Bite Prevention

Dogs

For People Who in the Course of Their Work, Meet Dogs



CANADIAN KENNEL CLUB®
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People Who in the Course of Their Work, Meet Dogs.

A dog bites out of concern. There are a number of factors that contribute to that concern, so before a concern expresses itself as a bite, you should have coping strategies available to you to ensure the bite does not happen.

If your job takes you into private yards and homes, it is important that you have a basic understanding of dog behaviour as well as ways to protect yourself in the case of a dog attack.

"Assessing the risk" is a key factor in keeping any worker safe and in this section we will provide you with the tools to make an informed evaluation when entering premises with dogs.

A basic understanding of dog behaviour will enable you to assess and interpret what the dog is trying to convey.

Knowing how to respond in a non-threatening manner will assist in avoiding a confrontation. However, if you are attacked we will discuss ways to minimize your injury.

Remember, to the dog you are the intruder, the stranger, and the trespasser. In order to stay safe and keep the dog calm you want to indicate, through your movements, that you are not there to do the dog harm.

Understanding the Dog.



Dogs respond differently according to how they are raised but there are some general characteristics and behaviours that can be applied to all dogs.

Breed

It is not true that a certain breed of dog is more dangerous than another. Each dog has its personality shaped by its experiences as much as its genetics. Do not base your risk assessment on the type or breed of dog. All dogs can bite.

Novelty Factor

Dogs become more anxious when they experience new things. In some cases this anxiety turns into fear. If the dog has been well socialized and has had multiple positive experiences in new situations, it will be less likely to become extremely afraid of you.

Should the dog have led a more confined existence, it is important to recognize that the dog may be afraid of you. It may react to your smell, your movements, your uniform, or the equipment you carry. As examples, your uniform may have a large collar that flaps in the wind, or your equipment might make a noise that bothers the dog. Moving slowly and letting the dog smell the equipment can help relieve the dog's anxiety.

Dogs Protect People Places and Things.

The basic rule to remember is that dogs are protectors.

If they are going to bite it is usually out of fear of losing the thing they are safeguarding, whether it's a toy, a favourite sleeping spot or a person.

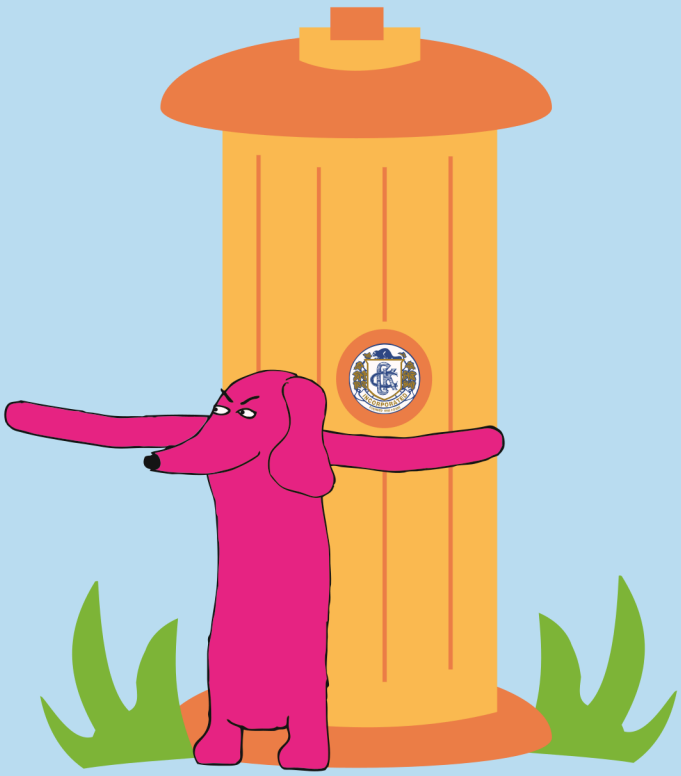
Dogs protect the people in their household. They may also extend that to other pets and people who spend time with them, such as a neighbour or a dog walker. Sometimes dogs will stand between their loved one and you, the intruder. To warn you to keep your distance, they may growl or bark.

Dogs have areas that they consider their territory.

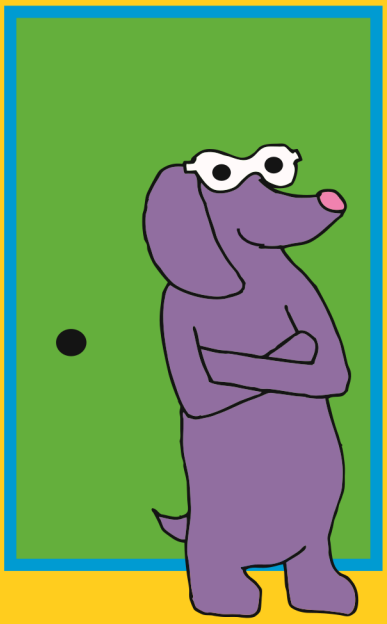
It may be a bed, a couch, a crate, a porch, a car or all of the above. They will warn you away from "their areas" through various means from merely standing still and staring at you to "patrolling" and/or growling.

