

The Hidden Secrets of Preventing and Withstanding a Vicious Dog Attack
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The Hidden Secrets of Preventing and Withstanding a Vicious Dog Attack

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Part 1 - Prevention

How to Stop Dog Attacks

Welcoming a dog into the home has become an American tradition. The expression that a dog is a man's best friend holds true for millions of Americans, and dogs that are taken in as pets very quickly become members of the family. Most families that own a dog recount happy and love-filled tales of canine antics. Unfortunately however, many exchanges between dogs and humans are less than positive. It has been estimated that over 4.7 people in America are attacked by a dog every year, and there are many more bites and attacks that are not reported. Of the reported attacks, 60% occur with children, more than 25% of all dog attacks require medical attention, and at least 12 people die annually from dog attacks.

When a serious dog attack occurs, what always follows is a media frenzy that is generally targeted towards the owners of larger, more aggressive dogs. However, even the smallest, most lovable canine will bite or attack if it is provoked. The primary targets of dog bites and attacks are children, the elderly, meter readers, mail carriers and other people that come to your home for service calls. The National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that 50% of children under the age of 12 have experienced a dog attack or bite. Dog attacks can be prevented. Knowing how to relate to your dog, and teaching others how to do the same, plays a primary role in the prevention of dog attacks.

How to Relate to a Dog that You are Familiar With

There are many events or situations that can trigger your dog to bite or attack. A sudden movement or loud sound can make even the friendliest animal uncomfortable and trigger an attack. The first rule of behavior in relating to your dog is to always speak in the same tone, and to move slowly around them. Because children love animals so much and are more excited by them, this rule needs to be firmly enforced when children are around dogs.

These other tips will prove useful as well when you are relating to your dog, and can easily be taught to guests in your home, or children that will interact regularly with your dog.

Always ask permission before petting a dog if it belongs to someone else. If they allow it, approach the animal slowly. Ensure the dog will sniff you, and then gently pet the animal along his or her back or sides.

Do not sneak up on an animal that may be asleep or is in the middle of eating. If they are frightened or startled unexpectedly, they may bite or attack. While it will seem the attack was unprovoked, being started is a key reason why dogs attack.

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Do not pet the dog if it is playing with an object or toy. Sometimes the items dogs play with do not look like toys, but to the dog, they are beloved possessions. Dogs have an instinctive protection towards their toys, and if you try to pet them when they are playing, they are likely to think you are trying to steal the toy and will react aggressively.

Do not pet an animal that is inside a vehicle. Again, this is space that dogs are very protective of and they may get startled and react.

Understanding the body language of your dog is very important as well in the prevention of dog attacks. Because dogs cannot speak, they offer many more nonverbal cues to those around them to indicate how they are feeling. Fortunately, nonverbal dog cues are universal across breeds. Children and any other people that might be around your dog regularly need to be taught what these cues are, and how they need to respond.

Dogs that are angry will attempt to make themselves appear bigger and take on a dominant pose. You will see upright ears, an upright tail, and you will notice the fur standing up on end along the back. The dog may also stare directly at the person that is causing them to be angry. Other more obvious signs are teeth baring and growling, however very often these are the last nonverbal cues a dog will share with its anger trigger.

Dogs that are frightened will behave in a different manner. The tail will often go between the legs, and the ears will fold back. These are generally submissive poses for the dog, and an attack may not occur in this situation.

However, often the submissive pose will appear before the dominant pose, so caution should be employed.

How to Relate to a Dog that You are Not Familiar With

Strange dogs should never be approached for any reason at all.

Unfortunately, common sense may fail in some situations, and strange dogs are still approached by the unsuspecting every day. Children particularly are victims of this, as they are the most interested in any animal strange or otherwise. These rules of thumb should particularly be instilled in children to ensure they do not fall prey to a strange and possibly aggressive animal.

The first rule of thumb with any dog is to always make the assumption that a dog that does not know you will perceive you as a threat. Always proceed with caution.

Always get permission before you touch any strange animal. Regardless of how sweet or innocent the precious canine appears, he or she will have personality qualities that their owner knows more about than you. They will know more than anyone whether the dog will react in a friendly manner.

