**Dangerous Dogs Practice Guidance**

**RELEVANT DOCUMENTS**

[**Assessing Dogs which may Pose a Risk to Children – Risk Assessment**](https://doncasterscb.proceduresonline.com/files/dogs_pose_risk_ch_risk_assess.docx)

[**Signs of Poor Welfare in Dogs**](https://doncasterscb.proceduresonline.com/files/signs_poor_welfare_dogs.pdf)

Thanks to Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board for granting permission to adapt their guidance for use in Doncaster.

This guidance was added to the procedures manual in February 2017.

**1. Aims of this Guidance**

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

The guidelines set out to explain and describe the following:

* The children most likely to be vulnerable to injuries inflicted by dogs;
* The dogs most likely to pose a danger to children;
* The information that should be gathered when any child is injured by a dog and the criteria that should prompt a referral to Doncaster Children's Services Trust
* The basis for an effective assessment of risk and the options for action that could be considered at Strategy Discussions or Child Protection Conferences.

**2. Definition of Dangerous Dogs**

The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) prohibits persons from having in their possession or custody dogs belonging to types bred for fighting, enables restrictions to be imposed in relation to other types of dog which present a serious danger to the public and makes further provision for securing that dogs are kept under proper control.

Certain dogs are 'prohibited'; if any professional has knowledge of or receives information concerning a dog of this type, this should be reported to the police immediately.

* Pit Bull Terrier
* Japanese Tosa
* Dogo Argentino
* Fila Brasileiro

See [**GOV.UK - Controlling your dog in public**](https://www.gov.uk/control-dog-public/banned-dogs).

Any dog can be 'dangerous' (as defined by The Act) if it has already been known 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 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 the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 by extending the offence of owning or being in charge of a dog dangerously out of control in a public place to 'any place in England or Wales', meaning it also covers private places. Please see [**Section 7, Legislation**](https://doncasterscb.proceduresonline.com/p_dangerous_dogs.html?zoom_highlight=dangerous+dogs#leg).

**3. The Dog and The Child – Family Context**

Whenever a professional or volunteer visits a dog owning family they should routinely consider whether or not the dog poses any threat to the child's health, development or safety. This should involve a discussion with the parents/guardian or the pet owner about the dog's behaviour. This is particularly important when there is a new baby in the household. The pet owner should be asked whether the dog's behaviour has changed since the baby was brought home. This assessment of risk should be repeated when the baby begins to become mobile. The following points should be borne in mind when assessing any potential risk posed by a dog in the home:

* All children are potentially vulnerable from attack(s) from dog(s);
* Young and very small children are likely to be at greatest risk;
* Younger children will be unaware and unprepared for the potential dangers they could face;
* A young child will be 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' or injury caused by unruly behaviour from the Dog;
* Is the dog left alone with the child? IF so how old is the child as this would be a risk for infants.
* How much money is spent on the dog compared to the child?
* Are there issues about the impact the dog is having on basic hygiene in the home and if so what might this mean for the health and safety of children living in the home
* How effectively do parents prioritise the needs of the child over the care/attention that they offer to the Dog

If you consider a dog is a serious risk to a child you should contact the Police immediately.

See also [**Signs of Poor Welfare in Dogs**](https://doncasterscb.proceduresonline.com/files/signs_poor_welfare_dogs.pdf).

**4. Additional Risk Factors - Owners and Families (Including Extended Family and Temporary Carers)**

* 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 the animal's 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;
* Prohibited, dangerous, powerful dogs are likely to inflict the most serious injuries.

Owners:

* Owners involved in criminal activity, anti-social behaviour, drugs or violence may have reason to encourage aggressive behaviour from dogs;
* Owners with histories in crime, violence, drugs or anti-social behaviour less likely to appreciate or prevent the possible risks their dog(s) present to children.

Families living in households 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.

**5. Practitioner Action**

Any practitioner who becomes aware of a dog that could be prohibited or considered dangerous should use the Assessing Dogs which may pose a risk to children checklist. Practitioners should also collect the following information:

* The dog's name and breed;
* The owner's details;
* The reason for keeping the dog and information about other family members, particularly young children.

This information should then be shared with the Police or the Children's Services Trust without delay.

Where there is a report of a child having been injured by a dog (or exposed to the risk of injury/significant harm either directly due to the dogs behaviour or indirectly due to the dogs impact on hygiene in the home) a referral to Children's Social Care should be considered. In deciding whether or not to make a referral, consideration should be given to:

* The nature of the injuries;
* The circumstances of the attack / incident;
* Whether the parents or dog owner sought medical advice;
* Whether the dog has previously shown any aggression; and
* What action the pet owner has taken to prevent a recurrence of any attack.

Remember, if a practitioner has reason to believe that a dog in the household is prohibited or presents a risk to a child, the Police or Children's Services Trust should be contacted immediately.

Where the concerns are about the impact the dog has on home conditions then practitioners should follow the guidance regarding neglect, including using the relavent tools to support their assessment.

A referral should also be made where a prohibited and/or dangerous dog is reported and/or treated, and is believed to be living with and/or frequently associated with children.

