

# Keeping Our Children Safe Around Dogs

**GUIDELINES FOR SAFE INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN AND PET DOGS**



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Mehlhorn H., (2000) Mode of Action of Imidacloprid and Comparison with Other Insecticides (i.e. Fipronil and Selamectin) In Vivo and In Vitro Experiments. Suppl. Compén. Contin. Educa. Pract. Vet. Vol. 22(4A), 4-9.  
Mehlhorn H. et al., (1999) Effects of imidacloprid on adult and larval stages of the flea Ctenocephalides felis after in vivo and in vitro application: a light- and electron-microscopy study. Parasitol. Res. Vol. 85: 625-637

# INTRODUCTION

Dear parents, caregivers and dog owners,  
Welcome. This booklet offers you a very basic understanding of dog behaviour and invites you to consider a few practical suggestions about how you can create a safe and fun relationship between children and dogs. Children will encounter dogs in a variety of situations; this could be at their home, the home of someone they know or even just walking to and from school. Statistics reveal most dogs that bite or attack children are known to the children, so it is vitally important they learn why dogs bite and how to behave safely around them. We want children to develop positive relationships with dogs.

Unfortunately there is no ONE simple rule that fits all situations all of the time. 'Kids will be kids' so parental supervision is the most important thing for children under 10 years of age. As soon as they are old enough, children must be taught how to interact safely with dogs. Children have to be reminded that extra care is needed around dogs that live with other people because those dogs don't know them as well as they know their owners.

In an ideal world all dogs would trust children and all children would be respectful and kind to dogs. The reality is that some dogs are used to being around children and the games they play, others are not. Some dogs have learned that some children tease, annoy and hurt them. While most dogs are friendly, no-one can guarantee their dog won't bite! It is intended that the safety tips in this booklet will significantly reduce the risk.

Best wishes

*Jennifer and David*



*The Pet Practice*

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In considering the use of these research-based, valid and reliable safety tips please be aware they are based on a review of research literature and expert informant interviews conducted in good faith and with supervision. Please refer to the Acknowledgements section of the 2008 report for a full list of the sources of our information.

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**S H A N E M O R T O N**  
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# ABOUT DOGS

## ANCESTRY

Dogs are part of the canine family which includes wolves, coyotes, foxes and jackals. Fossil evidence reveals that humans first began to live with tamed wolves over 14,000 years ago. All dogs today are descended from wolves.

- 🦴 Wolves live in packs. A 'pack' is a group of the same kind of animals that live and hunt together. A pack of wolves has a definite hierarchy. Each wolf knows which of the other pack members are above and below it. There is always a pack leader and the other wolves know they have to follow their leader's orders. Wolves will also lie on their backs and look away to show their leader that they know it's the boss. The pack leader walks in front, sits somewhere physically higher than other wolves if possible and eats before the other wolves. Wolves know that they can challenge anyone above them in the pack and that they have to defend their position from wolves lower in the pack that challenge them.
- 🦴 When a wolf pack has young cubs all the wolves will put up with cubs' playful and mischievous behaviour. As the cubs get older, wolves may firmly retaliate to behaviour that is no longer acceptable. This is how the cub learns about pack hierarchy and where its place is in the pack. Wolves higher up in the pack may have to bite to defend their position when the cubs are old enough to challenge or fight them.
- 🦴 Wolves have an inborn tendency to protect their pack from other wolves and animals.



*Dogs meeting each other*

# FAMILY PET DOGS

In many ways our family pet dogs still behave like their ancestors. Although they don't need to hunt in packs anymore because humans feed them, they are still very much social animals and so enjoy living with people. Dogs like to live in a social group in order to feel safe and secure.

## DOGS ARE PACK ANIMALS

Similar to wolves, dogs are pack animals and need to know their place in the hierarchy - who is above and below them. Dogs need a leader so they know what orders to follow. If dogs don't have a leader they will step up and attempt to do the job themselves. Dogs will naturally try to boss or dominate those that are smaller or less powerful than them until they are trained not to.

- 🐾 Dogs consider the family they live with to be their pack. Just like wolves, dogs will often guard and protect those who are part of their pack. Dogs are one of the few species that will risk their lives for a member of a different species.

## HUMANS AND DOGS LIVING TOGETHER

Although there are many advantages to humans and dogs living together, there can also be a lot of confusion. Even though dogs consider humans to be part of their pack, they know humans are a different species from them. While we need to respect dogs and the way they operate in the world, owners must assume leadership and train dogs to fit into human households.

## HUMANS IN CHARGE

The point is that pet dogs must integrate into human lives. Within a family hierarchy adults are positioned "above" children. Dogs need to learn that their place in the hierarchy is below adults and below children. Unless they are taught otherwise, dogs may consider children to be equal or "lower" than them in the family hierarchy; this is potentially very dangerous. Dogs are great pets and good company but they are not people. It is always a dog's place to co-operate with humans but people need to understand dogs too!

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# MAIN TYPES OF AGGRESSION

When faced with a new situation their preferred option is to flee. In a dog's world aggression is not always a bad thing provided it is in context with the situation i.e. a threat or a challenge. There are many different types of aggression and animals in the wild use them to make sure they have food and shelter and survive as a species. Our domesticated dogs still show many of these aggressive tendencies even though our family pet dogs now live in a very different environment. The main types of aggression are outlined below.

- 🐾 **DOMINANCE OR COMPETITIVE AGGRESSION** describes a dog's inborn tendency to keep raising or at least maintaining the position it has in the hierarchy. Some dogs have a more dominant personality than others.
- 🐾 **FEAR INDUCED AGGRESSION** can be a common result of poor breeding or when puppies or dogs are not socialised properly. When a dog is not used to being around people, has been abused by people or is not familiar with normal social circumstances, many environments become scary. The dog language section on pages 32-33 shows a drawing of a scared dog.
- 🐾 **TERRITORIAL AGGRESSION** is a dog's inborn tendency to protect its territory. This is when dogs protect their owner's home, backyard, car, truck and their own bed or kennel. This sort of aggression is encouraged in dogs for guarding purposes.
- 🐾 **POSSESSIVE AGGRESSION** is a dog's inborn tendency to protect its food, bones and toys etc.
- 🐾 **PAIN INDUCED AGGRESSION** is a natural type of aggression that occurs when dogs are experiencing or anticipating pain. This is why it is important for children to leave injured dogs alone.
- 🐾 **PUNISHMENT INDUCED AGGRESSION** describes how dogs try to defend themselves from being hurt. A dog that is regularly hit, abused or attacked can redirect its aggression onto a lower pack member instead of being aggressive towards the person or dog that it is being hurt by. It also teaches the dog that physical force succeeds.
- 🐾 **MATERNAL AGGRESSION** is displayed by a bitch that aggressively protects her pups from harm. Sometimes a bitch in season can become maternally motivated, showing nesting behaviours and becoming more wary of strangers.
- 🐾 **SEXUAL RELATED AGGRESSION** is caused by female dogs on heat. There can be aggression between a male dog and a female dog or between two male dogs that are hanging around looking for a female sexual mate.

