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Exercising Your Dog

How To Prevent Your Dog From Biting Someone.

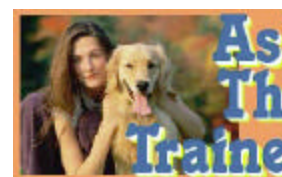
The topic of dog bites is very hot right now. It is in the news nightly. Dramatic pictures of the dogs and their victims are shown to illustrate each tragedy. I'm sure the owners of these dogs never imagined they would be on the 6 o'clock news one day when they first brought their cute little puppy home. If they had taken some simple steps when they first got their new puppy, they may have easily avoided a terrible situation later.

Every dog is capable of biting. Biting is a natural behavior for dogs to engage in. It is a way for a non-verbal animal to communicate certain things very clearly. Dogs have an extreme and very precise level of control over their bite. Dogs do not bite "on accident". A dog can easily move his head four times faster than a human can move their hand. If a dog snaps near a hand & SHY; he did not "miss" & SHY; he did not intend to bite. He only wanted to warn. The same is true if a dog makes contact with human skin. He only does that if he means to. He decides how much pressure to apply and for how long.

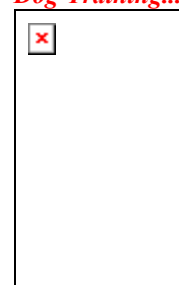
If a dog only bites acceptable things at acceptable times, it can be entertaining or even helpful. For example: A trained dog that fetches a ball by running after it, biting it and carrying it back to his owner is cute. A police dog that apprehends a criminal and restrains him by biting and holding onto his arm or leg can save someone's life. Problems occur when dogs bite the wrong thing at the wrong time. For dogs to live in human society, they must inhibit and modify their natural inclination to bite in order to become an acceptable member of society. Even dogs that live in the wild with other dogs must learn to do this. One of puppies' earliest lessons includes learning that he can not run up to an adult dog and chomp down on his ear. That adult dog will let him know in no uncertain terms with a growl, a snarl, a lunge and possibly a snap that he can't do that. The adult may even pin the puppy for a moment. The puppy will then be shunned until he changes how he approaches that dog. The puppy will learn that he must inhibit his desire to chomp ears and modify the way he interacts with other dogs if he is to become an accepted member of the pack. His reward will come when he controls himself enough that other members of the pack will interact with him and allow him access to the limited resources of the pack like food and shelter.

Problems often begin when the puppy leaves his litter to become part of a human family. While the puppy understood the clear and fair rules of his litter, he is now placed in a new environment with a different species. This species (humans) does not know how to speak his language (dog) and often tries to communicate with him in very confusing ways (words). Often, humans try to communicate one thing to him, but end up communicating another. Here are some examples of the different meaning humans and dogs have for the same things:

1. Looking directly at someone.
Human: I am open and honest. I am telling the truth.



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Dog: You had best take me very seriously. I may attack you.

2. Walking straight up to someone.

Human: I am friendly and wish to speak to you.

Dog: I am challenging/threatening you.

3. Reaching out to put an arm or paw over the head, neck or shoulder.

Human: I am caring, consoling, nurturing.

Dog: I am trying to dominate you.

4. Smiling.

Human: I am happy.

Dog: I am warning you that I may attack out of dominance or fear (depending on how much of my teeth I show).

5. Glancing/looking to the side or turning ones head to the side.

Human: I am distracted, bored or disinterested in what you are saying.

Dog: I am not a threat or challenge to you. Please stop what you are doing, it is stressful to me.

6. Licking your lips.

Human: I just ate something tasty.

Dog: I am a little nervous.

As you can see, there is a bit of a communication problem. This communication problem can lead to dog bites. A dog that has not been properly socialized to understand the differences in communication, may misinterpret a persons actions as threatening and respond by biting. This happens frequently when a dog is approached by a stranger and the stranger attempts to pet the dog. The stranger walks directly up to the dog (threatening), stands still (threatening) looks directly at the dog (threatening), smiles at the dog (threatening) and reaches out over the dog to pet it (dominating). You can see now why proper socialization is crucial to preventing dog bites. Dogs must learn that while certain behaviors mean one thing when a dog does them, it means something different when a person does them. Dogs need to learn that a person walking up to them, smiling, looking at them and reaching out over them is not a threat. Instead, the dog needs to learn that that means he is probably going to get a cookie and/or a pleasant pet. The easiest way for dogs to learn the right response to being approached by strangers is for a wide variety of people to approach the dog on a frequent and regular basis to give him food treats. This exercise will help reduce dog bites that occur when people come up to pet a dog.

The second kind of dog bite that can easily be reduced are bites that are prompted by a dogs prey or chase drive. Some dogs are born with a higher prey drive. They react very strongly to any movement in front of them. These dogs are likely to chase and bite a person running or riding a bike down the sidewalk. To reduce this natural instinct to chase, the dog needs lots of practice at sit and down-stays around people that are running and riding. The dog should be rewarded with food treats for staying. This will help him remain calm. Activity and movement on the other side of the fence surrounding their yard, frustrates many of these dogs and increases their territorial feelings each time they bark and the person continues down the sidewalk. This is why many dogs act aggressively towards the mailman or other delivery people. As the mailman approaches, the dog barks and the mailman goes away. If this happens regularly, the dog believes that his barking is driving the mailman away. Dogs who run along a fence all day, barking at everyone that passes by can become more aggressive and frustrated. This frustration builds their desire to chase if and when they ever do happen to get out of the yard. To reduce this frustration, the owner should make the fence solid to reduce visibility. It would be even better for the owner to build a secure dog run and set it up in a quiet area of the yard where the dog is not likely to be agitated by seeing or hearing outside activity.

Some dog bites that are prompted because of the under-socialization we discussed earlier when a dog does not know how to interpret basic human approaches. Other bites are prompted by the prey drive that some dogs are born with that makes them want to chase. Both of these types of bites can be made worse by how dominant or fearful the dog is. The more fearful a dog is, the harder he will bite when frightened by the approach of a stranger. The more dominant a dog is, the harder he will defend his perceived territory.

In addition to the tips on proper socialization, decreasing your dogs prey drive and decreasing fence-line frustration you can also decrease the likely hood that your dog will bite by increasing your leadership. Increasing your leadership can make fearful dogs less fearful and dominant dogs

less dominant.

To increase your leadership, don't give your dog anything he wants for free. This means that you should require your dog to at least sit before giving him his food, throwing a ball for him, petting him, letting him through a door etc. You should also not allow your dog access to any elevated areas like furniture or your bed. Always make sure you start, end and win every game with your dog. If you play tug of war, you should go get the toy out of the closet. Give your dog an obedience command, play tug for a moment, tell your dog to release the toy and either start over or end the game and put the toy away. If your dog tries to get your attention by pawing, barking, bringing a toy etc. you should get up and walk away. Go back to your dog later, give an obedience command and if your dog obeys, give him what he wanted earlier (attention, go for a walk, play fetch etc...).

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