

# Recommendations for Dog Guardians

Although you can't guarantee that your dog will never bite someone, there are many ways that you can significantly reduce the risk.

## Before You Get a Dog

- Avoid purchasing your new dog at a pet store. Most pet store puppies come from "puppy mills," large-scale commercial breeding kennels that often house dogs in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, without adequate veterinary care, food, water and human companionship or socialization. By buying a pet-shop puppy, you're likely supporting a cruel industry, and you run the risk of taking home a sick puppy. Dogs from puppy mills have been reportedly diagnosed with ailments such as respiratory infections and pneumonia, as well as hereditary defects like hip dysplasia. They may also be poorly socialized to people and other animals. Responsible breeders *do not* sell their dogs through pet stores.
- Consider hiring a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT) or Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB) to assist you in selecting a well-socialized dog of stable temperament that best fits your family's lifestyle.
- Adopt from a well-managed animal shelter whose staff and volunteers can fill you in on the dog's background, her personality and her behavior in the shelter.
- If you prefer to purchase a dog from a breeder, find a small-scale, reputable breeder who sells only one breed, breeds only once a year or less, and allows you to visit his or her home and kennel. The breeder should show you the mother and relatives of the puppy and provide a clean, loving home environment for them, including lots of handling, play and interaction with different people of all ages.
- Avoid purchasing dogs through classified ads in newspapers or through the Internet. Many

puppy mills and backyard breeders sell their dogs through newspaper and Internet ads. (A backyard breeder is a pet owner who breeds dogs on purpose or just allows dogs to mate on their own. Backyard breeders usually have little to no knowledge about breed standards, genetics, or proper puppy-rearing and socialization.)

- Consider waiting until your children are older. Because so many dog bites happen to young children, waiting until they are at least 10 years old is recommended.
- Educate yourself on dog care, raising a puppy and humane, reward-based training methods. There are a variety of books and DVD's on this subject matter.



## After You Get a Dog

- Spay or neuter your dog as soon as possible. Healthy puppies can be spayed or neutered as early as eight weeks of age. Check with your veterinarian. Spayed or neutered dogs may be less likely to bite.
- Socialize your dog! An ounce of prevention (puppy socialization) is worth a pound of cure (trying to fix behavior problems in adulthood). Well-socialized dogs make enjoyable, trustworthy companions. Under socialized dogs are a risk to their owners and to others because they're frightened by everyday things. Fearful dogs are more likely to be aggressive or bite. They tend to fight with other dogs. They don't adapt to new situations, and routine outings (like to the

- vet's office) become difficult for them and everyone involved. Socializing is the opposite of isolating. It means to let puppies meet, greet, and enjoy a variety of people, animals, places, and things. Done properly, socializing helps puppies feel comfortable and friendly—rather than uncomfortable and potentially aggressive—in many situations and around all kinds of people and animals. The main rule for effective socializing is to let your dog progress at her own pace and never force her to be around someone or something when it's clearly fearful or uncomfortable.
- Take your dog to humane, reward-based training classes—the earlier the better. We recommend starting your puppy in puppy kindergarten classes as early as eight weeks, right after its first set of vaccinations. Early training opens a window of communication between you and your dog that will help you consistently and effectively teach it what you expect of it.
  - Make your dog a part of the family. Don't chain or tie it outside, and don't leave it unsupervised for long periods of time—even in a fenced yard. Because tied-out dogs become frustrated and can feel relatively defenseless, they're nearly three times more likely to bite. Well-socialized and supervised dogs are much less likely to bite.
  - Don't wait for a serious accident to happen. The first time your dog shows aggressive behavior toward anybody, even if no injury occurs, seek professional help from a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB), a veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB), or a qualified Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT). Your veterinarian office or community animal control agency or humane society may also offer or be able to refer you to helpful services.
  - Always supervise children and dogs. Never leave a baby or child younger than 10 years old alone with a dog. Teach your children to treat your dog gently and with respect, giving the dog its own space and opportunities to rest.
  - Fulfill basic animal-care responsibilities. License your dog as required by law and provide regular veterinary care, including rabies vaccinations. Don't allow your dog to roam alone.
- Err on the safe side. Be aware of common triggers of aggression, including:
    - o Pain
    - o injury or sickness
    - o the approach of strangers or strange dogs
    - o the approach of people in uniforms, costumes or unusual attire (especially hats)
    - o unexpected touching
    - o unfamiliar places
    - o crowds
    - o loud noises like thunder, wind, construction, fireworks and appliances.

If possible, avoid exposing your dog to these triggers. If it seems stressed or panicked in crowds, leave it at home. If it overreacts to visitors or delivery personnel, keep it in another room when they come to your house. Work with a qualified behavior and training professional to help your dog become more comfortable with these and other situations.