

Preventing Dog Bites

By Barbara Rosenman

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) there are consistently over 800,000 serious dog bites a year in this country, which are treated in hospital emergency rooms. All told it is estimated that Americans experience over one and a half million dog bites annually, many of which go unreported. These range from a simple nip during rough play to fatalities. Dog fatalities have continued to increase, with 33 American deaths from dog attacks in 2007. Globally hundreds of people a year die from dog attacks. Of the 33 deaths in our country last year, most of these were young children, ten of whom were infants or toddlers.

Which dogs are most likely to bite?

Which dogs are most likely to attack and kill a child?

Intact dogs (they are capable of reproduction) are much more likely to bite than altered dogs. Of the 33 fatal dog attacks last year, only ten of these dogs were chained. Leaving a dog chained for long periods increases the dog's frustration. Dogs are social animals, and like the wolves they descended from, are a pack species. Only three of the 33 fatalities involved dog packs of unknown origin. That translates to the vast majority of dog attacks involve owned pets. However, just because a dog has an owner does not necessarily mean it is well socialized.

The Breed Ban Issue

Animal Control hears both sides of the breed ban issue. Half of the fatal dog attacks last year were committed by pit bull type breeds. Pit bull is a category of dog breeds, like retrievers or herders. Pit bull dogs were selectively bred to be canine gladiators. At some point in breed developments, standards were set for each breed. If there were no breed characteristics, then there would be no point in having breeds. We would only have one homogenous dog, a mutt!

Oldham County does not have a breed ban. We do have a Dangerous Dog law that applies to the dog's behavior.

In Conclusion

All dogs must be treated with respect, and be well socialized and trained. Dogs that have regular veterinary care, and are altered, not only make better pets, but trustworthy members of the community. It is essential that small children be carefully supervised around animals, and older children must be taught safety if confronted by an angry dog. It is far better to be a responsible pet owner and a responsible citizen who notifies authorities of potential problems, than to live with the regret of not reporting loose or aggressive dogs and the subsequent tragedies that can follow.

Animal Control will investigate anonymous reports. It is not necessary to provide your name to have us look into a situation.