



Resources for Pet Owners



Why Dogs Bite: A Guideline for Parents and Children

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Dogs can be a wonderful addition to families. They help teach children compassion, responsibility and companionship. Dogs do not have any way to express themselves verbally so they use their mouth to communicate. They have an amazing amount of strength in their jaws so it is possible for them to damage the delicate skin of children. To better understand your dog, look at the reasons they bite.

Pain or Illness

Dogs that are hurt or sick feel the need to keep children at bay until they feel better. If a dog has a lame paw, he will do anything to be left alone. The dog may believe you are causing the pain. You should keep children away from the dog until he is better and make sure he receives medical care if needed. Give the dog a safe area where he can recuperate, like a crate.

Excitement

Puppies and adolescent dogs often play with their mouth open. They see children as other dogs so they are more likely to bite when playing with them. Loud noises, screaming, running and chasing can make the dog overly excited causing her to bite more. The dog doesn't mean to hurt anyone, she is just playing along. If you find your dog becoming overly excited, take a break from playing until the situation is calm. Try to find calm games to play with your dog until she learns to not use her mouth when excited.

Fear

Dogs don't know how to express fear so they may end up biting when frightened. Dogs can be scared of strangers, odd noises and even thunderstorms. If you sense your dog is frightened, you should let him find a safe place to hide. Never approach a dog you don't know. If he is scared, he may bite. Keep children away from an unfamiliar or scared dog.

Protecting Resources

Toys, bones, treats and even an old shoe can be a coveted object for a dog. The dog does not know you want to play with him, he thinks you are taking his toy. An adult needs to teach the dog to exchange their toy for something else. This is too difficult for a child to do. Find a really delicious treat to give to the dog when it gives up an object. Show the dog the treat and when it releases the object, give it the treat and take the object. This way the dog will learn if it gives up a resource, it will get something good in return. Tell children to leave the dog alone when it is eating or chewing on a bone until it learns to give up objects in exchange for something else.

Aggression

Even dogs that like people will sometimes still not like children. If a dog was not exposed to children at a young age, she may not understand their quick movements or high pitched voices. If you are seeing signs of aggression in your dog, do not let children around your dog. Make sure your gate and house are locked so a child will not accidentally let the dog out. Consult a behaviorist immediately.

Warning Signs

Dogs often warn or give signals before they bite. You need to carefully monitor your dog's body language and vocalizations around children.

- Watch for stiffness in the dog's body. Stiff movements show stress in the dog.
- Ears may be pinned back and their gaze may be fixed.
- The hair on the back, neck and tail may be raised.
- The dog may be growling, barking or showing teeth.

What to Do

If your dog is showing any of these signs, freeze immediately. Do not stare right at the dog. Shift your gaze off to the side. Count to five, silently, and then move away slowly sideways or backwards. If the dog jumps on you, curl into a ball and cover your head. Never scream, run, throw things or stare at the dog. Try to be as quiet as possible.