In summary, human leadership and training may shape a dog's behaviour but dogs still carry the genetic blue print as pack animals. Dogs will sometimes show natural instincts and inborn aggressive tendencies in their behaviour. Dogs meeting other dogs will always need to establish themselves within the pack hierarchy. Dogs meeting new people will need to follow their leader's orders.

The next section, 'Being in Charge', will offer a few practical suggestions about how people can establish themselves ABOVE dogs in the family hierarchy.



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# BEING IN CHARGE

The previous section, 'About Dogs', identified that dogs need leadership. This section offers practical suggestions about how people can establish themselves above dogs in the hierarchy. For more information contact your local Dog Control Unit. They have a wealth of knowledge about dog behaviour and they are happy to share it with you. They often visit people in the community so you can approach them in person too.

## TRAIN YOUR DOG

Training your dog with basic commands can affirm human leadership and build a bond of obedience and trust between people and their dog. An obedient dog is also more enjoyable to be around. However, don't rely on obedience training as being a 'safeguard'. Obedience training teaches behaviour; it doesn't always deal with misbehaviour.

- 🔑 **BASIC OBEDIENCE** should include verbal commands like **sit, stay, down (lie down), no and come.**
- 🔑 **TRAINING SESSIONS** are more fun and more effective when they are **short and often.** Depending on the age and attention span of the dog you could do two or more sessions a day and make each one 5 minutes long.
- 🔑 **REWARD YOUR DOG** with verbal praise, physical touch and the odd healthy treat.
- 🔑 **PRAISE OR REWARD THE BEHAVIOUR YOU WANT** rather than punishing the behaviour you don't want. When you discipline for the wrong behaviour the dog still doesn't know what the right behaviour is. Distract or ignore the wrong behaviour.
- 🔑 **If you want to praise or VERBALLY REPRIMAND a dog's behaviour you must catch the dog in the act** so to speak. If you wait longer than 2 or 3 seconds a dog won't know what it was doing right or wrong. It's pointless reprimanding a dog for something it did 1 minute, one hour or one day ago because there is too much time in between the behaviour and the praise/reprimand.
- 🔑 **START YOUR OBEDIENCE TRAINING EARLY.** Puppies can begin learning basic commands from the time you get it at 8 weeks of age.
- 🔑 **DON'T LOSE YOUR TEMPER OR YELL at your dog if it does something wrong.** Dogs have very good hearing and a firm voice is all that is needed. Remember that obedience training can take time; be persistent and consistent until the dog learns what you teach it.

- 🔑 **CHILDREN CAN ALSO LEARN and use basic verbal commands.** Don't allow children or adults to pull at a dog's leash or physically force it to do anything. It is better and safer to teach the dog to respond to verbal commands.
- 🔑 **Train Dogs to WALK PROPERLY ON A LEASH.** They need to walk at your side; it's you that takes them for a walk not them that takes you for a walk.
- 🔑 **Train Your Dog to BEHAVE APPROPRIATELY AROUND VISITORS.** Examples of undesirable behaviour are: uncontrolled jumping, mounting, excessive sniffing or general unruliness.
- 🔑 **DOGS DON'T KNOW right from wrong.** Their behaviour is guided by instinct and what they learn to do. They will repeat things that give them pleasure and avoid things that cause discomfort.

**Again, THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSISTENCY AND PERSISTENCY cannot be stressed enough.** Make sure everyone in the family follows the same rules all the time because it's very confusing for the dog if everyone teaches it something different. Dogs are much happier when they know what good behaviour and bad behaviour is. Dogs need to be clear about what we expect of them.

## THERE IS NO PLACE FOR PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is not necessary to establish leadership over a dog! Physical abuse makes a dog fearful and it does nothing to build a respectful and trusting relationship between an owner and their dog. A dog fearful of its owner may end up being fearful of people in general and this creates many potentially dangerous situations. For example, a dog that is hit by its owner's hands will learn that people's hands hurt it. It is never OK for dogs to bite, but we can understand why this dog would try to defend itself by biting anyone else who tries to pat it - it thinks other hands will hurt it too. In the long run it's no good if your dog is scared of your hands. It will be hard to check the dog's teeth or ears and it won't like being handled by a vet.

We cannot hit dogs and then expect them to trust and respect people. Fear is not respect.

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## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

- 🐾 **YOU DECIDE when, and if you pat your dog.** Don't pat a dog that nudges and demands attention from you,
- 🐾 **If you are interacting with your dog YOU DECIDE WHEN playtime starts and finishes, and what the rules are.** You must keep the toy at the end of the game,
- 🐾 **YOU DECIDE WHEN, and if, your dog greets friends, strangers and other dogs,**
- 🐾 **MAKE SURE the dog obeys your commands immediately.** Don't keep repeating commands you can't enforce such as "sit, sit, sit, sit, sit, sit" because this teaches the dog disobedience. It's better to give fewer commands and praise or reward the dog each time it does what you say. Start with simple commands so the dog learns easily that it will be rewarded for doing what you say,
- 🐾 **REWARD SUBMISSIVE BEHAVIOUR.** Use the "down" or "lie down" command often because this teaches the dog that you are the leader and that it has to follow your orders,
- 🐾 **DON'T CARRY your puppy or dog too often.** It needs to learn that it is safe on its own and down on the ground. It is hard for a dog to meet other dogs properly when it's being carried,
- 🐾 **DON'T MAKE A BIG FUSS over departures or arrivals.** Give the dog its toy, put the radio on if you like so the dog has company, and then leave. Don't make a big fuss when you arrive back home. A big fuss at departures or arrivals may teach the dog that it is not OK for it to be on its own,
- 🐾 **FEED DOGS at regular times.** Leave the food bowl down for 20 minutes and then remove it. Humans control the food,
- 🐾 **IF YOUR DOG BARKS OR GROWLS to protect food, its behaviour needs to be corrected.** A dog like this could be very dangerous and its behaviour needs to be changed before a child is bitten. Consult your local Dog Control Unit or a good animal behaviourist for expert advice,
- 🐾 **START OUT as you mean to go on.** Decide if your dog is sleeping inside or outside and stick to it. Don't encourage a puppy to do things that it will be told off for when it grows up – it doesn't know the difference between old shoes and new shoes, or whether it's pulling an old towel or a new blouse off the clothes line.

