

Dogs & Kids

Kidsafe SA Inc. | June 2019

In many families, dogs play a very important role as companion and friend, and are much loved family members. However, it is important to be aware that there are risks associated with having children and dogs together, especially children under 5 years of age. It may be surprising to know that the dog most likely to bite a child is not a stranger's dog, but a dog that the child knows well.

The majority of dog attacks that require a child to be hospitalised take place in a child's own home or backyard, or at the homes of friends and neighbours. Due to the size of young children, the most serious injuries are usually to a child's head and face, often leaving them scarred for life.



What dogs breeds can attack?

Any dog can pose a risk to children. Some dog breeds have been noted to be more aggressive than other breeds and have higher rates of reported attacks. However, there are also many cross breeds, so classification of dog attacks by breed is unreliable. It is important you look carefully at the type of dog you choose if you are planning to get a dog when you have young children.

Speak to your local vet or animal behaviourist for more information.

Any dog can pose a risk if precautions are not taken to reduce the risk of young children being attacked.

When are dogs more likely to attack children?

Dogs are likely to attack a child if:

- Approached when eating.
- Approached when sleeping.
- Startled by sudden movements.
- Woken suddenly.
- Cornered and scared.
- Jumped on and climbed over.
- They have their ears or tails pulled, or are poked or hit.
- They are looking after puppies.
- They have been cooped up in a hot car.
- They are unwell or injured.
- They are not properly trained.

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Preventing dog attacks and bites

SUPERVISE OR SEPARATE

The most effective way to minimise the risk is to constantly supervise children around the dog; otherwise separate the dog from the children when supervision is not possible.

Always reinforce this message when visitors are present. It is important to create dog-free zones for young children, and child-free zones for a dog.

When to get a dog?

Parents are advised to wait until their children reach an age where they can learn about how to behave around the dog.

If you already have a dog, make sure that you prepare the dog properly early in the pregnancy. Familiarising the dog with the smells of the nursery and new furniture is important before you bring the baby home. Then slowly and calmly introduce the dog to the smells and sounds of the baby.

Safety tips to teach your child:

With dogs they don't know, tell them to:

- Always ask permission from the owner before slowly approaching an unfamiliar dog.
- Approach a dog slowly, with the back of the hand extended.
- Curl their fingers and allow the dog to sniff them.
- Stroke the dog gently on the chest, shoulder, or under the chin. Never pat it on the head.
- Avoid eye contact with the dog.
- Stand still if being approached by a strange dog. Do not squeal, run, or jump.

For approaching all dogs tell your child to:

- Avoid approaching dogs that are sleeping, eating, caring for puppies, unwell or injured, or in their beds or kennel.
- Always let a dog see you and sniff you before patting it.
- Never play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Never yell at or surprise a dog, not even the family pet.
- Never pull a dog's tail or ears, or jump on, or kick a dog.



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