

AVOIDING DOG ATTACKS & CONFRONTING AGGRESSIVE DOGS IN SAFETY

RSPCA GUIDELINES

Recent dog attacks on children and some adults have highlighted several important aspects of dog ownership.

1. Dogs are generally very social creatures - to people and other dogs. However it is a dog owner's responsibility to ensure dogs are properly socialised with people and other dogs.

This requires:

- * the dog to be properly socialised during the first four months of its life;
- * obedience training for the dog between 5 and 12 months;
- * daily reinforcement of training for life, but especially during the first two years when territorial protection develops.

2. Children should never be allowed to play with any dog unsupervised. All dogs have the potential to bite and children are prone to hugging, pulling and squeezing various parts of dogs, which may cause a dog to attack and bite. Children, particularly those under eight years, do not have the experience to detect the warning signals dogs may give.

Children who are able should be encouraged to control the dog with simple obedience commands to reinforce their dominance of the dog. Children should also be encouraged to feed dogs under parental supervision and should practice command control while presenting food to the dog.

3. It is important that adults educate children in the right way to approach animals. The very act of patting dogs on the head and back is perceived by most dogs as an aggressive action and yet this is what most adults accept, and encourage, children to do when approaching a dog.

Families with young children should be cautious in their selection of dogs. If a large or potentially aggressive dog is selected as a pet, proportionally more effort must be put into training and socialisation and into the control that the children can exert over the animal.

When a new child enters the family, the attention, control and time given to an established dog must be maintained to ensure that aggression toward the child does not develop.

4. Dogs should not be taught to attack. Owners should not accept or reinforce bad behavioural traits. Most people do not need to own attack-trained dogs which are a potential danger to humans. Ownership of such dogs should be reserved for security firm work and only then under the control of a qualified handler.

5. Any person owning a dog that could be, in any way, a danger to other people must accept liability. They must ensure there is no way their animal could escape from its yard; ensure the dog is always on a lead when taken for a walk; be willing to accept responsibility for any damage the dog may cause and be held culpable for it.

6. Young children should be taught never to approach a dog kept on a chain, and never to pat a dog running alone in the street.

7. If you are in a position of being threatened by a dog, stand stock still. Very few dogs will attack an object if it does not move. Indeed the worst action is to run. This will certainly induce the dog to chase and attack. If you are a jogger or if you are riding a motor-bike, stop immediately and don't try to outrun the dog. By stopping, you immediately halt the dog's chase reflex as there is nothing left to chase.

8. Do not look the dog directly in the eye and do not stand facing the dog directly. Both of these action can be interpreted by the dog as being an aggressive challenge.
9. With some dogs it is often useful to take a step towards the dog and to then stand still rather than to take a step backwards. By taking a step forwards the dog realises that you are not afraid of him but by taking a step back, the dog realises that you are backing off and that he has the upper hand.
10. If the dog is still intent on causing grievous bodily harm, then satisfy the dog's desire to bite by letting it bite something that doesn't have human flesh inside it.

Take a jacket, a towel or a hessian sack with you. Use this like a Matador's cape between you and the dog. If the dog does grab the jacket, **DO NOT LET GO** as he will then drop the article with preference to attack you. Then, if possible walk backwards to a fence or door, dragging the dog with you and subsequently closing the door between you and the dog.

Umbrellas are often useful. If a dog is lunging towards you, the sight of a rapidly expanding umbrella often stops the dog in its tracks. If it doesn't, then at least the umbrella can be used as a light mobile shield to keep the dog at bay.

It is important to remember that attacks by dogs are essentially a people problem - not a dog problem.