



# DARLINGTON

Safeguarding Children Board

## Safeguarding Children from Dangerous Dogs Practice Guidance



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## 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 death of a child referred to in a Serious Case Review undertaken by Northampton Safeguarding Children Board identified the need for all staff who come into contact with children and families to be vigilant when working with families who may own or are in accommodation where dogs may be present.

This guidance has been developed to provide information to those who are working with families and children when you visit a family that has a dog, you need to consider whether the dog poses any threat to a child's health, development or safety and to consider your own safety.

This document should be read in conjunction with Darlington Safeguarding Children Board [Child Protection Procedures](#) and the [Continuum of Need Indicators](#).

## 2. Aim of this guidance

The aim of this guidance is to protect children from the serious injuries that can be inflicted by dogs that are prohibited, dangerous or poorly managed.

The guidance sets out to explain and describe:

- The children most likely to be vulnerable and the dogs most likely to be dangerous;
- The information that should be gathered when any child is injured by a dog and the criteria that should prompt a referral to Childrens Social Care;
- The basis for an effective assessment of risk and the options for action that could be considered by strategy groups or case conferences.

## 3. 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 Brasileiro
- Cross bred pitbulls

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

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.

When reports of 'prohibited' dogs are know or potentially dangerous dogs are linked to the presence of children, all agencies should be alert to the possible risks and consequences.

#### **4. The Dog and the Child: Family context**

When you visit a family that has a dog you need to consider whether or not the dog poses any threat to the child's health, development or safety.

- All children are potentially vulnerable from attacks from dogs;
- Young and very small children are likely to be at greatest risk;
- A young child may be unaware and unprepared for the potential dangers they could face;
- A young child may less able to protect themselves and more likely to be of a size that leaves especially vulnerable parts of their body exposed to any 'assault';
- It is a large dog in a small home;
- Is the dog left alone with the child;
- How much money is spent on the dog compared to the child;
- If you consider a dog is a serious risk to a child you should contact the police immediately.

#### **5. Owners and Families (including extended family and temporary carers)**

Some factors to consider:

- Many commentators will insist that 'the owner, not the dog' is the problem;
- There will be occasions when even the 'best' of owners fails to anticipate or prevent their dog's behaviour;
- The care, control and context of a dog's environment will undoubtedly impact on their behaviour and potential risks;
- Research indicates that neutered or 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 risks than genuine pets;
- Some dogs are kept as a status symbol and can be part of the criteria of belonging to a gang.

Owners:

- Owners linked to criminal activity, anti-social behaviour, drugs or violence may have reason to encourage aggressive behaviour from dogs;
- Owners with interests and histories in crime, violence, drugs or anti-social behaviour are unlikely to appreciate or prevent the possible risks their dog(s) present to children;

Families characterised by high levels of aggression and domestic tensions:

- Are more likely to trigger excitement and possible attacks by dogs;
- Are less likely to appreciate and anticipate risks;
- May be less likely to take necessary precautions;
- May be less likely to guarantee the safety of the most vulnerable youngsters;
- Very young, small children living in chaotic or dysfunctional families are likely to be especially vulnerable;
- Prohibited, dangerous, powerful dogs are likely to inflict the most serious injuries.

## 6. Practitioner Guidance

Any agency aware of a dog that could be prohibited or considered dangerous should collect as much information as possible including:

- The dog's name and breed (if known);
- Size of the dog – large, medium or small;
- The current owner and any previous owners known, including gender;
- Has the original owner any previous convictions?
- Details of family members, particularly children
- Why did the owner choose this particular breed of dog, temperament or because the owner felt sorry for it etc?
- Is the dog's owner present – always, sometimes never?
- Does the dog get exercised outside the house – daily, weekly, never?
- Does the dog get off the lead exercise – daily, weekly, never?
- Does the dog live in the yard/garden – always, sometimes, never?
- Does the dog get fed from the owner's plate at mealtimes?
- Does the dog chew/destroy things – always, sometimes, never?
- Has the dog ever bitten another dog?
- Has the dog ever bitten a person?
- Obtain a photograph of the dog if possible.

Any agency aware of an injury to a child caused by a dog or treating an injury to a child caused by a dog, should establish precisely when and how the injuries were caused. You should also establish if and when there is any history or previous, similar injuries. Consideration should be given to whether the injuries caused are non-accidental injuries.

## What to do, if you have concerns.

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 (this should also result in a referral to the RSPCA) should be referred. A referral should be considered if any of the following criteria apply:

- If a child has an injury that requires medical treatment
- If the child has been injured more than once by the same dog
- If a child has sustained a significant injury
- The child/young person is under 16 years of age, injuries have required medical treatment and initial information suggests the dog responsible could be prohibited and/or dangerous;
- A prohibited and/or dangerous dog is reported and/or treated, and is believed to be living with and/or frequently associated with children.

If you consider a dog is a serious risk to a child and/or believe the dog may be one of the breeds mentioned in paragraph 3 above, you should contact the police on 101 immediately.

In the event that you are not sure about the dog you should share your concerns with the family. If you feel unable to do this you will need to discuss the issue with your line manager in the first instance. An information leaflet is available on [Staying Safe with Dogs](#) by the Dogs Trust which you can share with the family. Additional information is available on the [RSPCA website](#).

If you cannot be satisfied that any further risks will be addressed, you should consider all statutory options including protecting the child or removing the dog(s).

A referral to the [children's access point](#) following the DSCB [Child protection Procedures](#) should be made if there is any evidence that a dog has caused injury to a child and/or one of the criteria outline above is evident.

e-mail: [childrensaccesspoint@darlington.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:childrensaccesspoint@darlington.gcsx.gov.uk)

Telephone Number: 01325 406222

You must always ensure the safety of the child/ren

Some referrals might be logged 'for information only' if there is very clearly no significant or continued risk to the child, or other children (e.g. if the dog has already been destroyed or removed). Recording this information is necessary to establish if there are repeated incidents.

## 7. Research and Guidance

### Research

The Open University Research – [Dangerous Dogs, Dangerous Owners](#) (2013)

Battersea Dogs and Cats Home – [Research on Dangerous Dogs Act](#) (2016)

### Guidance

#### [Dangerous Dogs Act 1991](#)

#### [Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 \(Part 7\)](#)

Dogs Trust - [Staying safe with Dogs leaflet](#)

#### [RSPCA Website](#)

RSPCA – [Signs of Poor Welfare in Dogs](#)

RSPCA – [Dogs and Children](#) Advice and Welfare

RSPCA – [6 Golden Rules for keeping your child safe and your dog happy](#)

RSPCA Leaflet – [Children and Dogs guide to staying safe](#)

RSPCA Leaflet – [Growing up with a Dog – how dogs and children can enjoy living together](#)

RSPCA Poster – [How kids should interact with dogs](#)

RSPCA Poster – [How kids should not interact with dogs](#)

#### [Blue Cross Safety Advice](#)

House of Commons briefing paper – [Dangerous Dogs](#)

Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board – Serious Case Review Child Q  
[Overview Report and Briefing Paper](#)

Gov. UK Guidance – [Controlling your Dog in Public](#)