**A DOG SHOWING SOME OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING BEHAVIOURS may think it's "above" humans in the hierarchy.**

- 🦷 Biting members of the family,
- 🦷 Responding aggressively to children who stare into the dog's eyes,
- 🦷 Wetting in the house to leave its smell behind,
- 🦷 Claiming items of furniture as its own and growling or snarling when told to move,
- 🦷 Refusing to obey known commands,
- 🦷 Guarding a member of the family and responding aggressively when anyone else goes near him/her.

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# PREVENTING DOG BITES

## THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE GETTING A DOG

Owning and caring for a dog is a big responsibility and it needs to be a carefully considered decision. A dog is not an impulse buy so never give or receive a puppy as a gift. It is important to choose a dog that will suit your family and your lifestyle. Your local Animal Control Unit or vet will also provide a wealth of information to help you make the best choices. Before getting a dog you need to consider:

1. **WHAT SORT OF DOG?** The breed you choose will depend on what you want a dog for e.g. family pet, farm dog, hunting dog or guard dog. The type of property you live in will also determine what size of dog is suitable. Pure breed or cross breed? Long hair or short hair? Male or female? Puppy or adult?
2. **COST?** Can you afford food, housing, annual registration, vaccinations, neutering, vet bills, worming and flea treatments? Perhaps also the cost of puppy pre-school, dog obedience classes and holiday boarding kennels.
3. **DO YOU HAVE THE TIME AND ENERGY?** Dogs need company. They need to be walked and played with every day. They need to be trained and they need leadership. If you don't understand dog behaviour, will you realistically have the time to find out?



*Think carefully  
before getting  
a dog*

# BE A RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNER






## BE IN CONTROL OF YOUR DOG

The law requires dog owners to keep control of their dogs at all times. Many problems arise because people do not manage their dogs properly. If at home the dog must be confined to your property. There are many reasons why this is important; your local Dog Control Unit will be able to tell you what they are. One of those reasons is territorial aggression. Dogs not confined to their property might think they 'own' the footpath in front of their house or the street they live in and will defend this area accordingly. This means that a child riding past a gateway or a person walking up the street could be rushed at by an aggressive dog; this is not safe. We know dogs naturally defend their territory so we need to make sure they know where their territory stops!

If you are out walking your dog it must be leashed in most public places. There are some areas designated for off lead exercise. In these areas you must still carry a leash and your dog must be under verbal control (comes when you call it). It must be well socialised and not dog/person aggressive.

## KEEP YOUR DOG HEALTHY

It's important you make sure your dog is healthy. Dogs that are sick, injured or in pain are more likely to bite.

-  **FEED YOUR DOG PROPERLY.** Dogs need to be fed in a way that meets their nutritional requirements. They don't need to eat what we eat or when we eat. Make sure they always have fresh clean water.
-  **ENSURE YOUR DOG HAS ADEQUATE SHELTER.** Make sure your dog's bed or kennel is clean, dry, warm and draught free.
-  **PHYSICAL EXERCISE.** Dogs need to be exercised daily and there are many benefits to this. It keeps both you and your dog fit, it allows you to meet and chat with people you know and it helps your dog to become socialised. Socialisation is explained in the next section. If your dog has been classified as dangerous or menacing it needs to wear a muzzle when in public places.
-  **MENTAL EXERCISE.** Your dog's mind also needs to be exercised to prevent boredom. Try to give it a different toy or bone everyday and consider buying it food toys. Food toys are great because the dog has to think about how to get the food out of them. Talk to your local Animal Control Unit or vet for other ideas. Sooner or later, dogs that are physically and/or mentally bored will start to bark, dig holes and 'play up'.
-  **REGULAR HEALTH CARE.** Your dog needs regular vaccinations, worming and flea treatments. A dog scratching its ears all the time could have mites. Your veterinarian will be able to offer helpful advice.

## REGISTER YOUR DOG

This is a legal requirement and may help your dog to be returned to you if it gets lost.

## SPAYING AND NEUTERING

If you don't intend to breed from your dog there are many benefits to getting it spayed or neutered. It reduces your dog's desire to roam and fight with other dogs because they are not looking for a sexual mate. This in turn will avoid many unwanted pregnancies. It will not take away your dog's natural tendency to guard things and it will not stop your dog from working. Your vet is qualified to explain other health aspects.

## TEACHING YOUR DOG APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Understand that your dog doesn't know the difference between play and serious. If you teach your puppy or dog to run after children in fun it may think it's allowed to chase children all the time. While it is cute for puppies to chase children it can become dangerous when the puppy grows up. For many dogs, chasing will be harmless, for others it will not. Children also need to learn safe habits around family pet dogs because children will often treat other dogs the same way.

Puppies need to be taught not to bite. Your local Animal Control Unit can offer helpful advice.

## IT'S NOT OKAY FOR YOUR DOG TO BITE

It's not okay for you or your children to be bitten by someone else's dog, nor is it okay for your dog to bite you, your children or anyone else. If you notice your dog is becoming aggressive towards people, do something about it before a bite occurs. Consult your local Dog Control Unit or a good animal behaviourist for expert advice.

Whether you own a dog or not, people must be able to enter your property for lawful purposes. Members of your extended family, visitors, Plunket nurses or midwives and meter readers all need to be able to enter your property safely. The risks are too high to own an attack-trained vicious guard dog which is not under your control. These dogs don't know the difference between an intruder and someone lawfully entering your property. The owner of a dog that attacks could face fines, criminal convictions and maybe the loss of their dog. The unintended trauma of an attack affects all concerned; it's a price that no one should have to pay. Remember most dogs will naturally protect themselves, their owners and their owner's property. You don't need a vicious, attack-trained guard dog for it to guard your property.



# RE-HOMING DOGS

**GIVING YOUR DOG AWAY.** The Animal Welfare Act requires you to be responsible for the physical health and behavioural needs of your animal. This is why it's so important to think carefully before you get a dog. If for some reason your circumstances have changed so much that you are no longer able to care properly for your dog, it's best to re-home it. It is cruel to keep a dog constantly tied up or locked in a kennel on its own. If you know your dog is aggressive, don't re-home it! It could bite someone! Talk over your options with your local Animal Control Unit or a vet.

