

Why Dogs Bite: A Guideline For Children

Knowing why dogs bite and what to do to keep yourself safe is important. Dogs may bite for the following reasons:

- Fear or surprise
- Excitement
- Pain or sickness
- Protecting property

Excitement

The noises and movements you make when you play are very exciting to dogs. When dogs play with other dogs, they often play roughly with their sharp teeth and claws. Sometimes dogs forget that they can't play the same way with you. Because dogs don't have hands, they use their mouths to grab things. A dog can hurt you by accident, just by being too excited.

What you should do: Play gently and calmly. If a dog gets too excited, freeze until he calms down, then walk away. Take some time out before returning to play to give you both a chance to calm down.

Pain or Sickness

When a dog is in pain, he doesn't understand where the pain comes from. If you touch him, he may think you are causing the pain and could bite you to stop the pain.

What you should do: If a dog is acting like he is sick or hurt, leave him alone – even if he belongs to your family. Tell an adult and together you can get medical help for the dog.

Protecting Property

A dog may protect anything that's important to him: his toys, his bed, his food and water bowls, his people, his yard, his house or even his car. If you come near something that a dog feels is offlimits to you, he may bite to make you leave his property alone!

What you should (or should not) do: Never go into a yard where there's a dog you don't know. Don't reach through a car window or a fence to pet a dog. Don't pet a dog that's tied up. Don't touch a dog's property, including his bed and food dishes.

Fear or Surprise

Quick movements and sudden or loud noises are scary for dogs, and they may bite to protect themselves. If a dog thinks you might hurt him, he may not know how to get away, so he'll protect himself by biting.

What you should do: When you're around a dog you don't know, be quiet and move slowly. Always ask the dog's owner for permission before you pet him. If the owner says you may pet the dog, hold out your hand with your palm down. Let the dog come to you to sniff the back of your hand. Always pet him under the chin first. If a dog is sleeping, leave him alone. You can come back to pet or play with him after he wakes up.

If the owner isn't there for you to ask permission to pet the dog, then LEAVE THE DOG ALONE!

Warning Signs

Watch and listen for the warnings that a dog will give you to let you know when he is upset. If his ears are laid back against his head or his legs are very stiff, he is probably warning you that he feels threatened and will protect himself if he must. If the hair on his back is standing up, that's another warning. If a dog is growling or barking with his teeth showing, it means he is ready to bite. A dog's warning signs mean that you're doing something he doesn't like, so stop doing it!

If you think a dog is about to bite you:

- Freeze and look only at the ground.
- Count to five, slowly and silently.
- Move away very slowly, sideways or backwards.
- If the dog jumps on you, act like a rock by curling up into a ball and covering your face and head with your arms.

What you should NOT do:

- Don't stare at the dog – that means, "I dare you to bite me!"
- Don't run, jump or wave your arms around.
- Don't scream.
- Don't throw anything at the dog or hit him.

If A Dog Bites You

If you are bitten by a dog, or any animal, you should:

- Have an adult take you to a doctor.
- Wash the wound with soap and warm water.
- Write down the type, size and color of the animal. Was it wearing a collar? Did it have any identification tags? Where were you when you were bitten? Where did the animal go?
- Have an adult report all of this information to the animal control agency in your city or county.