

Keeping Safe Around Dogs

Dave Griffiths BSc (Hons)
Senior Policy Officer
National Dog Warden Association



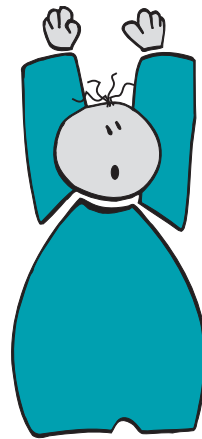
Introduction

The first thing to point out is that most dogs will not bite you. Your job however puts you at a higher risk than most. In a dog's mind you are a stranger and on his territory.

This leaflet aims to give you an idea of a dog's behaviour processes and how you can avoid or calm a situation.

The golden rule is:

**IF UNSURE,
STAY CLEAR!**



SECTION 1: UNDERSTANDING THE DOG

Breed/type of dog

It is true that certain breeds can show certain characteristics but it would be a mistake to base your assessment of a situation on the type of dog. Each dog will have an individual “personality” shaped by their experiences and environment, as much as by their genetics.

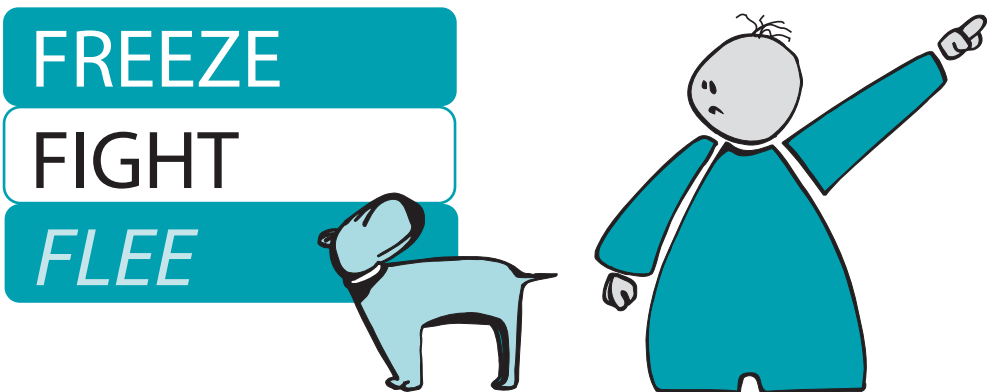
Socialisation/experience

It is important that, from an early age, a dog is subjected to as many experiences as possible and that they are positive experiences. He will then be a *well socialised dog* as opposed to a poorly socialised dog.

Novelty

When a dog experiences something new he may become anxious. In a poorly socialised dog, anxiety is much more likely to escalate into fear than in a well socialised dog with a broad range of good experiences to draw on.

Fear will lead the dog to 3 possible courses of action;



Fleeing is usually the preferred option,
if there is a route of escape.

Territory

The fight response is more common on a dog's territory, i.e. the home and garden, than outside it. The fight response usually starts with a warning of snarling, growling or barking.

Reinforcement

The purpose of the fight response is to make the subject go away. If it works, the dog learns that the behaviour was successful.

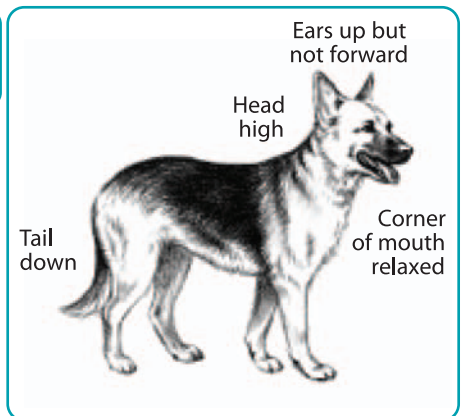
For example, a postman delivers letters to the house, the dog barks and the postman leaves. In the dog's mind, he has "seen off" the intruder.

As this pattern continues, the fight response becomes a habit, fear is replaced by confidence and the dog becomes more likely to bite the postman if he comes into contact with him.

Dogs communicate using BODY LANGUAGE.
Try to understand what he is saying to you.

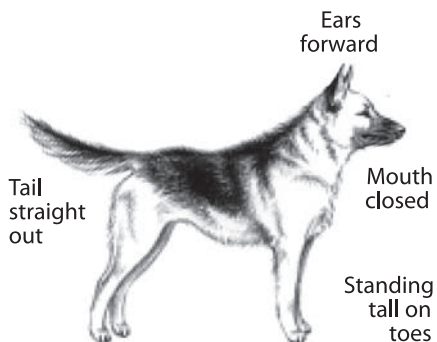
RELAXED

He is not worried by your presence and is calm.



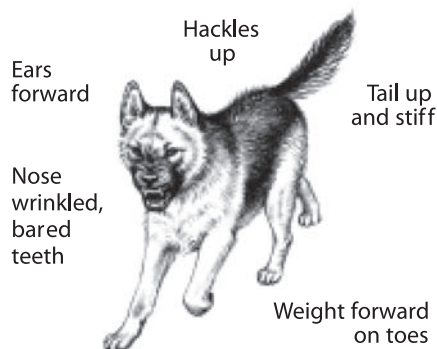
ALERT

He has noticed you.
He may become 'relaxed'
or 'offensive' from this
position.



