



## Kids and dogs

### Kids and Dogs don't always mix!

Kids, dogs and dog attacks have hit the headlines all too often in recent years, reminding us of the dangers that even the family pet can pose.

Dog attacks are not just those which happen in public places by unknown dogs.

Any dog bite is an attack, even when inflicted on a family member by the lovable family pet. Dog attacks to a family member in the family home are a painful experience for all concerned. The bite may not always require medical treatment but the action should be seen as serious and help should be obtained.

### Dog attacks in 'Safe' Environments

The majority of dog bites involving young children are never reported to the authorities or the media. This is because they happen to be in the child's own home and the culprit is seen to be the family pet. Dog attacks in the home of a friend or relative are not uncommon either, and the home of grandparents is another frequent venue.

Dog attacks in these familiar and 'safe' environments always horrify the owner of the dog. All too often the immediate reaction is to have the dog destroyed.

Everyone thinks that this action is highly responsible and will prevent the attack ever being repeated. It does — but only by that particular dog.

Owners often go ahead and select a new dog from the animal shelter, pet shop or a friend without first consulting someone experienced in dog behaviour to find out why the attack happened.

There are always reasons why dogs attack. These reasons, of course, cannot be used as excuses for the dog because people's safety must come first. But if a dog owner cannot handle the necessary action needed, then they should reconsider owning a dog of any breed, whether it be a Labrador, Chihuahua or Pit Bull Terrier.

### Size not the issue

Never be misled into thinking that dog size is the issue, and that only big, nasty-looking dogs are the ones that attack. Quite often it can be the small, cute little puppy that gets overexcited and delivers a nasty bite.

### Why attacks happen

More children under the age of five are bitten by dogs than at any other age. Children are often noisy, fast moving and unpredictable. They can be seen by the dog as a threat to his bed, his food, his water bowl and toy.

Dogs often repeatedly move away from children when they have had enough of being patted, jumped on or poked. The child cannot understand the dog's action and wants to keep 'playing'. That playing in the eyes of the dog is often seen as tormenting.

To demonstrate his frustration and determination to stop the 'game' a dog may resort to attacking.

### How to prevent dog bites

Parents should seek advice on different breeds before selecting their dog. No matter what breed, it should always be remembered that all dogs have the ability to bite if the need arises. Different breeds use particular types of aggression. Owners should understand the types of aggression peculiar to their family pet.

Children under five years should never be left alone with any dog, even if it is the faithful family pet. They need to be socialized with each other under adult supervision. We need to remember that old dogs may not see or hear too well and that young puppies need a rest from youngsters - as do young children from puppies.

It should be carefully explained to children that they must not approach strange dogs even if the owner gives permission. They should be taught to always let a strange dog approach them first (say hello to them first). Once the dog has done this, they can then pat the dog, preferably under the chin.

When approached by a barking dog, children should be taught to 'stand like a post'. The dog will see screaming or hitting out as an invitation to fight. Once the dog has lost interest, the child should then walk slowly away. If riding a bike, the child should dismount the bike on the side away from the dog and 'stand like a post' until the dog loses interest. They should then walk away with the bike, not riding again until a distance away from the dog.

If knocked to the ground by the dog the child should be taught to 'become a turtle' by curling into a tight ball, tucking in the head and placing the hands on the back of the neck. The dog will often sniff & poke; if the child remains still and quiet, the dog generally loses interest. The child should then get up and walk, not run away from the area.

## Introducing dog to baby

If your dog has been an “only child” and you are expecting a human baby shortly then it will be worthwhile to put in place steps to ensure the canine member of the household accepts the new human member.

### Weeks Before Birth

If the dog is allowed in house, allow him to enter nursery and see the changes to the room.

Sprinkle a nappy, towel, baby clothes with baby powder (the one that will be used) and allow the dog to get familiar with this smell.

If the dog has been ‘the only child’ gradually separate yourselves from him by keeping him away from you for various periods of time whenever you are at home.

Review the dog’s routine (time of walk, feed time, playtime with owner) as to how this will have to be changed after the birth and commence these changes now.

### Just Prior To The Birth

Record a baby’s cry to be played from the nursery, so as to familiarize the dog to this new sound. Place a baby-sized doll in the cot, play the recording from within the cot and lead the dog into the room to hear and see from a distance. The dog may not want to enter the room immediately. Don’t force him, let him enter when comfortable with the new sound.

Handle the doll as you would a baby, in view of the dog. While handling the doll outdoors if the dog likes to play ball, throw it for him, so as he learns good things happen when the baby is around.

### Bringing Baby Home

Because Mum has been away for a time the dog will naturally

be excited and want her full attention. Mum should give the dog attention while Dad removes the baby from the car and takes him/her into the nursery. Mum should then go indoors, leaving dog outside. After a short time, the recording should be played from the nursery, if the baby hasn’t obliged by crying first. With the baby in the cot, the dog should be allowed into the nursery. After a few minutes one parent should pick up the baby and turn off the recording while the other observes the dog. After a few minutes the dog should be encouraged outdoors, by either invitation to a game or treat.

### The Days Ahead

The dog should be allowed supervised access to be near the baby. The dog’s first approach to the baby should be when the baby is being held by an adult. The parent should remain calm and allow the dog to smell the baby’s feet and give the dog a pat.

Never leave the child alone with the dog. No child under 5 years should be left alone with any dog, as children often make sudden movements and noises that can cause the dog to react adversely.

When the child is of toddler age, the dog should be provided with a safe area where he can be away from the child.

For advice on dog behaviour call the Petcare Helpline ph: 8930 0606.