Strange dogs should never be approached for any reason. This applies especially to those that may already be confined in a vehicle, behind a fence,

or is tied to a leash. This also particularly applies to any dog that is not accompanied by its owner.

In the event that you have come into contact with a dog that you feel might attack or bite you, there are few steps that you can take to maximize your safety and prevent the attack.

Do not scream or run away from the dog. When your back is to the dog they will go on the offensive and run after you.

Stay as still as you can, and keep your hands to your sides. Do not speak to the dog and do not make eye contact with the dog as they will perceive this as a threat.

At this point, the dog will more than likely lose interest. Do not turn around, back away as slowly as possible until the dog runs away or you can not see them anymore.

If the dog has not lost interest, do not make noise or scream, but offer them something to distract them. This should be anything that you can put in the middle of you and the dog – a jacket, bicycle, purse, anything that might be around you at the time.

How to be a Proactive Dog Owner

Every pet owner fears the worst when it comes to dog attacks. No pet owner wants their beloved pet to be the culprit in a dog attack. While there is no surefire guarantee that your dog will never bite anyone, there are steps that you can take in terms of prevention. These tips will help you to “bite proof” your dog to maximize the safety of everyone, including your pet.

Have your dog spayed or neutered. This will decrease the rate of production of aggressive hormones in your animal, and reduce their need to fight with other animals. It will also decrease their chances of roaming off unattended, and will ultimately ensure that confining them, if necessary, can be done so with ease. Statistically, dogs that have been neutered or spayed have a lower tendency to attack.

Teach your dog the importance of being social. Frightened or nervous dogs will react aggressively if they think it is necessary. Ensure that your dog has been exposed to a large variety of situations and people so that he or she will have a lower tendency to be frightened or nervous in social situations.

Teach your dog the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Dogs cannot always comprehend the difference between play and real-life so ensure that these situations are distinguished with your dog. Do not play fight with your dog, or teach them to chase even for play purposes.

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Ensure your dog has set limits that they understand. Do not wait for an unfortunate incident to occur. At the first sign of aggression, regardless of how menial it seems, take action to ensure your dog understands inappropriate behavior. If you think the inappropriate behavior may become dangerous, discuss behavioral options with your veterinarian

Ensure you are a responsible owner. See that your dog is licensed, and undergoes consistent veterinary attention and regular vaccinations. Your dog should never be allowed to roam, unattended as you will never know what they are capable of if you are not present. Your dog should never spend exorbitant amounts of time alone, or be leashed for extended periods as both of these experiences will create pent up frustration. Treat your dog like a family member, and they will socialize themselves to that personality and act similarly to other members of the family.

It is always better to be safe than sorry, so err on the side of caution if you are ever unsure. If your dog has issues with crowds, leave it at home. If visitors or delivery workers will upset your dog, put them in a different room or in the backyard. Use common sense in any situation as you are the one that knows your dog best, you can not expect others to act accordingly all of the time.

BARK – Be Aware, Responsible, and Kind

Because children are the largest victims of dog attacks there are many organizations that work to provide prevention sources and educational

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programs to teach children how to be safe around dogs. These programs are an effort to reduce the number of dog attacks in any neighborhood and to also strengthen bonds between dogs and humans. Anyone can and should take advantage of these resources if they work with children or have children that are exposed to unfamiliar dogs regularly. The National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (the NAHEE) and The Human Society of the United States have worked together to create a program that will educate children and parents in this regard. The program is called BARK and stands for Be Aware, Responsible, and Kind.

This dog bite and attack prevention program is the only one that has proven to be effective in teaching dog safety to teachers and elementary students. The program entails a video called Dogs, Cats, and Kids as well as a 32 page activity book in English and Spanish that includes lessons, worksheets, and pages for coloring to teach children how to avoid dog attacks.

Another resource for dog attack prevention, is a board game called The Doggone Crazy! that teaches standard do's and don'ts on behaving with dogs. This game will also help children to interpret and understand dog's body language and nonverbal cues.

More dog attacks and bites occur inside the home. Knowing this, the biggest role in preventing these attacks falls to the owner of the dog. Owners know their dog better than anyone else, and are responsible for how their dog behaves. If you are a new dog owner, these tips and resources will be

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invaluable to you as you prepare your home and your family for your dog
and vice versa.