Dogs are also territorial with their property.

This can include food or water bowls, toys, leashes or blankets. So be careful when touching or moving these things. If possible, only do this in the presence of the owner or have the owner do it for you.







Fight or Flee.

When a dog is afraid, running away from a situation is usually its first choice. When it is confined to a house or yard it will probably resort to the fight response.

Initially, the dog will bark or growl to warn you to leave its territory. If the dog is successful and you do go away, then it will use the same tactic in the future. The dog has just been "*reinforced*" for its aggressive behaviour.

This is what happens with the postal carrier. Imagine the scenario from the dog's point of view:

A stranger approaches the house and makes some noise. I bark and warn the stranger away. And lo and behold! The stranger goes away. I have to remember to do that the next time. I am such a good dog! I can protect the house!

If the barking behaviour persists, and the expectant response continues, the initial fear is replaced by confidence. The dog is now more likely to bite the postal worker if they come into contact with each other.

Understanding The Dog's Signals.

Most dogs will warn us that they want us to leave or back off before they bite. It is important that we be able to read the body language of the dog and understand the signals.



Each dog is different, but some common warning signs are:

The hair raising on the dog's back.
The dog baring its teeth.
The dog barking.
The dog growling.
Ears pinned back to the head.

Some less common warning signs are when the dog is:

Yawning.
Panting.
Staring.
Showing the whites of its eyes.

The dog may demonstrate any or all of these signals simultaneously and it is up to you to determine their meaning. For example, a dog that is wagging its tail and growling is probably telling us to back off.

Avoiding Dog Bites.



Now that you know a few things about dog behaviour, we can look at how to modify the things you do, so that the dog can easily understand that you are not a threat. Remember, you are trying to let the dog know that you mean no harm.

Hats, Sunglasses and Uniforms

Dogs get their cues from eyes and may become fearful if they can't see them. Remove sunglasses and masks if possible. If you are wearing a hat, take it off. Many dogs are fearful of hats because they can make you look bigger and peaked caps can also hide your eyes.

If your uniform is bulky and makes noise when you move, don't flap your arms around. Move slowly. If you can button or zipper your uniform this may help lessen any noise it makes, and will offer you protection if an attack occurs.

Bags and Machinery

Let the dog see and smell your toolbox, large bags or whatever equipment you are bringing into the home or yard. Again, move these things slowly, reassuring the dog that they are not a threat.

Treats

If the dog is allowed food treats, carry them with you and drop them on the ground or offer them in your open palm. The dog will then connect you with this positive experience and see you as less of a threat.



When You Visit a Client's Home or Property.

Inform the owner of your upcoming visit.

Upon your arrival, try to alert this person, and if possible, enter the property only when that person is present. Most organizations have policies regarding home visits so always check your company's policy.

Rural properties may have dogs that run free. When a vehicle comes onto the property, the dogs will alert the owner that someone has arrived. Wait in your vehicle until the dog's owner comes out to take charge. If you exit your vehicle, ensure that you have easy access at all time.





If the owner is not home and you need to enter the property:

When a dog is tied

When a dog is chained or tied, never assume that it is attached to something secure. Some dogs are strong enough to pull stakes out of the ground or bend poles. Remember, dogs that are tied up are often more aggressive, because they know they are limited in their movement while they are trying to protect their space.

When a dog is loose

Never look a dog in the eyes. Look down or away to make you seem disinterested. To a dog, staring is a form of aggression.

Meet the dog by standing sideways. Turn your body to the side. A dog finds this less threatening and it will react accordingly.

Let the dog approach you first.
Let it smell you.
Keep your arms at your sides.

Talk to the dog calmly.
Reassure the dog that all is well.
Most often, a dog communicates through body language, so move your hands and feet slowly.

If you need to approach the dog, walk in an arc like another dog would or in some way that lets the dog think you are ignoring it.
The dog then believes you are not a threat and will be more at ease.



What to Do When You Believe an Attack is About to Happen.

Never Run!

Back away.

Always keep the dog in sight and walk backwards to a safe place. If possible, do not turn your back on the dog. Many bites occur when a person turns to leave.

Speak calmly to the dog as you move to a safe place.

Use a confident but soothing tone. Even though you may be afraid, keep your body movements to a minimum so you do not incite the dog.

Drop treats.

Let the dog know that you have them, and then toss the treats behind the dog to give yourself more time to get to a safe place.



What to Do If a Dog Attacks.

Shout "NO!"

Feed the dog anything you have at hand, such as a jacket, a purse, tool bag or even a clipboard.

If the dog knocks you to the ground, cover your head and neck with your arms and fists. Lie still until the dog loses interest and goes away.

