

KATHY
KOPELLIS
MCLEOD



The respected WA dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions

Uncovering the mystery of why your dog behaves as it does can be the difference between a pooch that's either a headache or a joy.

THE companionship of a well-behaved dog is enjoyable and offers many benefits. So much so that it's not uncommon for families to have more than one dog in their household.

When a dog becomes part of your home, there are key ways to protect both your pet and your family members.

To reduce the risk of a bite occurring, it is critical to teach children how to behave responsibly and safely around dogs. Children often fall victim to a dog attack simply because they lack supervision or education. Constant management is a must with toddlers and younger children.

Many families raise children in conjunction with their family dog, so the issue of safety cannot be underestimated.

In order to keep all members of the family safe and reduce the likelihood of being bitten, it is important to learn how to read the language of dogs. This includes understanding their facial expressions and observing subtle body-language signs.

Even though your dog is an important member of your human family, it doesn't mean they arrive pre-programmed with an understanding of how to behave appropriately around any child, including your own.

Children enjoy interacting with their dogs by hugging, patting and playing with them (albeit sometimes roughly) and many children grow up believing that all dogs are friendly. Not everyone understands that the family dog can be fearful, not only of unfamiliar children, but also of the resident children.

There is no better way to reduce the chance of a dog bite than learning to accurately "read" the way a dog is behaving.

Teach your children these valuable safety tips and carefully monitor them when they are in the presence of unfamiliar dogs or even your own.

DO'S

- * Always ask permission to pat an unfamiliar dog.
- * Allow a dog to approach you before trying to interact with them.
- * Watch for signs of sociability and make sure that the dog is happy about being patted.
- * Offer short glances to keep a check on the dog.
- * Stand side-on to the dog.
- * Offer a short pat under the chin or to side of face/neck as an introduction.
- * Keep the interaction brief.

- * Move calmly and quietly around a dog.
- * Respect the dog's safe space and leave it be.
- * Help your child read the dog's signs during the interaction.

DON'TS

- * Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.
- * Don't stare or directly face an unfamiliar dog or a dog that appears unsure.
- * Don't pat a dog on top of the head.
- * Don't lean over, hug and kiss a strange or wary dog.
- * Don't run away from a dog, scream and flail your arms.
- * Don't tease or be unkind to a dog.
- * Don't extend your arm out so the dog can "sniff" your hand.
- * Don't assume you know how a dog is going to respond, especially an unfamiliar dog.

Be aware of signs that the dog doesn't want you to approach it.

Observe the dog's posture and check for signs of sociability. Is the dog backing away from you? Is it trying to avoid you? Does it hold its body stiff, freeze and look at you with caution? Is its head lowered? Is the dog showing the whites of its eyes, panting or pacing?

These are all signs that the dog is lacking sociability and does not welcome your affection. By ignoring these signals, you increase the probability of being bitten.

On the flipside, there may be signs that the dog does want to interact with you.

Does the dog display either relaxed body language and/or a rapid tail wag? Is the body movement fluid and loose? Are the eyes blinking and/or squinting? These are common signs that indicate a dog that is more open to interacting with you.

Sometimes welcoming body language signs can change to unwelcome ones. When this occurs in one or more of the above ways, it may mean that the dog has become stressed and no longer wants to be approached.

The more closely you can observe and correctly interpret a dog's body language, the more you and your children can enjoy positive interactions and live safely and harmoniously with them.

* Visit www.kathysdogtraining.com.au to find out when Kathy's popular Intensive Dog Behaviour Workshop will be held next.



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