

Humane Officer's Corner by Jill Posanski

How to Prevent Animal Bites:

Hi! Thought I would share some bite case information in this newsletter to make a point about animal bites. Some readers might think that loose, stray dogs are doing most of the biting in Waukesha County. The truth is most of our bites cases result from the family pet biting either a family member or your kid's friends. Most bites occur at the pet owners' homes. No specific cat or dog breeds stand out on the bite reports I receive. The HAWS kid's camp children always guess that pit bulls, rottweillers, and German Shepherds do all the biting. A huge number of Waukesha families own "family friendly" breeds, such as golden retrievers and labradors. Many bite reports I receive list these dogs, probably because so many people own them!

A newer trend I am seeing is that of dogs rescued from puppy mill settings being involved in bite cases. They usually did not have the best start in life, especially in regard to socializing. It can take months and years, if ever, to get over their fear of "the unknown". Whatever they were not exposed to in a positive way as pups is their "unknown". Rescue group members say their rescue dogs' fears include people, open spaces, grass, solid floors, loud noises, hands, and fast motions. Usually fearful, their "stress response" is to avoid what they fear. The bites come when the dogs are (sometimes unknowingly) forced to face what they fear. It is the old fight or flight response magnified by lack of socialization. To overcome their fears takes time and special training, but it can be done.

The best advice I have for animal lovers is to spend time observing how animals respond to stress. Rarely does an animal bite take place where no warning signs are given by the animal. The problem is that kids do not notice or heed the warnings, and kids are the ones who receive the lion's share of bites. Supervise children around animals and avoid stressing animals to reduce the risk. If things are especially hectic around your home, consider parking your dog or cat in a comfortable crate away from the activities. They may act as if they miss the commotion, but many animals prefer things predictable and quiet. Obviously start the crate training the day you bring your pet home. Animals need time to learn to be quiet in their crate. There are many great crate-training methods out there. My dogs kept finding peanut butter smeared in their crates and now go in there just to see if the peanut butter fairy paid them a visit. They love their crates and I know they have a safe place to hang out when my kids get all loud and wild with their friends. I have friends who have their pets stay at grandma's home when they entertain. It reduces the stress for owner and pet alike, and grandma enjoys the furry company.

Together we can all take steps to prevent animal bites, while enjoying our lives in the company of pets. Stay Safe, Jill