

Help Your Kids Avoid Dog Bites

Children are the most likely victims of dog bites, and all dogs have the potential to bite. As a matter of fact, more dog bites happen in a home, with a familiar dog than with an unknown dog. Does this mean kids and dogs can't coexist? Of course not--but it does mean that parents and kids need to understand why dogs might bite and what to do to prevent it.

Why Dogs Bite

Dogs always bite for a reason, even if we don't see what it is at the time. Keep in mind that supervision by adults at all times is a must when dogs and children are together.

Excitement

Dogs can bite simply out of excitement, and kids' activity and noise can easily contribute to a dog getting overly excited. Teach your kids to be aware of playing calmly when dogs are around, and let them know that if a dog starts to get overly excited, they should stop and stand still, then walk away without screaming or running--both things that will get a dog more worked up.

Pain or illness

Any dog that's hurting or uncomfortable may react aggressively. Children should be told that if they think a dog is hurt or sick, they should leave it alone and tell an adult right away, even if it's their own dog.

Guarding

Dogs may guard things, such as toys or food; places, such as their house, yard, or car; or people. Children should never approach a dog that's tied up or behind a fence or in a car, and they need to be supervised when they're around dogs that are eating or playing with their toys.

Fear

A dog that's afraid or startled is likely to bite, so kids need to learn never to approach an unknown dog without permission from the dog's owner and from their own parents. Teach children to move slowly and quietly and never run up to a dog or yell at or tease one. Have your kids practice how to meet an unknown dog (see below) once they have permission.

How To Greet a Dog

- Once you have permission from the dog's owner, the best way to meet a dog is by letting the dog come to you. Stand still and be calm, and let the dog decide if they want to come up and sniff you.
- If a dog comes to you happily, with a softly wagging tail and a relaxed face, the best way to pet the dog is reach from below, not from above. Most dogs don't like being petted on top of the head, but a lot of dogs like to be rubbed under their chin or on the chest. The dog's owner can probably tell you their favorite spots.
- Talk softly and don't stare, and make sure you don't scare the dog by moving too fast or reaching over their head from above.
- If the dog doesn't come up to sniff you and say hello, that's OK. You might meet that dog another day!

Warning Signals and What to Do

Most (but not all) dogs give signs before they bite, and some signs are obvious while some are subtle. Warning signals can include:

- Moving away
- Looking away
- Putting their ears back
- Moving stiffly or slowly
- Licking nearby body parts (hands, face)
- Whites of eyes showing
- Panting
- Tail tucked
- Putting the hair up on their neck or back
- Showing their teeth, growling, or barking

If a dog starts to do one of the Warning Signals listed above, teach your children to stop and count to five, then very slowly and calmly move away from the dog without turning their back, avoiding eye contact with the dog the entire time -- no running, screaming, pushing, or hitting allowed. If the dog attacks, they should roll up into a ball like a turtle to protect their face and head.

What Not to Do

- Don't approach an unknown dog without permission from the owner and your parents.
- Don't run, scream, or yell around dogs.
- Don't stare at dogs--they find it threatening.
- Don't tease, hit, or poke dogs.
- Don't disturb dogs when they're sleeping, eating, or playing with their toys.
- Don't assume dogs are friendly because their tails are wagging. A dog might bite you even with a wagging tail.
- Don't chase dogs or run away from them.
- Don't go up to a dog that's tied up, in a car, or behind a fence.
- Don't approach a sick or hurt dog. Get an adult instead.

For more pet care tips, visit [spca.org/pettips](https://www.spcasoftexas.org/pettips)

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