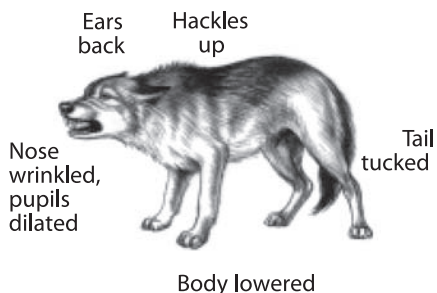
OFFENSIVE

He is confident and could
be aggressive. This is a
common guarding posture.
He may be guarding the
house, garden or owner



DEFENSIVE

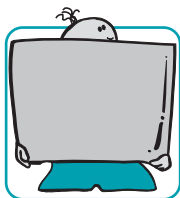
He is scared of you.
Don't approach him or
back him into a corner
or this fear may turn
to aggression.



SECTION 2: AVOIDING DOG BITES

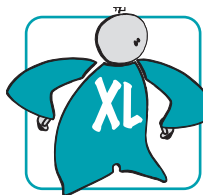
Avoid novelties

You can not know what will be new to a dog and you can not modify your uniform or equipment. Be aware however that, in a situation where you may have a problem with the dog, there are things that you can remove so that you appear less threatening. For example;



Large boxes/sacks

these make you look larger and more threatening.



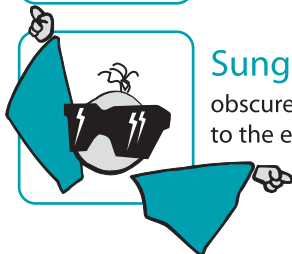
Large coats

can also make you look bigger, especially if they are loose and flapping in the breeze.



Large hats/caps

can also make you look larger. Peaked hats can hide your eyes.



Sunglasses

obscure the eyes. Dogs read body language and pay special attention to the eyes so it makes them uneasy if they can't see the eyes.

Defence

Dog biscuits are your best defence against potential aggression. Carrying a stick or an ultrasonic device may protect you once, but the dog will learn to associate you with pain and thus fear. This could lead to aggression towards you or a colleague in the future. If he learns to associate you with a treat, you may become the best of friends.

Procedure when approached by a dog

Remember, if you can avoid the situation, do so. This may mean coming back another time, sounding a car horn to alert the owner or telephoning the house that you are visiting.

Stop and assess

Try to read the dog's body language straight away.

Never stare directly at a dog - Staring is a threat and a direct challenge to the dog.

He will have to decide whether to fight or flee.

Stay still and calm

If a dog approaches you, stand perfectly still and let him sniff you. If he looks happy and friendly, greet him slowly and gently but do not be too forward or overbearing. You may wish to offer him a biscuit at this stage.

Give him space

If he shows fear in his body language, remember not to corner him. Give him room to keep you at a distance from him and he is likely to choose this option.

Avoid showing fear

Walk steadily and slowly. Never run or make any quick, sudden movements.

Talking to the dog may help

Use a confident but soothing voice as you would talking to a very young child.

Don't turn your back

If you feel that a dog is likely to bite or attack, walk away slowly backwards so that you are still facing the dog. Many bites to delivery people occur when they turn to leave the house.

Use a barrier

If you feel you are in danger, try to put something between you and the dog. A fence, gate, door or car door, maybe even a bicycle will make a good barrier.

Remember to:

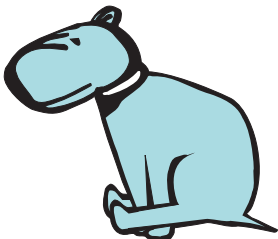
Alert your boss to any potential problem dogs.
Tell him immediately if you have been bitten.

Report a serious biting incident to the Police immediately .
They may need to take a statement and some photographs of the injury straight away if legal action is required.

Report any biting incident to your Dog Wardens. They need to keep such cases on record and usually advise owners on how to avoid a similar incident occurring in the future.

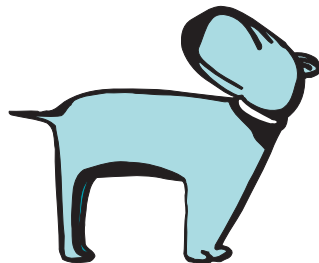
Other precautions

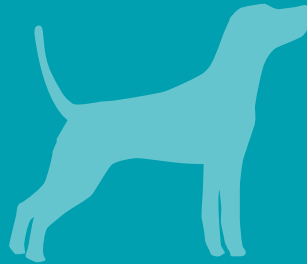
- Clean and disinfect any bite as soon as possible. Dog bites get infected very easily. In the case of a serious bite, you must visit a nurse or hospital immediately.
- Make sure your tetanus vaccination is up to date at all times.
- Try to wear protective equipment. A dog is most likely to bite the arms, legs, hands and feet. Thick sleeves, trousers and gloves will help and boots that protect the ankles are recommended.



References

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The Domestic Dog – J. Serpell 1995
Ain't Misbehavin' – D. Appleby 1997
How should you cope with an unfriendly dog – RSPCA leaflet 2003





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