

Tips to Prevent Dog Attacks

A dog trainer gives advice on how to prevent dogs from harming kids.

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Although attacks by dogs against children sometimes happen, longtime dog trainer Duane Overturf says they can easily be prevented if parents and dog owners are informed about the nature of kids and canines.

Overturf, owner of Your Best Companion Dog Training in California, says that leaving a young child unattended with dogs is a recipe for disaster and that children under the age of 7 should never be left alone with dogs – even if the dog is one they feel is very safe.

“Children under the age of seven do not truly understand that their actions may have consequences. I would be more worried about what the child might do to the dog than what the dog might do to the child,” says Overturf.

“If the child does something to the dog where he feels a need to defend himself, for example sticking a pencil in the dog’s ear, no one can expect the dog to simply take it and be injured. The dog will do what he has to do to keep from being hurt himself,” he says.

Overturf also says that anytime a new, adult dog is brought into a home, the dog should be considered on “probation” for his first three months. It takes a dog at least two weeks to show his true nature in a new environment. Asking for difficult commands, such as down and heel, in settings where the dog won’t want to listen will help show how the dog may react when under pressure to comply with something he does not want to do.

Only when the dog has been put under pressure will it become apparent to the owners how their dog will react under similar circumstances, whether he will bite, growl, comply easily, etc. Breeds that are known to be more easily provoked should be watched even more carefully.

Also, a dog that would be completely safe with kids when he is the only dog in the family may fall into acting with the group if put into a situation where another dog starts an attack, Overturf says.

“The group mentality is true not only for people but with dogs as well. This would be especially true if the person under attack was screaming and crying, only serving to escalate the situation,” he says.

Over the last 30 years, Overturf says, he has trained more than 6,000 family dogs of all ages, breeds, sizes, and temperaments. He works with a variety of family dogs but specializes in working with especially challenging dogs and puppies and regularly works with the families of dogs that have been through training previously, but still aren’t listening or behaving to the satisfaction of their owners.