

## DOG SAFETY AWARENESS

We are dedicated to reducing the number of children bitten by dogs every year.

This is an information resource for parents and teachers, to teach children how to be safe around dogs; be it their own pets, friends' dogs or unfamiliar dogs in public places.

There are many do's and don'ts within this document, but the following three rules alone will reduce dog bites significantly:

- **Never, ever go over to dogs; instead always call dogs to you**
- **Never kiss or cuddle a dog**
- **Never leave children alone with dogs**

**WHY DO DOGS BITE?**

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**HOW TO TELL DOGS TO LEAVE YOU ALONE**

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## WHY DO DOGS BITE?

As we brought dogs into our domestic world, it is only fair we take the time to understand their language and behaviours. Like us, they can feel happy, sad, anxious and nervous; and they have days when they want to play and those they'd prefer to be left alone.

Dogs always bite for a reason, and there are always warning signs before bites occur, subtle as they may be. If we know these reasons and can understand what they're telling us through their body language, we can prevent bites from occurring.

Here are some reasons for a dog to bite:

**Frightened** - Someone has startled the dog and it has reacted to protect itself, or a dog feels vulnerable because it has been put into a situation it is not happy with.

**Protective** - The dog is being possessive and protective over a toy, food, dish, bed, owners, territory or her puppies.

**Not feeling well** - The dog is injured, sick or old and has little patience.

**Over excited** - Rough play lead the dog to becoming over-excited.

**Chase instinct** - The dog perceived a child as prey due to their quick movements and high-pitched noise.

**Poorly bred** - The dog hasn't learnt bite inhibition and bites harder than it realises when being offered food or a toy.

**Poorly trained & socialised** – Dogs need guidance to learn how to behave in our human society. If they are not properly trained and socialised, they can revert to aggressive behaviour in order to cope with a world they don't understand.

# HOW TO SAFELY INTERACT WITH DOGS

## **Rule 1: Always ask permission first**

If you want to interact with any dog, always ask permission from the dog owner first, and all children should also ask their guardian for permission. The reason for this is that it will give the owners an opportunity to tell you whether their dogs are friendly or not. Even dogs that are usually friendly can have their off-days (they might be ill or have just undergone surgery) so by asking first, it gives owners an opportunity to tell you to leave their dogs alone if need be.

## **Rule 2: Never, ever go over to dogs**

Always call dogs to you, regardless of whether they are your pet, a friend's dog or a strange dog, or despite how friendly they may seem. If they don't come, respect their wishes and leave them alone.

Personal space is very precious to a dog that they can be possessive over. We don't like it when people approach us too quickly or are too close, especially strangers; and dogs feel the same.

So many people who are bitten say, *"I didn't do anything to provoke him, I just went over to stroke him!"* They were bitten because they disrespected a fundamental dog rule and 'went over' to the dog uninvited; and for whatever reason, that dog felt the need to 'tell' that person they are not happy about their personal space being invaded.

Out of respect for dogs and for our own safety, no one should ever approach dogs. If dogs don't come when called, there is a reason for this. In case that reason is because they don't want to be fussed or touched, respect their wishes and leave them be.

## **Rule 3: Remain calm and turn on your side**

If you wish to interact with dogs it's important you remain calm and quiet with no sudden movements.

Look at a dog as you call them over, and then turn onto your side as they approach. This will prevent you from towering over the dog and staring into the dog's eyes, which can be perceived as threatening.

## **Rule 4: Only stroke dogs under the chin, on the chest or on the side of the neck**

Before you touch the dog, let them sniff you first for a few seconds; this is their way of getting to know you.

The reason you should stroke dogs under the chin, on the chest or on the side of the neck is because dogs can see where your hand is going. If someone put their hand over the top of your head you would naturally look to where the hand is going because it is threatening.

## **Rule 5: Never stare or gaze adoringly at dogs**

Staring is perceived as a threat, and can cause dogs to react with aggression in order to protect themselves.

## **Rule 6: Never give dogs a cuddle or kiss, or put your face into a dog's face**

Whilst we may think this is affectionate, to dogs it is perceived as a threat, and can cause them to react aggressively in order to protect themselves. Dogs don't like hugs and kisses – it is an invasion of their personal space and is perceived as a dominant gesture. This is one of the most common causes of facial injuries to children.

Instead of putting yourself in danger and forcing your dog to endure your affections that they interpret as a threat, show them you love them in a way they'll understand and enjoy. Call them over for a stroke as described above, invite them to watch TV with you so they can put their head on your lap or lean on you, call them over for a game of fetch or hide and seek. If you stop petting dogs and they ask for more, you know they're enjoying it and it's safe to continue.

## **Rule 7: Never tower over or step over dogs**

This is a dominant gesture, whilst also entering a dog's personal space.

