

How dog-savvy is your child?

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Simple safety tips can prevent nasty bites, expert says.

(HealthDay)—Dog bites are one of the risks faced by children playing outdoors, but some simple safety measures can help protect them.

"In the summer, [dogs](#) are out more, kids are out more, and the more contact that dogs and people have, the more likely it is that somebody will get bitten," Dr. Anne Brayer, a [pediatrician](#) in [emergency medicine](#) at University of Rochester Medical Center, in New York, and director of Injury Free Coalition for Kids, based at URMCC, said in a medical center news release.

Remaining calm and not aggravating a dog are key elements in preventing [dog bites](#). Dogs bite when they feel anxious or threatened. Staying relaxed when dealing with an aggressive dog can help minimize the threat, Brayer said.

She offered the following tips:

- Never leave infants or young children alone with a dog, and keep children away from dogs that are eating, sleeping or caring for [puppies](#).
- Be careful when visiting older relatives with dogs. These dogs often aren't used to young children and can be jealous of the attention they receive.
- Remember that all breeds of dogs can bite, and a dog's upbringing plays a much larger role in its tendency to bite than its breed.
- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog, which may perceive you as a threat and may think you are challenging it.
- Avoid neighborhood dogs with a history of [aggression](#) and dogs that have little contact with children.

Adults should always keep an eye on children when dogs are nearby and teach them how to act around dogs, Brayer said. Teaching them to keep their face away from dogs reduces the likelihood that the child will make [eye contact](#) with the dog and seem threatening.

If a child is approached by an unfamiliar dog, he or she should "act like a tree or act like a log," Brayer advised. This means remaining motionless, not shouting, and avoiding eye contact.

If knocked to the ground, children should curl up into a ball and protect their face and neck with their hands and arms. This can help minimize injuries.

Children should be taught not to tease a dog. That means not pulling its tail, petting it roughly or taking away its toys. Even doing these things in play can overexcite a dog and lead to an unintentional bite, Brayer said.

About 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year in the United States, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Children most likely to get a bite are between 5 and 9 years old.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more about [keeping children safe around animals](#).

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