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Better Never Bitten

Tips for Keeping Your Family & Friends Safe ... Including Your Dog

Dogs are our best friends, and many families cannot imagine life without them. Yet bites from pet dogs are common and can ruin an otherwise loving relationship. Although we certainly see them as members of the family, it is important to remember that dogs are, in fact, dogs—whose native language is different from our own. What a child might do to show her love to a dog might be seen as a threat, and reaching to take something as meaningless as a paper towel from it might insult any dog's sense of ownership. We hear all kinds of advice and it can be confusing. What, then, can we do to ensure that our children, ourselves, and our beloved pets are content and safe?

What NOT to Do

- Don't leave infants, toddlers, or young children alone with any dog, no matter how friendly it is.
- Don't pet, touch, nudge, hug, or kiss a dog while it is resting, especially if it is on or beneath furniture.
- Don't hug or kiss a dog that is not your own, however friendly it may seem.
- Don't move a dog by pulling on its collar or scruff; instead, call the dog to you or toss a piece of food.
- Don't pet or touch a dog while it is eating food or chewing on a toy, bone, or any other object.
- Don't reach to remove food, toys, or any other objects from a dog. If it is necessary to remove an object, trade by offering it an irresistible piece of food.
- Don't pet or restrain any dog trying to get away from you.
- Don't corner a dog to clip on a leash, give it medicine, groom, or even pet it.
- Don't point at, hit, slap, or otherwise punish or scare the dog. Your dog does not purposely misbehave. Most important, physical punishment will frighten the dog, and frightened dogs are more likely to bite.

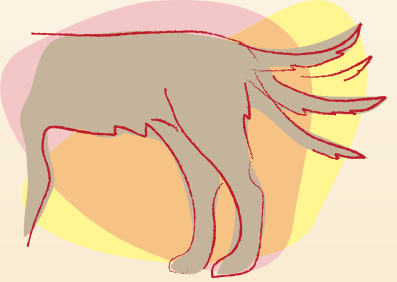
SHOULD YOU SEEK HELP?

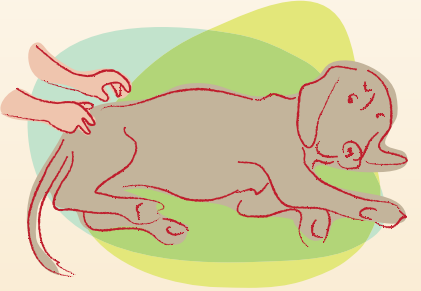
Dogs are complicated animals and, like us, might need help for one problem or another. Many "issues" can be addressed with simple training or environmental or management changes. If, however, your dog is significantly fearful or has shown growling, snapping, or biting behavior, the situation will not resolve on its own. Talk to your veterinarian or a certified behavior specialist for help and recommendations.

READING YOUR DOG

You might be surprised to learn about these signals of stress or fear. These reactions may be especially relevant when the dog is approached by someone or hesitates to do something that you have asked it to do:

- Yawning
- Rolling over on its back
- Lowering its head
- Backing up
- Wagging a stiff tail
- Licking its lips
- Lifting a front leg
- Sitting





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