**ADOPTING AN ADULT DOG.** You don't want to adopt an aggressive dog – especially if you have children! If you are unable to adopt a dog from a place that does behavioural assessments (a test that checks the dog's temperament), talk to your local Animal Control Unit to find out how you can tell the difference between an aggressive dog and a good tempered dog. It is safer to adopt a dog that is socialised and used to being around children.

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## SOCIALISE YOUR DOG

Socialisation happens in the first 16 weeks of a puppy's life and this exposure needs to continue throughout the dog's life. Socialisation describes the process of gradually exposing a puppy to as many different experiences/situations as possible so it learns to feel at ease under normal social circumstances. For example: different accessories (umbrellas, hats), different situations (riding in the car, shopping centres, streets, off lead and on lead), different sounds, different people (ethnicity, size, children and adults, long and short hair) and different animals. Attending a good puppy pre-school is a great way to socialise dogs with each other. Dogs that have been well socialised from an early age are less likely to bite people or fight with other dogs. Dogs that are not correctly socialised with people, especially children, will often fear them and become nervous or frightened of them in everyday situations. This fear could lead to aggressive behaviour towards humans. Puppies that are not socialised properly will never be entirely comfortable in human society as adult dogs.

Include family pet dogs in everyday activities. This socialises children and dogs so they can be comfortable around each other and show mutual respect. Socialising children and dogs together is important so that they learn how to behave safely around each other.



**It is important to socialise children and dogs so they can be comfortable around each other and show mutual respect**



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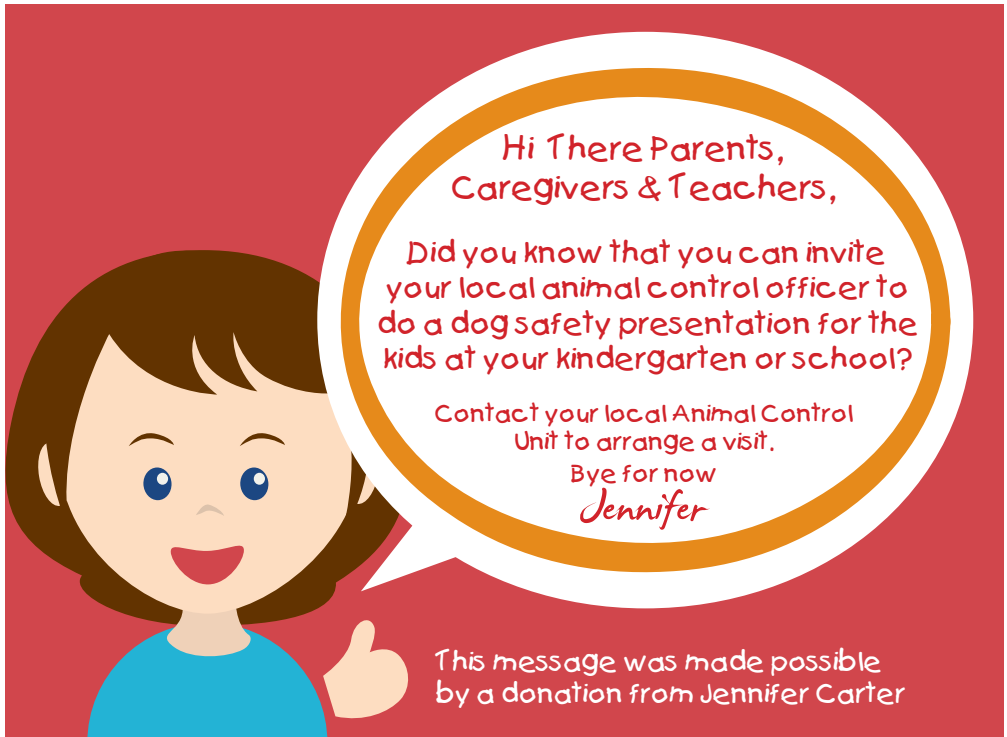
“  
**Always supervise  
children and dogs to  
prevent accidents**  
”

# CHILDREN'S SAFETY TIPS

This segment in the booklet offers practical safety tips that can be incorporated into every day activities to create a safe environment for children and dogs. These tips will teach children and adults how to behave safely around dogs.

The 'At Your Home' tips will be immediately useful for parents who own their own dog. These tips are based upon an assumption that the dog is included in the daily life of the family and is reasonably well socialised. This information is also relevant to parents who do not own their own dog, but wish to understand dog behaviour and teach their children how to behave safely around dogs. Dog owners without children may also benefit from knowing what behaviour parents and caregivers will be expecting from them and their dog. Adults must be alert to the signs that a dog is beginning to feel uncomfortable or aggressive, and separate the children from the dog straight away. We need to protect a dog from having to bite and children from being bitten.

The 'Out and About' tips build upon the information learned 'At Your Home' and make further suggestions about how children can interact safely with dogs belonging to someone they know. These dogs could be owned by a friend, neighbour, auntie/uncle or nana. 'Out and About' also suggests how children can safely interact with dogs they have never met before.





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## AT YOUR HOME...

The importance of supervision cannot be stressed enough! No matter how well we think we know our family pet dog we must remember dogs are a different species and they think differently to people. It's hard to predict what people will do sometimes, harder still to predict people and dogs together!

Consistency is also very important so dogs don't get confused. If you decide that dogs are not allowed to sleep on beds make sure all family members follow this rule. Remember children learn from what they see you doing, so follow the rules yourself.

## NEVER LEAVE A BABY OR SMALL CHILD ALONE WITH A DOG

**It is dangerous to leave a baby or small child alone with a dog unsupervised, even for a few minutes!** If you need to make a drink, answer the door or go to the bathroom, take either the child or the dog with you or contain the dog in a separate room while you are gone.

## SUPERVISE CHILDREN AND DOGS WHEN THEY ARE TOGETHER

**Children up to 10 years old must be supervised at all times when a dog is nearby.** This means actually being there and watching them. You may think that your dog won't bite but dog bite statistics reveal the opposite. Supervision is particularly important with visiting children. There have been many instances where a dog has bitten visiting children because it thought the play-fighting was hurting the children from its own family. Remember, most dogs will naturally protect the family they live with. If you are unable to supervise the play between children and dogs, isolate the dog in a safe place.



**Supervise children and dogs when they are together**

## TAKE CARE WHEN TYING A DOG UP

**When dogs are tied up they can't get away from approaching children and may bite to defend their space if they feel threatened.** Children, especially visiting children, must learn not to go near the dog when it is tied up. Always tie a dog where it can't be approached by children. It may be safer to confine the dog to a room inside. Over time a tethered dog could become more aggressive.

