



Hampshire
Safe guarding
Children
Partnership



Safeguarding Children from Dangerous Dogs Practice Guidance

Aim of this Guidance

The aim of this guidance is to help protect children in the HIPS areas from serious injuries inflicted by dogs that are prohibited, dangerous, or poorly managed. The guidelines cover:

- Children most likely to be vulnerable and the dogs most likely to be dangerous
- Collation of information when a child is injured by a dog, and the criteria that should prompt a safeguarding referral
- The basis for effective risk assessment and practical options for consideration in strategy discussion or Child Protection Conferences.

Dangerous Dogs

- [The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991](#) provides information on the legislation covering certain types of dogs, the responsibilities of owners and the actions that can be taken to remove or control dogs.
- [Certain dogs are prohibited](#) and if any agency has any knowledge of such a dog the matter should be reported to the police immediately.
- Any dog can be 'dangerous' (as defined by the Act) if it has already inflicted or threatened to injure
- Injuries inflicted by certain types of dog are likely to be especially serious and damaging. Powerful dogs such as the pit bull types will often use their back jaws and powerful neck muscles to shake their victims as they grasp
- When reports of prohibited dogs 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](#) extended the offence of being in charge of a dog dangerously out of control to 'any place in England or Wales'. This includes private places such as homes. (See Legislation section below).

The Dog and the Child – family context

When you visit a family that has a dog you need to consider whether the dog poses any threat to the child's health, development or safety. Issues to bear in mind are:

- All children are potentially vulnerable to attack from a dog, with young and very small children being at the greatest risk
- A young child may be unaware of the potential risk and unable to protect themselves in the event of attack
- A large dog in a small home
- A dog that is kept in confined conditions (eg a small cage)
- Whether the child and the dog are left unsupervised
- How much money is spent on the dog compared to the child
- If you consider a dog poses a serious risk to a child, you should contact the police immediately.



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What increases the risk?

- There will be occasions when the best intended owner fails to anticipate or prevent their dog's behaviour
- The care, control and context of a dog's environment will impact on their behaviour and the risk they pose
- Research indicates that neutered/spayed dogs are less likely to be territorial and aggressive towards other dogs and people
- Dogs that are kept and/or bred for the purpose of fighting, defending or threatening are likely to present more risk than genuine pets.
- Dog owners linked to criminal behaviour, anti-social behaviour, drug supply or violence may have reason to encourage aggressive behaviour in dogs. They may also not appreciate or prevent the possible risks their dog(s) pose to children.
- Families where there is violence and aggression in the home are more likely to have a dog trigger excitement/attack. They are also less likely to anticipate the risks posed by the dog and to take precautions to protect from those risks, particularly to very young children.
- Very young children living in chaotic families are especially vulnerable
- Prohibited, dangerous, powerful dogs are the most likely to inflict serious injuries.

Practitioner Guidance

If you are aware of a dog that could be prohibited or dangerous, collect as much information as possible, including:

- The dog's name and breed
- The owner's details (name, address, family members)
- The reason for keeping the dog

The RSPCA advice to all professionals who are in contact with a household where there is a dog/s present:

"When looking at, or asking about a dog think about the following points, which should not be considered an exhaustive list but are intended to prompt a professional's curiosity as to the state of the dog's welfare along with suggested courses of action."

"The points relate to Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act, 2006 which imposes a duty of care on a person who is permanently or temporarily responsible for an animal. This duty of care requires that reasonable steps in all the circumstance are taken to ensure that the welfare needs of an animal are met to the extent required by good practice. The welfare needs are:

- The need for a suitable environment
- The need for a suitable diet
- The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- The need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease



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During the visit ask if there is a dog in the property including the back garden. If there is, and the dog isn't in the same room as you, ask to see him."

When to refer to MASH:

- A child injured is under 2 years old is injured by a dog
- A child under 5 years of age is injured by a dog and the injuries require medical treatment
- The child under 18 has injuries that required medical treatment and initial information suggests the dog could be prohibited/dangerous
- A prohibited/dangerous dog is reported and/or treated by a vet, and is believed to be living with an/or frequently associated with children under 5 years old.
- Some referrals might be 'logged for information' only by agencies, if it is clearly established that no significant or continued risk is likely to the children or other children (for example, if the dog already been destroyed or removed).
- Some referrals might prompt signposting to further information and guidance on dogs and safe care of children to be issued if the incident or injury was clearly minor, if the child was older or if the family have clearly shown themselves to be responsible dog owners.
- In more serious cases, initial assessments of joint section 47 investigations would lead to further discussions with other agencies, ie home visits to complete fuller assessments and inform judgements on parenting and the care and control of dogs, and advice could be sought from a vet to help determine the likely nature or level of risk posed by the dogs. As with all assessments, bear in mind that the welfare of the child is paramount.

The identifying worker has a duty of care to others and should record this information upon their client record system and warn others in the professional network of the potential risk associated with the animal.

Legislation

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 brought changes to the Dangerous Dogs Act:

- Extension of the law under Section 3, from a dog dangerously out of control in any public place to cover "any place in England and Wales" whether or not a public place. There is limited defence in relation to whether the person is a trespasser at the time of the offence
- Under section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act a new offence has been created in relation to dog injuries to an assistance dog, such as a guide dog, dog for the disabled or hearing dog for the deaf. This only covers assistance dogs, not other assistance animals. For clarification of 'assistance dog' see Section 173(1) of the Equality Act 2010
- New power to Police Constables and authorised Local Authority Officers to seize a dog in England and Wales which is not in a public place if the dog appears to be dangerously out of control.
- Increased prison sentences for those convicted of some offences
- In relation to court, Contingent Destruction Orders on dogs will take into consideration whether the owner is a fit and proper person.



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Research

- Male owners have dogs with increased aggression and fear (Roll & Unsheim 1997)
- Shy, tense, emotionally less stable owners have aggression in their dogs (Podbersek 1997)
- Presence of children in the house reduces behavioural problems (Kebeck 2003) but the presence of teenagers increases biting
- Dogs fed at meal times from the owners' table increases food aggression (O'Sullivan 2008)
- Dogs that are walked more have less stranger aggression (Kobert 2003)
- Lack of research on dog type before purchase leads to increased behaviour problems. Those dogs chosen for practicality have less problems whereas those chosen for their appearance have increased problems (Roll & Unsheim 1997)
- First time dog owners have more behaviour problems in their dogs (Jago 1996)
- Dog owners that have taken puppy classes with their puppies have less behaviour problems as adult dogs (Lindsay 2000).

If you have concerns about a dog in a home with a child/children, discuss with your supervisor initially.

Further reading

[Anti Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act](#)

[The Dangerous Dogs Act](#)

[NSPCC Research: understanding the links, child abuse, animal abuse, and domestic violence](#)

[The Dogs Trust: dangerous dogs campaign](#)