

10 Tips for Dog Bite Prevention

Learning how to be safe around dogs is important for everyone, especially children, whether or not they have a dog at home. In order to make interactions between kids and dogs pleasant for all parties, we recommend teaching children how to approach a dog, what to do when they see a loose dog, and the proper way to treat dogs. AKC Canine Ambassadors — a network of volunteers nationwide that promotes purebred dogs, responsible dog ownership, and safety around dogs — provides some expert advice on this important topic.

1. Always ask, “May I pet your dog?”

“Some dogs have never met a child, don’t live with a child, or just don’t yet know what a child is, and the dog may think the child is scary.” – AKC Canine Ambassador Darleen Wheelington, South Arkansas Kennel Club

2. Slowly present the back of your hand first for the dog to smell

“Never reach right over the dog’s muzzle or top of their head to pet them unless you have first presented your hand and are getting positive feedback from the dog.” – AKC Canine Ambassador Jaclynn Robertson, Coronado Kennel Club of New Mexico

3. Do not run toward a dog

“Often children run up to a dog with no hesitation whatsoever, and although I am happy to see love and not fear in their eyes, they need to be taught how to approach a dog.” – AKC Canine Ambassador Robyn Cosenza, Berkshire Belgian Tervuren Club

4. Never bark or growl at a dog

“Whether the dog is by itself, in a crate, or with a person, that is teasing the dog.” – AKC Canine Ambassador Kathy Davidson, Iowa City Dog Obedience Club

5. All dogs can bite because all dogs have teeth

“People should learn to read a dog’s body language, respect a dog’s space, and always supervise dogs and children.” – AKC Canine Ambassador Sandy Weaver Carman, Siberian Husky Club of America

6. Never leave young children and dogs unattended

“Do not assume a dog is ‘safe’ and ‘will never bite.’ It’s important to continue to monitor the relationship, as it can change over time.” – AKC Canine Ambassador Amy Garabedian, Leonberger Club of America

7. Teach proper manners around the dog for everyone in the family

“Do not let your child ride or sit on your dog no matter how well behaved he is. Don’t pull his ears or tail. Never bother him while he’s sleeping or eating — after all, would you want someone playing with your food while you eat?” – *AKC Canine Ambassador Colleen Douglas, Rogue Valley Kennel Club*

8. ‘Stand like a tree’ around loose dogs

“In addition, it is important that children know to tell an adult when they see a loose dog or when they see someone hurting a dog.” – *AKC Canine Ambassador Lyndy Mckay, Papago Labrador Retriever Club of Greater Phoenix*

9. Service dogs are working and should not be bothered

“They need to keep their attention on their owners, and you must always ask before petting a Service Dog.” – *AKC Canine Ambassador Alice McGowen, Petit Basset Griffon Vendeen Club of America*

10. A dog is not a person

“A dog may bite when threatened, cornered, or scared. We must respect these facts and get to know the different expressions of a dog as much as possible to be able to anticipate how they are feeling.” – *AKC Canine Ambassador Theresa Meyer, American Maltese Association*

Also, dog owners can help with safe canine interactions by socializing and training their dogs. The Canine Good Citizen program offers a good starting point and is the gold standard for dog behavior. One of the first steps in the CGC test is accepting a friendly stranger.