## DISCOURAGE YOUNG CHILDREN FROM DISCIPLINING A DOG

**This is potentially very dangerous.** When a child disciplines a dog that considers itself equal to or above the child in the family hierarchy, the dog could perceive it as a challenge and bite or nip to defend its position.

## DOGS SHOULD HAVE THEIR OWN TOYS

**Don't give old children's toys to the dog.** Children could attempt to retrieve an old toy from the dog and may get bitten by a dog that protects its new toy. This is a dangerous situation that can be avoided by giving dogs their own toys.

## TEACH OTHERS HOW TO BEHAVE SAFELY AROUND DOGS

**There are many people without dogs at home; they may not have had the opportunity to learn safe behaviour around dogs.** If you are concerned by a visiting child's unsafe behaviour, talk to their parent or caregiver. Where possible, teach other adults and children how to behave safely around dogs. Never force people to approach or pat a dog they are scared of; dogs appear to respond to people who are scared around them and may be more likely to bite.

## REWARD THE DOG FOR DOING THE RIGHT THING

**Reward the dog with treats when it is well behaved around children** – this way the dog learns to associate good things with children. You could reward the dog for lying down when you change the baby, or for staying out of the baby's room, as examples.



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## KEEP DOGS OFF FURNITURE AND BEDS

**Of course the final choice is yours but it's better in the long run if dogs are kept off furniture and beds.** Dogs allowed on furniture and beds could learn that they have equal status. Keeping your dog on the ground is one way of raising your children physically higher and affirming their status above the dog.

It's good for dogs to have their own bed on the floor so they get used to being on their own sometimes. Dogs that get smothered with constant attention from people, never spending any time on their own, can sometimes get very anxious when their owners go out. This is called separation anxiety and it's not very pleasant for the dog.

## TEACH CHILDREN:

1. **DON'T HUG AND KISS DOGS! Dogs don't like to be hugged around the neck and kissed; it is not how they meet each other.** Your own family pet dog probably won't enjoy this from the children it lives with and certainly not from visiting children. Teach children it's gross to let dogs lick their face because dogs have bad breath, they smell other dogs' bottoms and children could get worms and parasites off dogs. Face-to-face contact is a common cause of bites to the face; thought to be in part because of close eye contact.
2. **IF A DOG RUSHES AT YOU, BE A STATUE! Teach children that when a dog is bothering them they need to drop any food or toys they are holding and 'be a statue' (or a tree).** Statues are boring for dogs – they will usually come and sniff, and then go away. You will see dogs sniff each other when they meet; dogs sniff things to find out who or what they are. The explanations over the page teach children how to be a statue and a stone. You can practise this in advance so children know exactly what they need to do when a dog rushes at them.



*The two older girls are being statues*

## BEING A STATUE...

- 🦷 **Stand still and straight**, with feet together, your fists held under your chin and elbows close against your chest. If you are holding food or a toy drop it on the ground,
- 🦷 **Don't scream and don't run away.** You might be feeling very scared but you have to be brave and **STAND STILL** – let the dog come and sniff you, usually it will sniff you and go away,
- 🦷 **Don't stare into the dog's eyes** because it might think you want to fight. Look at the dog's paws, chest or over the top of its head,
- 🦷 **If the dog moves, turn slowly so that you can always see where it is.** Never let the dog walk around behind you,
- 🦷 **If the dog does attack, protect yourself** by putting something between you and the dog. This could be your jacket or jersey, lunch box, backpack, book, bicycle or anything you can put in between,
- 🦷 **Stay like a statue until the dog leaves** or an adult comes to help you. Slowly move backwards while still facing the dog; remember not to stare into its eyes,
- 🦷 **Never turn and run!**



*Being a statue*

## BEING A STONE...

- 🦷 If you fall or are knocked to the ground 'be a stone'. Curl into a ball, face down, with your hands over your head and neck. Protect your face. Try to stay still – do not scream or roll around,
- 🦷 Stay like a stone until the dog leaves or an adult comes to help you. When you do move, you must move slowly. Slowly move backwards while still facing the dog. Remember not to stare into its eyes,
- 🦷 **Never turn and run!**



*Being a stone*

3. **DON'T RUN AND SHOUT AROUND DOGS!** Teach children not to run around, shout, ride their bike or skate close to a dog. Some dogs could feel scared because they are not used to children doing these things, other dogs may chase and even bite because this behaviour can trigger a dog's prey instinct. If you are supervising play and a dog gets too frisky or excited teach children to 'be a statue'. If you are unable to supervise children's play, isolate the dog in a safe place.

Don't be offended if another parent asks you to lock the dog away while their children visit. This protects your dog as well as the children. Children play-fighting can be a potentially dangerous situation. Family pet dogs have been known to bite visiting children when they've thought the children they live with are getting hurt. It is necessary to protect both the children and the dog in this situation.

4. **NEVER RUN AWAY FROM A DOG!** Teach children that even if they are feeling scared, they should never scream or run away from a dog. To move away from a dog, they need to turn their body slowly so they can always see where the dog is and then back away slowly and quietly while still facing the dog.

Remind children not to stare into a dog's eyes – they need to look at the dog's paws, chest or over the top of its head. They should never let the dog come around behind them because many children are bitten from behind! Practise backing away slowly at home where possible, even if it's only with a toy dog.



*Backing away from a dog*

**Photo supplied by Kirstie Smith**

5. **NEVER TEASE OR ANNOY DOGS.** Teach children that dogs may bite people who annoy them. Dogs are not toys and children should never pull their ears, tail or fur. Teach children it's not safe to pull a toy, a stick or any item from the dog's mouth. There is no need for children to piggy-back on dogs, they could hurt them. Explain to children that any dog can bite if it is scared, confused or in pain – even their own family pet. Many dogs that bite have been teased or annoyed by children in the past.

Teach children of all ages to respect animals and handle them gently. Explain to children that most dogs are our friends and that they like to spend time with us and be part of our family.

6. **NEVER SNEAK UP ON A DOG!** Children must never sneak up on a dog that is eating or sleeping and give it a fright! If the dog is eating, children must wait until the dog has moved away from the feed area before approaching it. If the dog is sleeping, children need to stand back and call the dog out of bed if they want to give it a pat.

Any dog could bite them if it is scared confused or in pain – even their own dog. Children must let a dog see them before they approach it. They must let a dog see and sniff them before they pat it.

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7. **DON'T TEACH DOGS TO PLAY ROUGH!** It can be dangerous to play chasing games or tug-of-war with a dog. These games teach dogs to bite hard and be rough with people – we don't want to teach dogs that! If a dog overpowers a child when playing tug-of-war it could think it has won the challenge and therefore raised its own position in the hierarchy. Don't encourage children to lie on the floor and wrestle with dogs.

