



Children, Babies & Dogs

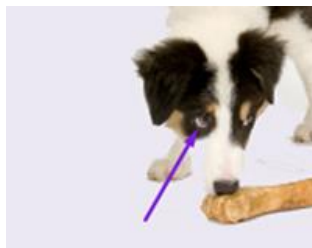
At the juncture of children and dogs, there always exists the risk of a child being bitten by a dog. This happens millions of times every year. However, many dog bites could be prevented if parents and children were aware of the subtle communication signals dogs send when they are uncomfortable or anxious. Some dogs are more tolerant than others of handling/mishandling by children and adults; these dogs typically show signs of anxiety but do not bite. Other dogs tolerate things they don't enjoy for a period of time, but when their level of tolerance is reached, they may growl, snap, or bite. While many parents are shocked and say, "There was no warning!!" those who are familiar with dog body language can point out exactly when a dog shows physical signs of distress around a child, as well as which dogs are most likely to bite and when.

Reasons a Dog May Bite:

- The dog is protecting a possession, food, or a favorite resting place.
- The dog is protecting its owner or the owner's property.
- The child has done something to provoke or frighten the dog (e.g., hugging the dog, moving into the dog's space, leaning or stepping over the dog, trying to take something away from the dog.)
- The dog is elderly and wants to be left alone.
- The dog is injured or sick or simply afraid.
- The child has hurt or startled the dog by stepping on it, poking it, or pulling its fur, tail, or ears.
- The dog without bite inhibition bites hard by accident when a child offers food or a toy.
- The child and dog are engaging in rough play and the dog gets overly excited.
- The dog treats the child as prey because the child is running and/or screaming.
- The dog is a herding breed and nips while trying to "herd" the children.

Warning Signs a Dog is at Risk of Biting a Child:

- The dog gets up and moves away from the child.
- The dog turns his head away from the child.
- You can see the "whites" of the dog's eye, in a half-moon shape (*see photo below.*)
- The dog yawns while the child approaches or is interacting with him.
- The dog licks his chops while the child approaches or is interacting with him.
- The dog suddenly starts scratching, biting, or licking himself.
- The dog does a big "wet dog shake" after the child stops touching him.



Half-moon shape whites of the eye.

Visit www.mspca.org/dogtraining

For more information on dog training and behavior as well as our upcoming training class schedule.

**Train Your Baby, Train Your Dog:**

We subscribe to a philosophy espoused by dog trainer Madeline Gabriel that says: *dogs and babies should lead parallel existences; lives near and next to each other, but without lots of direct interaction.* Gabriel refers to the term “magnetized” to describe babies who simply CANNOT stay away from dogs. This happens through the process of reinforcement; babies get love and attention from parents as they pet the dog. While it may be heartwarming to see your child show such interest in and love for animals, the concerning issue is the lack of self-control inherent in a “magnetized” young child. As a parent, you get to shape habits and behaviors you are going to instill in your child long before they can make their own choices. Encouraging a baby to notice, reach for, and/or touch your dog (or any dog) reinforces the sort of interactions between the child and the dog that can later go awry. The little baby on your lap who you are encouraging to “Pet the dog nicely,” will soon be a baby crawling towards the dog (this is usually when the dog first gets scared of a child); then they will turn into a blazing toddler racing towards the dog to grab it enthusiastically or even to fall on it by accident. The storybook tale of the perfect dog and its family’s children is just that, a myth. If you don’t encourage your baby to let the dog alone, the reality is that of a fast-moving baby/toddler who may corner or climb upon a dog repeatedly until the dog says “Enough!” the only way it knows how...by acting like an animal. It’s hard to imagine this sort of danger when you’re a new parent and you have a baby who seems so sweet, with your nice dog by your side. But this is precisely why Gabriel places so much focus on not starting a “relationship” between the dog and baby -- because it’s so hard to turn back once you start. Don’t be in a rush! Let your baby just coexist peacefully with your dog. Do not ever encourage your baby to pet a dog. Be sure to always reinforce the dog for being away from the baby, and vice versa. Once your child can reliably follow verbal instructions (typically around age 4-5 years) you can work on developing their relationship with the family dog.

References:

<https://babysafedogtraining.com/blog/> Madeline Gabriel blog

Some good pictures of relaxed vs. dogs at risk to bite: <https://doggonessafe.com/Bite-Prevention>

<https://www.thefamilydog.com/stop-the-77> good video for young children to learn about dog-safe practices

To read about one family’s tragic experience and the mission they have undertaken as a result:

<http://www.liamjperkfoundation.org/index.html>

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