**6. Risk Factors: Dangerous Dogs**

A risk assessment tool (see [**Assessing Dogs which may Pose a Risk to Children - Risk Assessment**](https://doncasterscb.proceduresonline.com/files/dogs_pose_risk_ch_risk_assess.docx)) has been developed to assist practitioners in identifying and assessing the risk of potentially dangerous dogs.

Where there is a report of a child having been injured by a dog (or exposed to the risk of injury) a referral to the Children's Services Trust should be considered. In deciding whether or not to make a referral, consideration should be given to the factors set out in section 5:

A referral should also be made where a prohibited and/or dangerous dog is reported and is believed to be living with and/or frequently associated with children.

Some referrals might result in information being provided to families on the safe care of dogs and children, for example 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. See - [**Parent Tips - Keeping Babies and Children Safe Around Dogs in the Home (Institute of Health Visiting)**](http://ihv.org.uk/for-health-visitors/resources-for-members/resource/ihv-tips-for-parents/managing-minor-illness-and-reducing-accidents/keeping-babies-children-safe-around-dogs-home/) and [**The Blue Cross Be Safe with Dogs Leaflet - Guidance for Families**](https://www.bluecross.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/14865_proof_4LR_WEB.pdf).

In more serious cases a Children and Families Assessment or joint Section 47 investigation may be required along with:

* Multi agency home visits to complete fuller assessments and to inform judgements on parenting and the care and control of dog(s);
* Advice might be sought from a vet to help determine the likely nature or level of risk presented by the dog(s).

As with all other assessments "the welfare of the child is paramount".

See also [**Assessing Dogs which may Pose a Risk to Children - Risk Assessment**](https://doncasterscb.proceduresonline.com/files/dogs_pose_risk_ch_risk_assess.docx)

**7. Legislation**

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 introduced the following changes to the current Dangerous Dogs Act (DDA):

* Extended the law under Section 3, from a dog dangerously out of control in a public place to cover "any place in England and Wales" (whether or not a public place). There is a limited defence in relation to whether the person was a trespasser entering or in a building, part of a building, that is a dwelling or forces' accommodation at the time of the offence;
* Creation of a new offence in relation to a dog injuring 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. Assistance dog has the meaning given by Section 173(1) of the Equality Act 2010;
* New power to Police Constables and to authorised Local Authority Officers to seize a dog in England and Wales which is not a public place, if the dog appears to the constable or officer to be dangerously out of control. This includes a private place, but the dog must be out of control immediately before or at the time the constable or authorised Local Authority Officers makes the decision to seize;
* 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.

Example Incidents:

* A burglar enters a property, as a trespasser, and is attacked by the house owner's dog. In this case there would be a "house holder case" defence;
* The next door neighbour's son climbs over the garden fence to get his ball back and gets bitten by a dog whilst in the neighbour's garden, this would be an offence. The back garden is not covered in the defence;
* The postman delivering mail entering the driveway with implied permission gets chased by a dog which is snarling and biting at him but does not get bitten but is in fear that he will – this is an offence;
* When dealing with a prohibited breed dog (under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act) such as a suspected Pitbull, unless out of control immediately before or at the time, a warrant will still be required to seize from a private place.

**8. Research Findings**

* Male owners have dogs with increased aggression and fear (Roll and Unsheim1997);
* Shy, Tense, emotionally less stable owners have increased aggression in their dogs (Podberscek 1997);
* Presence of children in house reduces behavioural problems (Kebect 2003) but presence of teenagers increases biting;
* Dogs fed at meal times from the owners table causes increased food aggression (O'Sullivan 2008);
* Dogs fed at the table and dogs which sleep with the owner especially in their bed / bedroom have increased aggression (Jagoe 1996);
* The presence of other dogs in house leads to less fear aggression dependent upon the age spread of dogs (Thompson personal communication PC);
* Dogs kept outside show increased aggression to strangers (Thompson PC);
* Dogs which are walked more have less stranger aggression (Kobect 2003);
* Dogs which have a free run on open space show increased socialisation and therefore less behaviour problems;
* 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 appearance increased problems.(Roll and Unsheim 1997);
* First time dog owners have more behaviour problems in their dogs (Jagoe 1996);
* Those dog owners who have taken classes with their puppies have less behaviour problems as adult dogs (Lindsay 2000).

**9. Further Information / Resources**

[**The Blue Cross Be Safe with Dogs Leaflet - Guidance for Families**](https://www.bluecross.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/14865_proof_4LR_WEB.pdf)

[**The Dogs Trust: Staying Safe With Dogs**](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/factsheets-downloads/stay%20safe%20around%20dogs.pdf)

[**Battersea Dogs and Cats Home**](https://www.battersea.org.uk/pet-advice)

[**Kennel Club's Safe & Sound Programme with Resources for Schools**](https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/dog-training/safe-and-sound/)

[**National Animal Welfare Trust Advice Sheet/Free Webinar**](http://www.nawt.org.uk/advice/changes-dangerous-dogs-act-advice%20-owners)