

## Safeguarding Children from Dangerous Dogs Guidance

### 1. Introduction

Dogs play an important place in society and are valued companions for many families, playing an important part of family life.

Official figures for England in 2015 revealed that there were 7,227 admissions to hospital for dog attacks in the previous year. This represents a 76% increase in admissions to hospital in England over the past 10 years with children under 10 being the most likely to be admitted. Deaths from dog bites or attacks remain a rare occurrence. There has been, over the previous 10 years, a number of high-profile deaths attributable to dogs with at least 21 fatalities, of which 13 were children or babies.

The aim of this guidance is to provide information to those who are working with families and children. The guidance explains and describes:

- The situations where children are most likely to be vulnerable;
- The advice to be given to families with regard to dog and child safety and to prevent dog bite or attack;
- The basis for an effective assessment of risk and the criteria that should prompt a referral to Children's Social Care or other agencies.

This document should be read in conjunction with the [Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children procedures](#) and the [DSCBs Threshold document](#).

### 2. Situations where children are most likely to be vulnerable

Public Health Wales undertook a [Rapid Review of Deaths of Children from Dog Bites or Strikes](#) (2014) as part of the Child Death Review Programme and identified the following factors / situations indicating increased vulnerability for children:

- Deaths and injuries among hospitalised children in the younger age range (0-4yrs) are usually to the face and head. Research indicates that these attacks are usually from a familiar dog, although often not the dog of the immediate family, in a familiar setting.
- Older children are more likely to be bitten on the hand or arm, and attacks are more likely to be out in the open than younger children. Often the dog is not a familiar dog.
- In a number of cases death from dog attack has occurred when the child is in the care of another (e.g. grandparent).
- Serious dog bites or attacks, requiring hospitalisation, are more frequent among children from more deprived areas than children from less deprived areas.
- The owner of the dog is often not present when the fatal attack occurs and in some cases the attack has occurred when the dog has had unsupervised access to the child.
- **Breed is not a good predictor of risk**; other factors including the history of the dog, socialisation and context of the event are important.

### 3. Preventing bites and attacks

The most important advice identified by the Rapid Review is to **never leave a baby or young child unsupervised with a dog, even for a moment, no matter how well you know that dog**. This message is relevant to any contact with dogs, including when the child is in the care of others.

All professionals coming into contact with a family with dogs should emphasise the importance of ensuring babies and young children are not ever left alone with a dog – however familiar the dog is to the family – and record the advice given.

The Blue Cross and RSPCA have produced a range of useful resources about keeping children safe from dogs. Practitioners should give or direct any families with a dog or have contact with a dog, towards these resources. (See appendix 2)

### 4. Effective assessment of risk and the criteria that should prompt consideration of a referral to Children's Social Care, Police and other agencies

- The care, control and context of a dog's environment will undoubtedly impact on their behaviour and potential risks. Dogs that have been ill-treated/abused or kept in appropriate conditions are more likely to be aggressive.
- Dogs that are kept and/or bred for the purpose of fighting, defending or threatening are likely to present more risks than genuine pets. Owners linked to criminal activity, anti-social behaviour, drugs or violence may have reason to encourage aggressive behaviour from dogs which puts children and young people at risk.
- Families, who experience high levels of aggression and domestic tensions including domestic violence, are more likely to trigger excitement and possible attacks by dogs; these families are less likely to appreciate and anticipate risks and may be less likely to take necessary precautions.
- Very young children living in chaotic or dysfunctional families are likely to be especially vulnerable to attack from animals through lack of supervision and care.

The [DSCBs Thresholds Document](#) has been developed to support practitioners in their decision making when there are concerns about a child or unborn baby; this should be used to determine if a referral to Children's Social Care is required or if alternative action is needed such as an early help assessment.

A referral to Children's Social Care should be considered if any of the following criteria apply:

- There are clear links between animal cruelty and the capacity for child cruelty therefore any concerns about the ill-treatment of a dog or inappropriate conditions of care where there are children in the family, should result in a referral to Children's Social Care as well as the RSPCA. (See appendix 2)
- Where parents/carers have been advised not to leave a baby or young child unattended with a dog and continue to do so.
- A child injured by dog bite is under five years of age.
- The child/young person is under 18 years of age, injuries have required medical treatment and initial information suggests the dog responsible could be prohibited and/or dangerous or the parents have acted irresponsibly.
- Where parents/carers are believed to be exposing a child to or failing to protect a child from a dog who is believed to be dangerous or prohibited.

The Police should be contacted on 101 if:

- You consider a dog is a serious risk to a child or a banned / prohibited dog. (See appendix 1)
- At any point a dog bites a child.

Some referrals might be logged 'for information' only by the agencies, including Social Care, if it is clearly established that no significant or continued risk is likely to the child, or other children (for example, if the dog has already been 'put down' or removed). Recording this information is necessary to establish if there are repeated incidents.

