



CHILDREN AND DOG SAFETY

My twenty month old pup Codie and I find ourselves romping around parks and neighborhoods meeting new friends along the way. Much to Codie's delight, many youngsters jump at the chance to play with him or stroke his black silky coat. He's quite taken in by these loving little people and would probably run to the nearest park at any time given the opportunity.

All dogs should be kept on a leash and under control by their owners, but this is not always the case, and many dogs are out roaming our community. Some children have not had the experience of being around dogs due to living situations, parents desire, or allergies in the family. Other children may have had previous traumatic experiences with animals and need a calm approach in dealing with dogs.



As child care professionals, we want to keep our children as safe as possible, but cannot be in two places at once. Helping the children learn what to do in unfamiliar situations can give them some tools to use until your guidance is available.

Here are some suggestions on what children should remember when confronted by or just out around strange dogs:

1. Never go up to pet a dog without asking the owner first. This dog may fear strangers.
2. If a dog is scary looking to you, do not run from him. He may think you want to play and chase you. Instead stand really still until an adult can come to you. If you find the dog is jumping on you, just simply sit on the ground so he doesn't knock you down.
3. Do not yell or scream, as that sometimes alerts dogs to go after what sounds scary to them.
4. Many animals cannot tolerate human food so giving them tidbits of candy and treats may upset their tummy.

5. Never kick, throw things at, or try to harm a dog, as this will not make it go away and it may get very angry. Talking to the dog in a gentle kind voice can help him be your friend.
6. Never tease dogs with sticks, food, balls, etc. as they sometimes get anxious and confused and may nip at your hands. Puppies have sharp teeth that can easily cut into the skin.
7. If you ever see a dog roaming around looking lost tell an adult so she can call the animal shelter. The shelter will help find its home.

Being around animals can be a wonderful experience as children seem to naturally love them. Many children Codie and I meet enjoy throwing his tennis ball and letting him fetch the ball and bring it back to them. This builds the child's confidence and self-esteem, while also giving them the chance to have a fearless relationship.

By Prudence Bartlett