Teach children to play *hide and seek* where the dog has to find them or something they hide, and *fetch* where the child swaps the thing for a treat so the dog learns to give it back. Show children how to teach the dog tricks like sit, down, roll over and play dead. If you are not sure how to do this contact your local Animal Control Unit for advice.



*Playing fetch with a dog*

8. **KEEP AWAY FROM A DOG THAT IS EATING!** Dogs like being on their own when they eat or chew a bone. Explain to children that if they touch or play with a dog while it's eating the dog might think they are trying to take some of its food. A dog protecting its food could bite. Teach children to stay away from a dog's food or bones, even when it is not eating them.



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*"This content was made possible with action research funding managed by David Swain / University of Waikato"*

9. **FEED THE DOG ON THE GROUND.** It's good practice for the dog to learn that it only eats from the ground, never from children's hands or plates. This is important because a dog that is excited could snatch food from children's hands and accidentally bite him or her. Dogs can get protective over their food so it is safer to feed the dog away from where children play.

**Children can feed a dog under supervision** once your dog has learnt basic verbal commands. Teach your children to make the dog "sit" and "stay" while they put food down. The dog must not touch its food until the child says "OK" or "Eat". It is not safe for children to feed puppies or dogs unsupervised.



*Children can feed a dog under adult supervision*

10. **NOT ALL DOGS ARE AS FRIENDLY AS THEIR OWN DOG.**

**All dogs are different!** If children have a dog at home it is probably very friendly because it is used to having children around and used to the games they want to play. Many children get bitten finding out that they can't treat dogs living with other people the way they treat their own dog.

- 🐾 Children must be taught not to go near strange dogs tied up in their own backyard.
- 🐾 As a general rule teach children not to stare into any dog's eyes. Family pet or not, dogs with a dominant personality may perceive this as a challenge; it's safer to avoid the risk of a bite. Fearful dogs may feel they are being 'sized up'.

# TEACH CHILDREN 'DOG LANGUAGE'

People use words to talk to each other. Dogs can't use words so it's important adults and children learn to understand 'dog language'. Understanding 'dog language' will help keep us safe because we will know when a dog wants to be left alone.

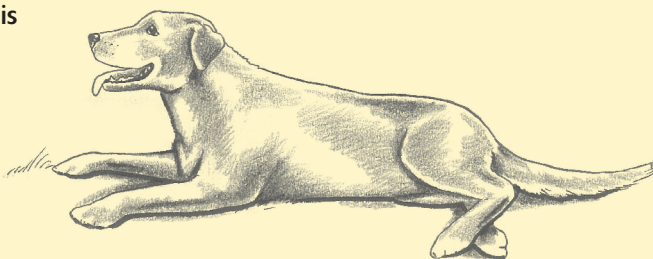
When dogs 'speak' they use their whole bodies to tell us how they're feeling. We need to look at a dog's ears, lips, tail and whether their body is tall and stiff or crouched down low. Barking and growling are only part of the way that dogs talk to us. When we understand dog language we know if the dog is feeling relaxed, playful, scared or very angry. The drawings below will show you how to work out what they are saying.

Sometimes dogs could bite by accident if they are very playful. They will often warn us they are feeling scared or angry before they bite. Teach children to keep away from any dog that tells you it is feeling scared or very angry!

## RELAXED

Here Bella is telling you that she is relaxed.

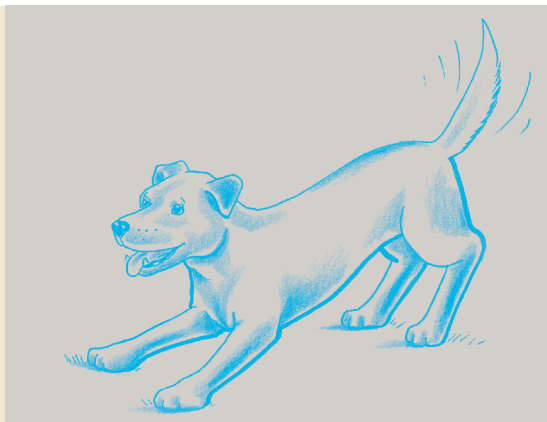
She has a relaxed body position, and all her hair is lying flat on her body. She is panting with her tongue out and has a happy expression on her face.



## PLAYFUL

Here Bella is telling you she feels playful.

The front of her body is low down and the back half of her body is still in the air. Her tail is up and might wag slowly. Her ears are up and she could bark a little bit.

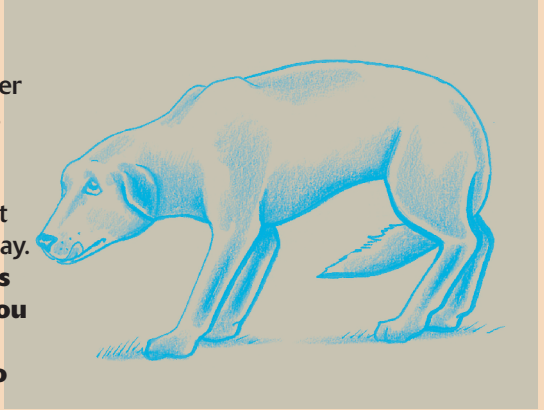


## SCARED

Here Bella is telling you to leave her alone because she is scared! She is trying to make herself look as small as possible. Her whole body is lowered to the ground and it could be shaking. Her tail is tucked under her body. Her ears are low or lay back against her head. The hair on her back may be standing up on end. She will not want to look at you, she will keep turning her head away.

**Remember not to stare into a dog's eyes, especially when it is telling you it feels scared!**

**Give scared dogs plenty of room to get away from you; they will bite you if they're cornered.**



## VERY ANGRY

Here Jess is telling you to keep away and leave her alone! She is Angry! She is trying to make herself look as big and scary as possible. She is standing tall and stiff and slightly leaning forward. Her tail is stiff and it pokes out or up, it may even be wagging a little bit too. The hair on her back is standing up on end. Her ears are up, her nose is wrinkled and she is showing you her teeth! She will stare straight at you while snarling, growling or barking at you.

**Remember not to stare into a dog's eyes, especially when it is telling you it feels very angry!**



Explain to children that they have learned some dog language. They now know how to look at all the parts of a dog's body together to see what it is feeling. It's important they pay attention to dog language; they must keep away from any dog that is telling them it feels scared or very angry.

**Remind children that a dog wagging its tail is not always friendly.**

## OUT AND ABOUT...

'Out and About' builds upon the information learned 'At Home'. Again, the importance of supervision and consistency cannot be stressed enough!