## **Rule 8: Never tease a dog**

Dogs feel pain and have varied tolerance levels like people. They will give you warnings to let you know they're not happy about what you're doing, but when it gets too much, they will feel the need to nip or, worse, bite to defend themselves.

# HOW TO TELL DOGS TO LEAVE YOU ALONE

## **Rule 1: Ignore dogs you don't want to interact with**

Don't go anywhere near them and avoid eye contact. This will communicate that you do not wish for that dog to come over and that you pose no threat. In turn, the dog should ignore you.

For example, ignore dogs that are eating, dozing or chewing a toy. Also ignore dogs that are tied up in public places, locked in cars or behind fences.

'Ignoring' may be rude in our human world, but it forms a significant role in canine communication that dogs use every day to tell fellow dogs that they do not want to interact.

## **Rule 2: If a dog comes over and you want it to go away - fold your arms, look at your feet and wait quietly**

If a dog chases you, or if a dog becomes over-excited, aggressive, boisterous or just plain annoying, communicate you wish for that dog to leave you alone by following these five steps:

- 1. Stand still**
- 2. Fold in your arms**
- 3. Look at your feet**
- 4. Wait quietly for either the dog to leave you alone or for someone to help you**
- 5. Once the dog has left you alone, walk away slowly without looking at the dog**

If a dog chases you while you are riding a bike (skateboard, scooter, etc.) stop riding and place your bike in between you and the dog. Tuck in your arms and head, and wait quietly for the dog to leave you alone or for someone to help.

If a dog knocks you over, roll into a ball making sure you cover your face. Quietly wait for the dog to leave you alone or for someone to help.

This rule applies to any dog that you wish to go away. All dogs become excitable over things that move, and they love to chase. If you stand still and do nothing, dogs will find you boring and leave you alone. It's important for safety to keep your head and arms tucked in. By tucking your head in, not only are you protecting your throat and face, but you are also averting your eyes from the dog, showing that you are no threat.





## WHEN TO LEAVE A DOG ALONE

- Dogs tied up in public places
- Dogs walking or resting in a public place, with or without an owner
- Dogs on a lead with an owner
- Dogs in cars or on public transport
- Dogs eating
- Dogs sleeping or dozing
- Dogs in gardens/behind fences
- Dogs guarding something (toy/bed/bone)
- Dogs with puppies
- Dogs that are sick or injured
- Dogs playing tug of war/chase
- Dogs snatching something off you/has something you want – let them have it
- Dogs locked behind baby-gates/doors

**Remember**, if a strange dog comes over uninvited, or a dog chases you, or a dog you're playing with becomes over-excited or aggressive, follow these four steps:

1. Stand still
2. Fold your arms
3. Look at your feet
4. Wait quietly for either the dog to leave you alone or for someone to help you
5. Once the dog has left you alone, walk away slowly without looking at the dog

# DOG BODY LANGUAGE

**Happy** - These forms of body language signal that the dog is receptive to attention or wants to play:

- Eyes are soft and relaxed – (not wide, frowning)
- Body is relaxed, even wriggly
- Play bow (front end down; rear end up; tail wagging)
- Tail wagging enthusiastically or thumping the floor

**Alert/Interested in something** - These forms of body language signal that the dog is interested in something, or is deciding on a course of action. In this state, they are not receptive to receiving attention:

- Wide eyes staring at whatever has caught their attention
- Frowning
- Body still tense
- Ears forward
- Mouth closed
- Tail high
- Possibly a slow tail wag

**Stress/anxiety** - These forms of body language signal that the dog is not comfortable with the current situation. The dog is communicating that if you don't stop doing whatever it is you're doing, you will push him to the point of nipping or, worse, biting. Very much like a mum saying to a child, "If you don't stop that, you'll get a telling off!" This warning is a good thing, as the dog is giving you an opportunity to leave them alone, so do just that:

- Wide eyes so you can see whites of the eye
- Frowning
- Licking lips
- Yawning
- Tail down or between legs, sometimes wagging
- Ears down or sideways
- Rapid panting
- Hiding
- Turning their head away
- Barking and retreating
- Rolling on their back in a submissive way

**Aggression** - These forms of body language signal that the dog is going to bite. Stop all interaction with the dog and look away, giving the dog an opportunity to leave. If you are touching the dog at this point, slowly move your hand away. It is very important that you avoid eye contact and avoid talking to the dog when they display this body language. Don't scream and run away. Instead, fold in your arms, look at your feet, and quietly wait for help to come.

- Eyes intensely staring at whatever/whoever they are aggressing
- Hackles up
- Body goes stiff and tense
- Tail high
- Legs wide, body low staring at you
- Lunging forward/charging
- Mouthing
- Barking
- Growling
- Baring teeth
- Snarling
- Nipping



We hope this document has helped to develop a better understanding of dog safety awareness.

If you have any questions, please contact us. We'd be happy to help in any way we can.

# Naturewatch Foundation

For the advancement of animal welfare

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