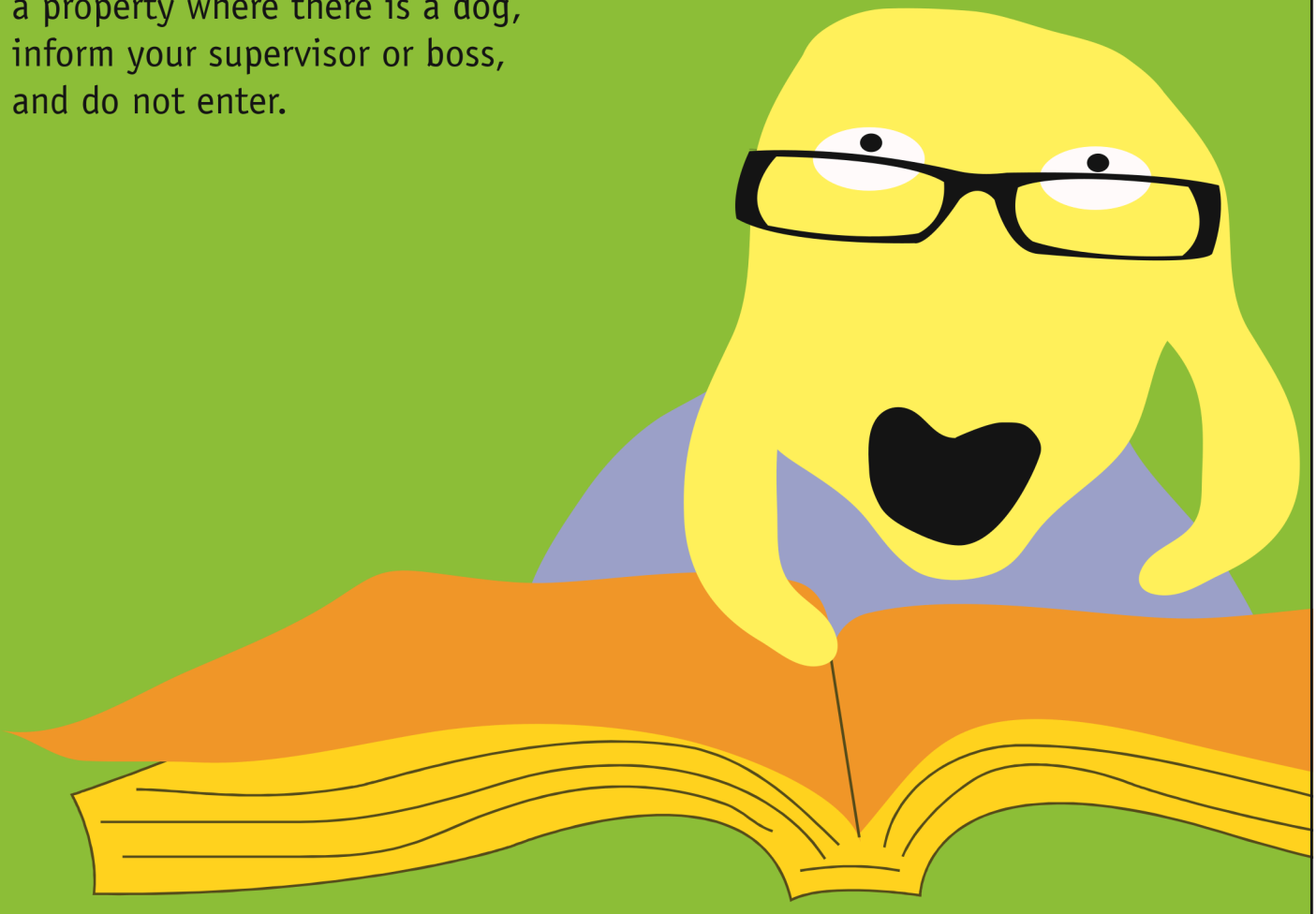


Remember that all situations are different, and all dogs are individuals.

Most dogs do not want to bite.

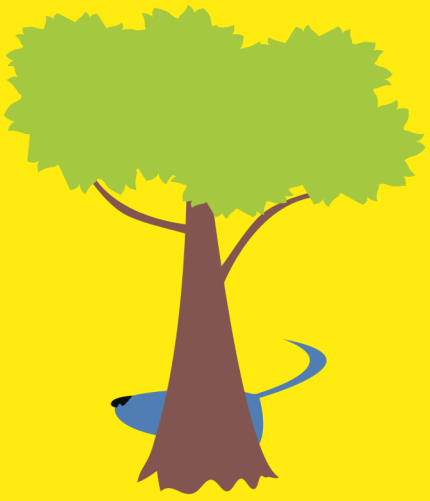
A few dogs are trained as guard dogs, but even these dogs will show you the signals before they bite. The majority of dogs bite out of fear. If you can reassure a dog that you are not a threat, there is a lesser chance of you getting bitten.

If you are unsure about entering a property where there is a dog, inform your supervisor or boss, and do not enter.



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