



The Truth About Dog Bites

It's something dog owners never want to think about -the horror of learning that your dog has bitten someone. In some cases, there is warning, in other cases you're completely stunned your dog could do something like this.

While you're reeling from the information, trying to decide what to do, here are some things to consider.

How bad was the bite?

Dr. Ian Dunbar, a veterinarian and respected dog trainer, grades bites on a level of 1-6:

Level 1: Fearful, aggressive behavior, but no contact with skin.

Level 2: Teeth made contact, but no skin puncture. (May be skin nicks less than 1/10th an inch deep).

Level 3: One to four punctures in a single bite, none deeper than ½ the length of a canine tooth.

Level 3B: Multiple level 3 bites

Level 4: One to four punctures, with at least one puncture deeper than ½ the length of a canine tooth. This means that the dog grabbed and shook what was in its mouth.

Level 5: Multiple bite incident with at least 2 Level 4 bites.

Level 6: Victim Dead.

Dogs don't "accidentally" bite. Puppies spend so much of their time playing, chewing, and putting things in their mouth so that they can learn the extent of their jaw's capabilities and strengths. If a dog puts teeth on you, but didn't actually bite down, it is exactly what he meant to do. If a dog leaves a puncture wound, it wasn't an accident, she put as much pressure into the bite as she thought she needed to.

A dog that issues a Level 1-3 bite is usually considered a good candidate for rehabilitation. Dogs with a history of bites that are Level 4 and higher are considered to be a much greater risk and not as likely to be safely rehabilitated.

What provoked the bite?

If a dog is tense or fearful in certain situations, and the dog was in one of the situations when he bit, you may know what may have provoked him. Most dogs give clear warnings before they bite that we humans don't understand. Brush up on canine body language to have a better understanding of stress and anxiety signals.

In many states, including Wisconsin and Illinois, a dog must be quarantined for 10 days after issuing a recorded bite. During that time, the dog cannot be sold, given, returned or otherwise be placed into someone else's ownership. If proof of current rabies vaccination can be shown, the dog might be able to

be quarantined at the home. If no current vaccination can be shown, the dog will need to be kenneled at a humane society, vet's office, or other place as determined by local law. Any kenneling fees are the responsibility of the dog's owner.

Keep in mind some state laws may hold you liable for any further bites the dog may issue if you rehome the dog.

If you would like to keep your dog in your family, you need to take measures to make sure the dog is unlikely to bite again. Work with a force free trainer to identify what provoked the bite and what can be done to manage it. This might include crating, employing muzzles, leashes or gates.

You and your family must carefully consider whether these management techniques are possible and if so, will they be in place 100% of the time.

Working with a force free trainer is a must in all dog bite cases. Look for a positive trainer who is not only experienced in dealing with aggressive dogs but is also comfortable meeting and working out training protocols for aggressive dogs.

A dog that bites isn't automatically a bad dog. However, it is a dog that needs immediate behavior modification and a full physical and blood work up at the vet's office. There are many, many reasons that a dog might bite, some obvious, and some not so obvious.

A skilled professional can help guide you through all that is involved with a dog bite. It's a very emotional time for all. Take a moment to breathe and look forward to what is best for all involved.