### IF YOU OWN A DOG, KEEP IT UNDER CONTROL AT ALL TIMES.

**Do not let your dog approach adults or children without their permission.**

Don't let children walk a dog on their own unless they can physically control it. This will depend upon the size of the dog and your child's strength. Your dog could chase after another animal and a child needs to be strong enough to hold the dog back. Talk to your local Dog Control Unit to find out the legal requirement for being in control of a dog.

### WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A DOG AT HOME.

**Even if you don't have a dog at home your children will still benefit from being socialised with dogs.** It is very likely children will interact with a dog somewhere and it is important they know how to behave safely. Safe exposure could include visiting people that you know with dogs or even a visit to an on lead or off lead dog exercise park. If you wish to avoid dogs it may be best to keep away from designated dog exercise areas. Your local Animal Control Unit can inform you where these areas are.

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## **NEVER TIE A DOG'S LEASH TO THE BABY'S PRAM.**

**If the dog chases after something it will pull the pram over and possibly injure the child.** It's safer to hold the leash in your hand. If another dog rushes at your dog stand still and let them meet each other. If one dog attacks the other, let the leash go! NEVER leave your baby or any child unattended to stop dogs fighting. NEVER permit an older child to try and break up a dog fight. If you have a mobile phone call someone for help.



***Hold the dog  
leash in your  
hand***

## **WHEN A DOG RUSHES AT YOU BE A STATUE.**

You or your children may need to be a statue if you are rushed by a dog while you are out and about. Refer back to the explanation of being a statue in the 'At Home' tips.

To be a statue you must:

- 🦴 Stand still and quiet,
- 🦴 Never scream or run away,
- 🦴 Never stare into the dog's eyes,
- 🦴 Allow the dog to come and sniff you,
- 🦴 Keep the dog in view; never let it approach you from behind,
- 🦴 Back away slowly while still facing the dog.

## **DON'T LET CHILDREN RUN, RIDE OR SKATE TOO FAR AHEAD OF YOU.**

If children are too far ahead and a dog rushes out of a driveway you have no control over the situation.

## **WHEN APPROACHING AN UNFAMILIAR PROPERTY**

**Check for signs of a dog before entering e.g. bones, chew toys, dog poo or a kennel.** Whistle, yell out or make a noise to announce your arrival. If you feel at all threatened by a dog do not enter the property.

## IF YOU VISIT SOMEONE WHO OWNS A DOG

greet the people before you show the dog any attention. This also affirms the owner's status above the dog. You may appear less threatening to a dog if you:

- 🐾 Avoid staring into its eyes,
- 🐾 Move slowly,
- 🐾 Stand side on to the dog so you look smaller,
- 🐾 Don't bend over the dog,
- 🐾 Don't pat the dog on the head,
- 🐾 Speak softly or not at all.

## ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATIONS:

- 🐾 Speak softly or not at all,
- 🐾 Dog chains and ropes can be longer than you think and they have been known to snap,
- 🐾 Never back a dog into a corner; always allow it plenty of room to move away from you,
- 🐾 If you see a dog roaming without its owner report it to your local Animal Control Unit straight away.

## CONSIDER PUTTING A MUZZLE ON YOUR DOG IF IT'S TIED UP IN PUBLIC PLACES.

Ideally dog owners would avoid leaving their dog tied up and unattended in public places where there are children. Sometimes this is unavoidable. If you have to leave your dog unattended outside early learning centres, schools or supermarkets consider putting a muzzle on your dog – just to be safe. This protects your dog as much as it protects children. **Dogs need to be able to pant and drink while wearing a muzzle.**



***A muzzle  
protects your  
dog as much  
as it protects  
children***

## TEACH CHILDREN:

### 1. **ALWAYS ASK THE OWNER BEFORE YOU MEET THEIR DOG!**

**If children are meeting a dog for the first time they must ask the owner for permission first! Before approaching any dog, even if it is not for the first time, children must be taught never to run up and hug or pat the dog.** The owner will tell you if their dog likes to meet children or not. If the owner says “yes”, teach children to:

- 🦴 Stand still, stand up straight and have their hands down by their side,
- 🦴 Leave a couple of steps between them and the dog; the dog needs to approach and sniff them first,
- 🦴 They can talk quietly to the dog if they want to,
- 🦴 When they feel comfortable, they can make one hand into a ball, gently raise their arm and let the dog sniff the back of their hand,
- 🦴 It is important they are calm, confident and move slowly.



*Meeting a dog*

### 2. **PAT THE DOG'S CHIN, CHEST OR SIDE OF THE NECK!** After the dog has sniffed them they can give it a gentle rub on the chin, chest or side of the neck. Remind them to keep their face away from the dog and never stare into its eyes.

- 🦴 For very small dogs they may need to squat or kneel down. They must keep the top half of their body straight and not bend over the dog.
- 🦴 Teach children to stroke the dog's chin, chest or side of the neck. Dogs don't really like being patted on their head by people.







*Pat the dog's chin, chest or side of the neck*

3. **EVEN IF THEY HAVE MET THE DOG BEFORE, BE CAREFUL!**

**Even if the dog belongs to the child's neighbour, friend, auntie/uncle or nana and they see it all the time they must ask for permission before they play with the dog!** This dog knows the children don't live at its house and it doesn't know them as well as it knows its owners. This dog may think they are a threat and bite to defend itself or its property. Children must be supervised when playing with this dog. If that's not possible put the dog away in a safe place.

4. **STAY AWAY FROM A DOG THAT IS PROTECTING SOMETHING!**

**Dogs are territorial animals, which means they will naturally protect their property and home.** This could be the dog owner's home, backyard, car or the dog's own bed or kennel. Explain to children that even if they have met the dog before and it seems friendly, they must stay away! This means:

-  Never reach through a fence to pat a dog – it is protecting the owner's property,
-  Don't pat a dog through a car window – it is protecting the car,
-  Don't pat a dog sitting on the back of a truck – it is protecting the truck,
-  Don't pat or play with a dog when it's on its bed. If their ball or toy accidentally goes over someone's fence they must not go and get it themselves. They must ask an adult for help.

If they go near a dog that is protecting its property, it could think they are intruders; it may bite them to protect its space.

