



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. The benefits of owning pets are well established. Living in a pet owning household can have physical and emotional benefits for children as well as teaching them about responsibility and caring for living creatures. Since 2018 there has also been a 15% rise in the dog population.

In 2018 the number of dog attacks recorded by police in England and Wales rose by more than a third. In 2018, there were just over 16,000 by 2022 this had risen to nearly 22,000 cases of out-of-control dogs causing injury. Hospital data also reveals an upward trend in the number of attendances for dog related injuries in the past 15 years. There has been an 88% increase in attendances, from 4699 in 2007 to 8819 in 2021-22. As well as an increase in incidents, there has also been a significant jump in the number of dog related fatalities. In a typical year there would be 3 deaths as a result of a dog bite injury. In 2022 the total jumped to 10 fatalities, 4 of which were children.

2. Aim of the guidance

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 to prevent dog bites 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 Procedures](#) and the [DDSCP Threshold Document](#)

3. Situations where children are most likely to be vulnerable

A 2021 report commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra)—known as the Middlesex report—identified a range of situational factors that can cause or make dog attacks more likely, when linked to key human behaviours including:

- Proximity between larger and smaller dogs in public places.
- Children's interactions with poorly socialised dogs in the home.
- Trigger incidents such as a dog experiencing fear or excitement.
- Predatory behaviour from other dogs.

- Being in unfamiliar settings.
- Provocation by humans.

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. (70% of all injuries) Research indicates that these attacks are usually from a familiar dog, although often not the dog of the immediate family.
- Older children and adults are more likely to be bitten on the hand or arm, and attacks are more likely to be out in the open unlike younger children. Often the dog is not a familiar dog. Other research found that the highest months for dog bites was July and August. This may be indicative of children playing outside and the school holidays.
- 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.
- 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.
- **The Breed of the dog is not a good predictor of risk;** other factors including the history of the dog, socialisation and context of the event are important. Some legal breeds can pose just as great a risk to public safety as illegal breeds. (see appendix 1)

4. Professional advice to families for dog and child safety and to prevent dog bites or attack;

In the main dog bites are preventable. Learning identified from rapid reviews where a child sustained an injury from a dog is that it is important 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 practitioners coming into contact with a family with dogs should emphasise the importance of ensuring babies and young children are never left alone with a dog – however familiar the dog is to the family. **Practitioners should ensure that safety advice is recorded clearly within relevant records.**

[Briefing NDS20 Managing the risks of Dogs around Children Sep 2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

The Blue Cross and RSPCA and DDSCP 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)

5. Effective assessment of risk to inform threshold for intervention.

Assessment- consider the context

The [DDSCP Threshold 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 alongside considerations below to determine if an early help assessment is required or, if alternative action is needed such as a referral to Children's Social Care is required.

[Briefing NDS20 Managing the risks of Dogs around Children Sep 2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

- All children are potentially vulnerable to attacks from dogs with young and small children are at greatest risk
- 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
- Young children are unaware of the risks posed by animals and are unable to protect themselves.
- The supervision arrangements for the dog and the child. How often they are exposed to each other and presence of adults.
- The care and control of the dog and its environment, including where the dog eats and sleeps. Dogs that have been ill-treated/abused or kept in inappropriate conditions are more likely to be aggressive. The environment and care of the dog impacts on their behaviour.
- Any there any observations of, and/or known history of the dog being aggressive or having bitten someone previously.
- Consider the past history of compliance with previous safety advice
- The size of the dog, the breed of dog and why the family chose this particular dog.
- Dogs that are kept and/or bred for the purpose of fighting, defending or threatening are likely to present more risks than genuine pets.
- Where did the family get the dog from? Does the family know the dogs history?
- 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 abuse, 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.

[Briefing NDS20 Professional Curiosity- Links between child, animal and DA Sep 2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

[Briefing NDS20 What Professionals Need to Know _ Animal abuse in the family Sep 2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

6. When to make a safeguarding referral

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 under 5 years of age is injured by dog bite.
- The child/young person is under 18 years of age and sustains injuries which require medical treatment and initial information suggests the dog responsible could be prohibited and/or dangerous or the parents have acted irresponsibly.
- If the same dog has bitten more than once and continues to have regular contact with the child.
- 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 under 18 years old.

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.

Think Family

If a vulnerable adult with care and support needs is also residing in the home or at risk practitioners should also consider if a safeguarding referral to adult social is also appropriate.

Appendix 1

Dangerous Dogs

The [Dangerous Dogs Act \(1991\)](#) (amended with effect from 13 May 2014 by the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014) provides very detailed information on the legislation covering certain types of dogs, the responsibilities of owners and the actions that can be taken to remove and/or control dogs. As a result of the 2014 Act, it extends to private places, the offence of owning or being in charge of a dog that is dangerously out of control (previously in a public place); provides that a dog attack on an assistance dog constitutes an aggravated offence; and ensures that the courts can take account of the character of the owner of the dog, as well as of the dog, when assessing whether a dog should be destroyed on the grounds that it is a risk to the public. 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;

- Pit Bull Terrier
- Japanese Tosa
- Dogo Argentino
- Filo Braxillero
- Cross bred pitbulls

Identification of dog breeds is very difficult and can be problematic, even for experts. If you have any concerns the police should be contacted via 101 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 will judge what type of dog it is and whether it is (or could be) a danger to the public. They can take the dog away and keep it, even if it is not acting dangerously or there has not been a complaint.

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

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

Any dog can be 'dangerous' (as defined by the Act) if it has already been known to inflict or threaten injury

Appendix 2

Useful Resources and Contact Numbers

DDSCP Briefings

- [Briefing NDS20 Managing the risks of Dogs around Children Sep 2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)
- [Briefing NDS20 Professional Curiosity- Links between child, animal and DA Sep 2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)
- [Briefing NDS20 What Professionals Need to Know Animal abuse in the family Sep 2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

Blue Cross 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](#)

RSPCA 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](#) - RSPCA video of top tips
- [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
- [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 7777
Derbyshire Dales dog warden	01629 76 12 15
North East Derbyshire dog warden	01246 23 11 11
Chesterfield dog warden	01246 34 57 34
Bolsover 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

Version Control

This document replaces all other previous published versions and should be read in conjunction with the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Procedures					
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