

## **Reducing Dog Bites**

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**Author: Bill Moreau, DC, DACBSP, CSCS**

In January 1995, a two-year old boy in South Dakota wandered into a neighbor's yard, where he was attacked and killed by two chained wolf-german shepherd hybrids. A few years ago my son was bit in the knee by a dog. We have always had dogs around our house and he had no natural fear of dogs. He made the classic mistake of approaching a strange dog. Besides the scar on his knee, he continued to be afraid of dogs for several years after the injury.

The annual number of total dog of bites that occur in the United States has been estimated to be around 800,000 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It has been estimated that almost half of all children have been bitten by a dog at some point in their lives. More than 50 percent of documented bites occurred to the head, face, or neck. Boys from age five through nine have the highest incident rate for injury secondary to dog bites.

A recent article in the Journal of the American Medical Association described some measures for preventing dog bites.

- Realistically evaluate your home environment and lifestyle. Consult with professionals to determine suitable breeds of dogs for consideration.
- Dogs with histories of aggression are inappropriate in households with children.
- Be sensitive too clues that a child is fearful or apprehensive about dogs. If your child is apprehensive, delay acquiring a dog for your home.
- Spend time with a dog before buying or adopting it for your home. Use caution bringing a puppy or dog into the home of an infant or toddler.
- Spay or neuter virtually all dogs. This frequently reduces aggressive tendencies.
- Never leave infants or young children alone with any dog.
- Properly socialize and train any dog entering your household. Teach the dog submissive behaviors such as rolling over to expose their abdomen and giving up food without growling.
- Immediately seek professional advice if the dog develops aggressive or undesirable behaviors from veterinarians, or responsible breeders.

- Do not play aggressive games, such as wrestling, with your dog.

Teach children the following basic safety points for being around dogs. Review these points regularly with your child:

1. Never approach an unfamiliar dog.
2. Never run from a dog and scream.
3. Remain motionless when approached by an unfamiliar dog. Teach them to be still like a tree.
4. If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still. Teach them to be still like a log.
5. Never play with a dog, unless supervised by an adult.
6. Immediately report stray dogs and dogs displaying unusual behavior to an adult.
7. Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
8. Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
9. Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.
10. If bitten, immediately report the bite to an adult.

We all should take steps to care for our children and our animals so these severe deforming injuries can be prevented. It takes very little effort from each of us to make this summer a safer one for our children.