5. **MEET PUPPIES WITH A GROWN-UP! When puppies are still with the mother dog it is safer if a grown-up picks up the puppy and then lets children hold it when they are sitting down.** Mother dogs are very protective of their puppies and may bite anyone or anything they think will hurt them. Teach children to be extra careful of a mother dog that doesn't live at their house because she doesn't know them very well and may think they are a threat. Remind children that puppies have sharp teeth too!
6. **TEACH CHILDREN IF THEY VISIT SOMEONE'S PLACE AND A DOG GROWLS AT THEM THEY MUST TELL YOU.** Dogs growling at children is a warning that cannot be ignored! Talk to the dog owner and make sure the children's play around the dog will be supervised or the dog put away in a safe place.
7. **DOGS ON THEIR OWN MUST BE LEFT ALONE! Teach children to stay away from strange dogs that are tied up and dogs that are running around on their own.** They must never call stray dogs over to them – it is not safe! Explain to children that if a dog has been teased or annoyed by other children it might think they are going to hurt it too. This dog may bite to protect itself.

8. **IF THEY ARE RIDING PAST SOMEONE'S PLACE AND A DOG RUSHES OUT AT THEM** they must STOP, jump off their bike and try to use it as a shield between them and the dog. **They must not keep riding because dogs can run faster; the dog might chase and attack them.** If the bike falls over, 'be a statue' OR if they fall over 'be a stone'.

Teach children to stay like 'a statue' OR 'a stone' until the dog leaves OR an adult comes to help them. It's best that children stay standing if they can. When they do move, they must slowly back away from the property with the dog still in view. Never turn and run. Remind children that these dogs don't know them, they are just protecting their property.



*Being a statue*



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# WHEN SOMEONE IS BITTEN

- 🐾 Confine the dog or move the person who has been bitten to a safe area.
- 🐾 Stay calm, try not to panic.
- 🐾 For serious wounds, apply pressure with a clean towel to control bleeding and seek urgent medical advice and treatment. If possible, keep the injury site elevated above the level of the heart; this also helps stop bleeding and slows swelling.
- 🐾 Minor wounds can be washed thoroughly with warm soapy water and covered with a plaster – even if the wound is small seek medical advice because dog bites often become infected. Doctors will normally prescribe a course of antibiotics and give a protective tetanus injection if yours is not current.
- 🐾 Return to your doctor if you develop a fever or if the wound becomes more red and/or swollen, warm and tender to touch, or if there is any pus oozing from the wound.
- 🐾 Report the incident to your local Animal Control Unit. They will need the following information:
  - Where the attack occurred and what happened,
  - Time and date of the attack,
  - Description of dog – colour, breed, size, distinct markings, collar etc,
  - Owner's response if any,
  - If the dog is a stray, they will need to know if you have seen it before and in which direction it went.

The information comprising this section was gathered from:

- 🐾 St John First Aid Emergency Handbook (1st ed.). (2006). Australia: Tyrrells Administration Trust,
- 🐾 Angela Mills, a Registered Nurse with Accident and Emergency experience,
- 🐾 Dr Roger Brown MBChB, Dip ComEmMed, FRNZCGP, Medical Director, Anglesea Clinic Accident & Medical, Hamilton NZ.



Anglesea Clinic Accident & Urgent Medical provides the after hours component of your doctor's 24-hour medical coverage 7 days a week. Outside your own doctor's normal surgery hours, we are committed to providing prompt, quality urgent medical services for patients who need urgent attention.

Our service does not replace care that can wait to be dealt with by your usual GP. If you are not sure if your problem can wait, then come in and we will assist you.

When patients are seen here, a copy of the treating doctor's clinical note is sent by secure e-mail the next working day to their own GP to follow up on the initial treatment we provided. Patients are generally advised to return to their usual doctor for follow-up of the presenting problem.

The service has operated continuously for over 20 years and is supported and operated by a committed group of medical practitioners in the Hamilton, Cambridge, Te Awamutu, Huntly, Morrinsville, and Raglan areas.

**Anglesea Clinic Complex**  
**Cnr Anglesea and Thackeray Streets, Hamilton**



# SUMMARY OF CHILD SAFETY TIPS

## AT YOUR HOME:

1. DON'T HUG AND KISS DOGS!
2. IF A DOG RUSHES AT YOU, BE A STATUE.
3. DON'T RUN AND SHOUT AROUND DOGS!
4. NEVER RUN AWAY FROM A DOG!
5. NEVER TEASE OR ANNOY DOGS  
? Any dog can bite if it is scared, confused or in pain.
6. NEVER SNEAK UP ON A DOG!
7. DON'T TEACH DOGS TO PLAY ROUGH!
8. KEEP AWAY FROM A DOG THAT'S EATING!
9. FEED THE DOG ON THE GROUND.
10. NOT ALL DOGS ARE AS FRIENDLY AS THEIR OWN DOG.  
? If they see a strange dog tied up leave it alone!
11. TEACH CHILDREN 'DOG LANGUAGE'.  
? Remember not to stare into a dog's eyes!

## OUT AND ABOUT:

- ? Never back a dog into a corner!
1. ALWAYS ASK THE OWNER BEFORE YOU MEET THEIR DOG!
2. PAT THE DOG'S CHIN, CHEST OR SIDE OF THE NECK!
3. EVEN IF THEY'VE MET THE DOG BEFORE, BE CAREFUL!
4. STAY AWAY FROM A DOG THAT IS PROTECTING SOMETHING!
5. MEET PUPPIES WITH A GROWN-UP!
6. TEACH CHILDREN IF THEY VISIT SOMEONE'S PLACE AND A DOG GROWLS AT THEM THEY MUST TELL YOU.
7. DOGS ON THEIR OWN MUST BE LEFT ALONE!
8. TRY TO USE THEIR BIKE AS A SHIELD.

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# USEFUL RESOURCES

## BOOKS

McLaine, S. (2004). **Can I pat that dog?** Pymble, N.S.W.: Angus & Robertson.

Weston, R., and Ross, C. (2004). **Kids & dogs: Teaching them to live, play and learn together.** Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.

## WEBSITES

The Department of Internal Affairs <http://www.dogsafety.govt.nz>

Christchurch City Council <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/animals>

The Humane Society of the United States <http://www.hsus.org>

Doggone Safe <http://www.doggonesafe.com>

The American Veterinary Medical Association

[http://www.avma.org/communications/brochures/dog\\_owners.asp](http://www.avma.org/communications/brochures/dog_owners.asp)

The Kennel Club Safe and Sound Scheme

- 🐾 The 20 Safety Tips [http://www2.the-kennelclub.org.uk/sashi\\_code](http://www2.the-kennelclub.org.uk/sashi_code)

- 🐾 The interactive website for learning  
[http://www2.the-kennel-club.org.uk/safe\\_and\\_sound.html](http://www2.the-kennel-club.org.uk/safe_and_sound.html)

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [www.spcakids.com](http://www.spcakids.com)



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