

# Safety Protocols

## for dogs with bite risk

Safety is the most critical part of any behaviour modification programme.

Accidents do happen. If the safe management protocols fail just once, a serious bite incident may occur.

### General Principles

The principles involved in setting up safe management protocols are the same as for other safety protocols, in that a failure of the protocol should require at least TWO things to fail. In the case of dogs, best practices therefore require that there be at least TWO safe barriers between the dog and the rest of the world. These "barriers" include things like muzzle, crate or pen, leash, locked doors or gates, or simply distance.



### FOR EXAMPLE

#### 1) Children

Any dog that may be at all uncomfortable around strangers and/or children, or that resource guards (food, toys, owner) against children and/or dogs, **must be kept physically separated from children at all times**. Even more than adults, it is very difficult for children to follow instructions. Do not trust your child's safety to his/her ability to remember an instruction! From the dog's point of view, children move erratically and unpredictably, which the dog may find intimidating. Children are also liable to want to not only pet the dog, but to pick him up, hug him or kiss him, and to suddenly decide to take something away from him. Such actions are leading causes of serious dog bites and can be catastrophic for both the child and the dog.

#### 2) Fenced Yard

If there is a chance that the dog may possibly bite people that walk into the yard, and the dog is given access to a back-yard, the yard should be secured with a fence high enough that the dog cannot jump or climb over it. For large breeds, the height should be six feet, with additional wire with "coyote rollers" on top to prevent climbing or jumping; for smaller or less agile dogs, the height can be reduced accordingly. If the dog is left unsupervised and unmuzzled in the yard, the fence should also be secured under ground against digging. If the fenced yard has a gate to the front that is accessible to the general public, the gate must be secured with double gates ("air-lock"), one of which must be pad-locked at all times, to prevent the dog from being able to escape when somebody enters the yard from the road.

#### 3) Doors

If there is a chance that the dog may bite people or dogs if he/she gets out into the street, and he is kept unmuzzled in the house, and there is access from any door of the house directly to the road, additional doors and gates should be installed in order to create an 'air-lock' system, so that there are always two doors or gates between the dog and the outside world, in case that somebody unexpectedly opens a door and the dog runs out.

#### 4) **Safe Room**

If there is a chance that the dog may bite visitors, a lockable room should be available where the dog can be kept safely when you have visitors. The room should lock with a key and the key should be kept by the owners, so that children or other visitors cannot accidentally (or wilfully) enter the dog's room against instructions.

#### 5) **Muzzle**

Whenever a dog that is considered a serious bite risk (e.g. barks and lunges at people or dogs directly on sight, or has a bite history) is taken out in public, or otherwise exposed to strangers, children, or dogs, he should wear a secure, comfortable basket muzzle. We recommend the Baskerville Ultra muzzle. The dog should learn to enjoy wearing the muzzle through an appropriate training programme.

IMPORTANT: The muzzle does not mean that we can now put the dog into situations that we would not put him into if he was not wearing a muzzle – that would make his fear/aggression worse! Instead, the muzzle is additional insurance. Think of it like the seat belt in your car. We use it for additional protection in case an accident happens, not so that we can race down the road without due care.

#### 6) **Walking a dog in a muzzle**

A dog can inflict serious trauma (physical and emotional) even while wearing a muzzle. It is therefore preferable that a dog that is liable to lunge at children, strangers or dogs be secured with two leashes, in case one leash attachment breaks or is dropped by accident. The "working" leash should be attached to a safe walking harness and the "back-up" leash should attach to a martingale collar or head halter. The working leash should be hand-held, and the back-up leash could either be held in the other hand or be a waist-leash. If both leashes are held in the same hand, both leashes could be dropped at the same time.

#### 7) **In Case the Worst Happens**

Check your homeowner's insurance for cover for dog bites. In order not to invalidate your policy in case your dog bites somebody from outside your household, some insurers may require that you inform them that you have a dog, or if you have a dog that has a bite history, or that might bite.

#### *References:*

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