Part II – What If You Are Attacked

How to Defend Yourself against Dog Attacks

While it is true that dogs can be your best friends, it also holds true that the tamest of dogs can turn on you quickly. Regardless of whatever prevention methods you, as a responsible owner, take in taming and training a dog, dogs can always pose a threat under adverse circumstances. Because of this perceived threat that dogs carry in their subconscious at all times, both owners and non-owners of dogs need to prepare themselves in the event of dog attacks. Besides taking preventative measures to ensure your dog will not attack, owners of dogs must ensure they are prepared with defensive techniques to diffuse dog attacks and minimize injury to both the dog and the human. Further, it is a good idea for anyone, whether they own a dog or not, to understand necessary dog attack defense methods as dog attacks are likely to happen anytime, anywhere.

What are the Warning Signals?

You generally know when someone is angry with you or even poses a physical threat – you feel it in your stomach, your blood pressure sky-rockets, your heart begins to pound. You have an innate 6th sense which helps to protect you. Dogs are not much different than humans in that they also sense the subliminal warning signs of danger - cues for you to back off. Literally.

The first thing you will notice from a dog that is about to attack will most likely be growling. If the dog is drooling out of its mouth while growling, this is not a good sign. Look for tense body signals, such as the back seeming higher (known as the hackles) and if his or her tail is standing upright. Ears will be erect and if the tail seems to be wagging a little too fast, you want to get out of the way as quickly and safely as possible. Be careful however, moving too fast or too soon, will also get you in trouble.

Diffuse, Diffuse, Diffuse.

Just like you would if you thought a human was going to attack you, diffusion is an important key in preventing dog attacks and escaping with the least amount of harm. Unfortunately dogs can't verbally communicate with humans, so you have to rely on using non-verbal cues in the same manner that the dog is nonverbally communicating with you.

Do not smile under any circumstances. Dogs see this as a bearing of teeth and as a personal invite to "bring it on". Stay as calm and relaxed as you can. Do not act submissive, or weak, and conversely, do not challenge them by appearing aggressive. You also want to avoid eye contact as again, they perceive this as a challenge. Maintain a constant gaze over the dog instead of at the dog. Do not look down as this will be a sign of submission and will be the only thing the dog needs to interpret weakness from you and launch the attack. Neutral nonverbal cues are your best defense at this point.

In the canine kingdom, the alpha figure hierarchy reflex is instinctive, and with a dog attack, the dog is attempting to take on that alpha role and literally, attempting to show you its dominance over you. The key response that you need to have is to show the dog that in fact, you are the alpha and that you are in charge. Your goal is to intimidate the dog into leaving you alone, without egging him on, and this requires an attitude of confidence. Act like the dog, by using slow and steady movements. Indicate to him that you are more than happy to end the situation, but do not do so aggressively or he will take that as a challenge. He needs to know that if he attacks, you are not afraid. This kind of confrontation is about who is in charge, and if he suspects that you are in command and that you do not want to hurt him, he may give up. Sometimes this confidence is intimidating enough for the dog to leave you alone, and sometimes unfortunately, you can not escape the attack.

If the dog suspects that you are trying to play the alpha male role and has not backed down, then he may begin his attack. At this point he may make an attempt to go behind you, he may start to circle which is a sign that attack is imminent. Do not allow him to get behind you, move with the dog and keep your front facing him at all times as it will be much easier for him to attack from behind. Do not run away at any cost. You would have much better luck beating an Olympic champion at this point. Not only will you lose the race, but you immediately place your back to the dog which is a challenge.

Very often, the command position has been advised in the defense of dog attacks. This involves using a firm but not challenging body position and

stance. Put one hand outwards with the palm facing out, and place the other hand up behind your ear. Use a firm and loud voice, but do not shout, and say Stop! This is a technique that has been employed by military defense personnel in the training of dogs, and this technique affects their aggressive instinct. Sometimes this will diffuse a looming attack, but if the dog is strange to you, it may not.

When the Dog Attacks

At this point, if you can, try to fill the space between the dog and you. It could be a coat, purse, newspaper, anything that you have around you. In this worst case scenario, you may even have to put your arm in front of you if you have nothing else. Putting something in between you and the dog will break up the attack line. In the event that an attack still ensues, you at least have given him something for his mouth to grab first. If you have to use your arm to protect you, ensure there is something wrapped around your wrist or your forearm. This way, if the unfortunate event of deep wounds occur, you will not experience severed arteries in these locations.

