

BEWARE OF DOG!

Basic Dog Smarts for Everyone

by Shelagh MacDonald and Susan Muehlherr

“Beware of Dog” signs display a clear warning to all who read them. In French, these signs read, “Chien Mechant”. “Chien” means dog, and “mechant” can mean any of the following: wicked, malicious, evil, mischievous, bad, ill-tempered, spiteful – hardly an adjective you would expect to describe “man’s best friend”.

Usually, dogs are loyal and affectionate. Many will risk their lives to protect humans. Their barking can frighten a burglar away, and wake a family when a fire breaks out. Dogs can provide assistance and freedom to blind, deaf or epileptic people; they can offer a therapeutic lick or cuddle to seniors or children in institutions. But some can also be dominant, highly protective or downright vicious. How can children and adults predict or control the difference? Let’s explore some ideas.

Dogs will bite more than a million North Americans this year; at least another million bites will go unreported. Unfortunately, most victims of dog bites are children. The majority of dog bites to children are inflicted by animals known to the kids.

Dogs whose owners allow them to run free, despite leash laws, will inflict most bites. Millions of dollars in medical treatment is spent each year on dog bites; in addition victims suffer psychological damage.



Teaching children how to behave around dogs, as well as educating parents to ensure that children are never left unsupervised with ANY dog, can prevent many incidents. Recently, the National Companion Animal Coalition (the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies is a founding member) developed a web site intended to reduce dog bites: www.dogsandkids.ca. This site provides lots of information that would be perfect for a Scouting program.

Why Dogs Bite

Lack of education and commitment of dog owners: these are the two biggest factors that lead to dog bites. Too many people get a dog

without knowing anything about the type of animal, or how to take care of it responsibly.

Dogs aren’t born already trained. They need to be taught how to behave with their families, with children, with strangers and with other canines. Dogs also need regular exercise and social stimulation. This requires a significant commitment from owners.

So why do dogs bite?

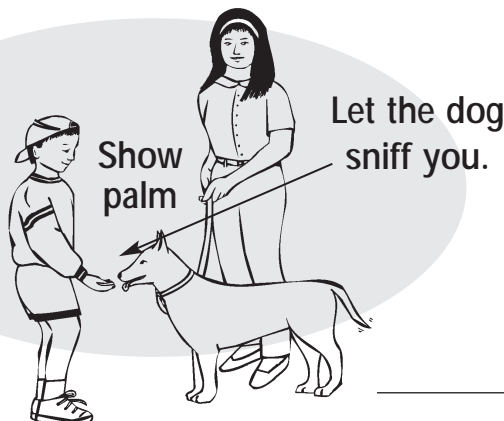
- If a dog feels threatened, angry or afraid, even a friendly dog could bite.
- Many dogs have a predatory instinct to chase and attack.
- Dogs protect what they consider their things – food, puppies or favourite toys.
- They also protect their spaces – eating and sleeping areas, yards, porches, parked cars and their homes.
- If a dog is cornered or crowded by many people, or if someone stands over a dog, it may feel threatened.
- Stray dogs may feel lost or hurt, and therefore may attack with less provocation.
- Elderly dogs can be startled because they can’t hear or see someone approaching.

Tips for Preventing Bites

- Start teaching children when they are young to be careful around pets. Don’t play rough, and don’t allow a puppy to bite – even play bite.

How to Safely Approach a Dog

Approach the dog from the front.



Caution!
Always ask the owner if the dog is friendly.

- Teach children never to approach strange dogs.
- Always ask permission from a pet owner before touching a dog, even if the animal is on a leash with its owner present.
- Don't put your face close to a dog's face. Most bite injuries occur on the face.
- Don't run past a dog. Dogs love to chase and catch things. Never give dogs a reason to get excited or aggressive. For example, avoid yelling, screaming, or squealing close to any animal.
- Never try to pet a dog that is sleeping, eating or taking care of puppies.
- Do not try to pet dogs that are tied up, behind fences or in vehicles.
- Don't take away a dog's food, bones or toys.
- Don't swing your arms or something in your hands at a dog. It may take it as an invitation to bite.
- Don't pet a stray dog or one that is running loose.

If you see several dogs fighting, or a dog that is hurt, get an adult to help.

If a Dog Attacks

- If a dog approaches to sniff you, stand still. In most cases, the dog will go away once it decides you aren't a threat.
- Watch for the following signs that a dog is feeling uncomfortable: ears back against the head, head down, tail between the legs, eyes shifting, growling getting louder.
- If a dog threatens you, remain calm. Don't scream. Avoid eye contact with it. Try to speak

calmly and firmly. Stand still until the dog leaves, or back away slowly. Don't turn and run; they can run faster.

- If a dog jumps at you, fold your arms, grabbing each elbow with the hand of the other arm, and thrust your arms up in front of your face. This will help to protect your face, and may knock the dog off balance.
- If a dog knocks you down, roll on your tummy and put your hands over your neck. Try to tuck your face into your chest. Yell for help. Don't move.


If You Get Bitten

Wash the wound immediately, making sure you use lots of soap and water. Wash away all saliva. Cover the wound with a sterile cloth, and go to your doctor or hospital without delay. Try to remember all details of the attack: what the dog looked like, its colour, size, breed, and special markings.

Report the attack to police, telling them where it happened and the owner's name or house where the dog lives (if you know it). The more information you can provide, the quicker the dog can be found. Then you can find out if it has had its rabies inoculation.

Two Paws Up Rating

Dogs are great companions, but humans must treat them with respect and friendship. If all dogs were spayed or neutered at six to eight months of age, properly socialized to be friendly around other dogs, children and strangers, and trained to respond reliably to voice commands, there



A Visit from Police, Guide or Rescue Dogs

Look for ways to tie in a visit from the Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind, police rescue dogs or search dogs into your program. Youths will marvel at watching these dogs in action.

would be significantly fewer dog bites. Doesn't this sound like a reasonable expectation to make of dog owners? Unfortunately, few dog owners comply with these basic expectations. So, everyone must remain vigilant around all dogs.

Teach your Scouting members, regardless of age, how to act around dogs and what to do if attacked. It will keep them safe. X

-- *Shelagh MacDonald is Program Director of the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. Susan Muehlherr works at the National Office.*