#### Version Control

<b>Policy to be read in conjunction with the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Procedures</b>					
<b>Version</b>	<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Updated by</b>	<b>Signed off by</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Review Date</b>
1.	DTHFT Safeguarding Lead / DSCB Policy Officer	-	DSCB Policy and Procedures Group	May 2016	April 2019

## Appendix 1: Dangerous Dogs

The [Dangerous Dogs Act \(1991\)](#) provides very detailed information on the legislation covering dogs, the responsibilities of owners and the actions that can be taken to remove and/or control dogs;

- Any dog can be 'dangerous' (as defined by The Act) if it has already been known to inflict or threaten injury (this could be a bite and/or any other type of injury);
- Certain dogs are 'prohibited' and if any agency has any knowledge or report of a dog of this type, the matter should be reported to the police immediately (see appendix 1);
- Injuries inflicted by certain types of dog are likely to be especially serious and damaging. Strong, powerful dogs such as Pit Bull Types will often use their back jaws (as opposed to 'nipping') and powerful neck muscle to shake their victims violently as they grasp which will cause more severe injuries;
- When reports of 'prohibited' dogs and known or potentially dangerous dogs are linked to the presence of children, all agencies should be alert to the possible risks and consequences;
- The [Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act \(2014\)](#), amended Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) by extending the offence of being in charge of a dog dangerously out of control in a public place to 'any place in England or Wales', which includes private places.

However, all dogs are capable of causing serious injuries.

### Prohibited/Banned Dogs

In the UK, it's against the law to own certain types of dog. These are the pit bull terrier, the Japanese Tosa, the Dogo Argentino and the fila Brasileiro: Identification of dog breeds is very difficult and can be problematic, even for experts. If you have any concerns the police should be contacted and an assessment made, and necessary action taken to protect children/the public. If someone has a banned dog, the police or local council dog warden can take it away and keep it, even if:

- it isn't acting dangerously
- there hasn't been a complaint

The police may need permission from a court to do this.

If the dog is in:

- a public place, the police don't need a warrant
- a private place, the police must get a warrant
- a private place and the police have a warrant for something else (like a drugs search), they can seize a dog

A police or council dog expert will judge what type of dog you have and whether it is (or could be) a danger to the public.

Above taken from [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website, for more information see [controlling your dog in public](#).

#### Note:

Identification of dog breeds is very difficult and can be problematic, even for experts. If you have any concerns the police should be contacted and an assessment made, and necessary action taken to protect children/the public.

## Appendix 2: Useful Resources and Contact Numbers

### Blue Cross [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)

Has a wide range of information and resources about pets, pet care and safety. Includes:

- [Keeping your toddler safe around dogs leaflet](#)
- [Be safe with dogs; a guide for families leaflet](#)
- [Education activities](#) including:
  - sessions on family dog safety for parents/parents-to-be
  - talks to school and youth groups
  - teaching downloads/resources for children of all ages.

### RSPCA [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)

Provide range of information and resources about [dogs and children](#) designed to help parents understand and recognise dog behaviour making it easier for children to stay safe and dogs happy.

- [Six golden rules for staying safe](#)
- [Dogs and children – a guide to staying safe leaflet](#)
- [Growing up with a dog - helping children to learn about dogs](#)
- [Poster: Keeping Kids Safe, how kids SHOULD interact with dogs](#)
- [Poster: Keeping Kids Safe, how kids SHOULD NOT interact with dogs](#)
- [Keeping kids safe and dogs happy](#) - video of top tips in RSPCA blog post
- [Canine Aggression FAQs pet care factsheet](#)
- [RSPCA Education Team](#) provide a range of education resources and can offer schools visits

Other useful RSPCA numbers and contacts:

- [Derby & District RSPCA Animal Centre](#), 45 Abbey Street, Derby, DE22 3SJ, tel 01332 344620, email [info@rspcaderby.org.uk](mailto:info@rspcaderby.org.uk)
- [Reporting cruelty](#)
  - 24-hour cruelty line - call 0300 1234 999 to report cruelty or an animal in distress (sick, injured or trapped animal)
  - Contact online to report an animal in distress, animal abuse or neglect.

### Other useful contacts

- [Derby City Council Animal Welfare and Dog Warden service](#) or via Streetpride 0333 200 6981
- Derbyshire based dog wardens:

○ High Peak dog warden	0845 129 77 77
○ Derbyshire Dales dog warden	01629 76 12 15
○ North East Derbyshire dog warden	01246 23 11 11
○ Chesterfield dog warden	01246 34 57 34
○ Bolsolver dog warden	01246 24 24 24
○ Amber Valley dog warden	01773 84 13 35
○ South Derbyshire dog warden	01283 59 57 95
○ Erewash dog warden	01159 31 60 20