

Dog education crucial to slashing injuries

A certified Perth dog behaviour consultant is calling for an increased focus on canine education, saying it could reduce the number of injuries from dog bites.

Former RSPCA instructor Kathy Kopellis McLeod said more emphasis needed to be placed on teaching both adults and children how to act around dogs.

“Just like we teach road safety skills to reduce accidents, we need to educate people how to interact well with dogs so that the potential for attacks and injuries are slashed,” she said. “For example, most children don’t know that approaching a dog that is eating can often be confronting for the pet, even if the child is being careful.”

Kopellis McLeod said most dog attacks take place in the victim’s home or at a friend’s house, and that any dog is capable of becoming aggressive.

“The key to bringing down the rate of dog attacks is to teach people how to read the behaviour patterns of dogs, including reading what their facial expressions mean and observing

subtle body language signs, and what will scare them,” she said. “Any dog can be dangerous if they’re not treated as they need to be. More formal education for both adults and kids is a must and it may even be worth investigating the viability of making such programs compulsory for new owners.”

Other tips to reduce the risk of attack include:

- Never approach a strange dog
- Observe for signs of sociability. Does the dog even want affection from you?
- Don’t look an unfamiliar dog directly in the eye
- Do not scream or make sudden movements
- Do not reach your hand out for a dog to sniff it.

This can be a perceived threat to some dogs.

Recognised by the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants as a Certified Dog Behaviour Consultant, Kopellis McLeod is also a member of the Australian Veterinary Association’s behaviour special interest group, Pet Industry Association of Australia, Association of Pet Dog Trainers and the Canine Association of Western Australia.