance away so that you are not a threat.
 Avoid rushing up.	 Avoid rushing up.	 Approach slowly (at a relaxed walk).
 Avoid interactions without asking.	 Avoid interacting with unfamiliar dogs, especially if they're tied up.	 Ask if you can interact first.
 Avoid staring at people. This is scary.	 Avoid staring at the dog or approaching head-on.	 Approach sideways and look using your peripheral vision.
 Avoid looming over.	 Avoid leaning over or towards dogs even when you change position to squat or get up.	 Stay outside the dog's bubble and present your side to the dog.
 Avoid reaching into personal space.	 Avoid reaching your hand out for the dog to sniff.	 Let the dog approach at his own rate.
 Avoid close interaction if the person is afraid of you.	 Avoid petting if the dog looks nervous or tense. Just admire him instead.	 It's OK to pet the dog if he looks relaxed, comes up to you, and solicits your attention by rubbing against you.
 Avoid touching inappropriately.	 Avoid hugging, kissing, and patting roughly. This is too familiar and disliked by many dogs.	 Pet gently.

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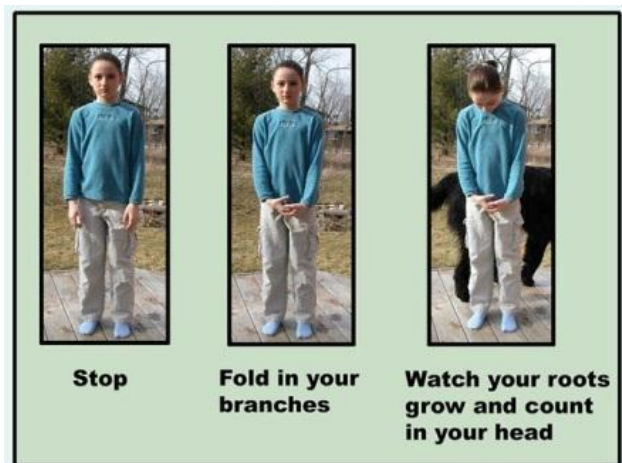
### 3) Know self defence.

Many people are bitten because they unintentionally provoke or escalate an attack.

If in any doubt about a dog,

- Stand still
- Don't make eye contact (turn head to side, look out of corner of eye)
- Don't move suddenly
- Be a statue
- Make no loud noises
- Try to slowly walk away
- Remember; *be a tree not a bunny!*

<http://www.be-a-tree.com/kid%20main.htm>



If it lunges:

- If you are holding something, put it in its mouth
- Raise your arm to protect your face
- If it grabs your arm or leg, try not to pull it away; give it to the dog (easier said than done!)
- If knocked over, be a turtle: curl up, face down, cover head with arms and stay this way until the dog leaves.

### 4) make your dog people safe

- Socialise your dog through puppy classes and training
- Invite them to be part of the family. Less social “outdoor” dogs are represented more for biting than “indoor” dogs
- Establish clear rules and standards of behaviour and be consistent. Make sure other members of the family and guests know these rules.
- Avoid punishment. Some nasty power battles occur between owners and dogs when people are told to “teach the dog who is boss”. Techniques such as pushing your dog over on his side, or staring at him and growling are usually dangerous and ineffective. There is the risk of this bullying behaviour escalating until physical or psychological harm is done and the relationship becomes one of fear, distrust and usually more aggression.

## 5) monitor your dog for danger signs with children

If your dog shows any of these signs in the presence of children, you should remove your dog from their company;

- It appears ill at ease
- Backs away from the child
- Remains still, looking from corner of the eye at the child
- Has raised hackles
- Stands over the child
- Has ears back, tail between legs
- Approaches the child with tail up
- Curls the lip
- growls

### How Kids SHOULD Interact with Dogs

Use common sense.

Be polite and kind to pets



Learn to recognize when your dog is scared or anxious



Play appropriate games with pets, such as:

Fetch



Training tricks (like roll over, shake, beg, etc.)



Walking and running with a dog



Playing hide-n-seek



Always remember:

Supervise all interactions. Accidents can happen in a split second.



Train your dog to associate the kids with positive experiences so he'll be more likely to tolerate your child in case she accidentally interacts inappropriately.



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# How Kids SHOULD NOT Interact with Dogs

It's common sense. Just imagine how people should interact with each other.

Avoid taking people's food



Avoid bothering dogs when they are eating

Avoid stealing other people's toys



Avoid taking a dog's bones or toys

Avoid putting your face right up to someone else's face



Avoid putting your face right up to a dog's face

Avoid bothering when asleep



Avoid bothering animals when they are resting. Let sleeping dogs lie.

Avoid pestering



Avoid grabbing tail/ears

Avoid climbing on or trampling



Avoid climbing on or trampling

Avoid pinching



Avoid hugging. Most dogs dislike it.

Avoid screaming around



Avoid hollering and shouting. Use your "inside" voice instead.

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## 6) be responsible

We invite dogs to be part of our lives. No dog deserves to be made to feel threatened, or to be out in dangerous situations. All dogs are individuals, and like us, may feel uncomfortable in certain situations. Any dog which bites needs immediate assessment for behavioural problems, but they should not receive an automatic death sentence.