When the attack occurs, the dog will probably jump on you in an attempt to knock you to the ground if he has not grabbed your arm. The goal here is to remain as still as you can. Do not kick, or punch, or react, as a dog that has latched on to you is not likely to let go until he knows that he has won. If you are fighting him, he will be sure that he needs to win the challenge.

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Many experts suggest that you curl into a ball and put your hands on your ears. This not only displays passiveness to the dog, but also will protect your throat and carotid artery. With you in submission position, the dog may just give up if he feels there is no further challenge. If not, offer him your arm and try some counter preventive measures. While offering your arm seems desperate, you need to do so to keep him from going for your legs. By going for your legs, your throat will become exposed and you risk even more serious injury.

The key again is to not fight the dog, to stay as calm and still until he has given up. Fighting back will ensure that you are injured more than you need to be. Many medical officials report that the most damage from dog bites or attacks occurs when the victim has given signs of struggle. Struggling with a dog that has latched on to you will rip your skin and cause more intrusive wounds and punctures than if you just let the dog go.

Another thing that you need to keep in mind is that dogs will experience a resistance when something is being pulled from their mouth, but will not experience this resistance if something is being pushed in. Some experts suggest that if your hand is in the dog's mouth, to ram your hand or fist down its throat and cut off its air supply. This will also force the dog's gag reflex and startle them enough to hopefully let you go. If you are not strong enough to do so, do not try and pull your arm or hand from the mouth as again, this will force the dog's resistance and cause more damage that is unnecessary.

As a last resort, keep in mind that the dog will have vulnerable areas no matter what position it is in. If you are near the dog's face and it has a hold on your arm or hand, you have access to his eyes or throat. You can use your thumbs in the same way you would on a human to jab or give sharp blows to the eyes or throat. This is something you do not need strength for, so this is a maneuver that even women can handle. While this is a disconcerting thought for many, when a dog has a hold on you and you have nothing left to fight with, this may be your only choice. Jabbing the throat or larynx, or even the eyes, will definitely startle the dog enough to let you go.

Know What a Dog's Pressure Points Are

Dogs have very similar anatomy to humans in some cases, and fortunately this means that they have many of the same pressure points that we do. These points come in very useful for dog attacks as they are often very accessible, and thus easy to use to your advantage. The purpose of using a pressure point in a dog attack is to stun or startle the dog enough to release its hold on you. If you do this, you exhibit alpha male qualities that may force the dog to leave you alone. When you are using pressure points, the object is to inflict quick, sharp blows to the area in question to cause the appropriate startling affect.

The first point you want to reach is the one that is located in their armpits, and a quick blow here may be all you need to get released form the dog. Another area is a release area that is located at the point where their bottom

jaw is hinged onto their skull at the base of their neck. Do not try this with muscular dogs such as pit bulls or rottweilers, as it will be more difficult to find and it will only aggravate them more. Another pressure point that dogs have is an area that contains a large host of facial nerves, and these leave the skull and fan around the face. If you strike any of these areas moving from backwards to forwards, you will cause significant pain to the dog and maybe even force consciousness. You will have to hit the pressure point just so, but if you do not get it the first time, try again. Fortunately in this case, dogs are not like humans, and will not get wise to you and defend against your blows.

The brachial plexus is another pressure point that dogs have and is a set of nerves that goes down the back of their necks and across the sides of their neck to their front legs. In this section of nerves lies an artery that will split, and there is a tiny space in the middle of the split branches that contains a tissue-filled sac that regulates their blood pressure. This is called the carotid sinus, and a forceful blow here will stun the dog and hopefully startle it enough to leave you alone. Again, this is not something you want to try with the more muscular breeds as it will be difficult to find. Further, use this method as a very last resort, as many dogs are adept at defending strikes here.

It is hoped that all of these methods never have to be used, however the reality is that over 4.5 million Americans are attacked or bitten every year. Knowing how to protect yourself in the event of one of these attacks will

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ensure that both you and the dog can alleviate the situation with as little injury as possible.

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