

Dog Attacks Child! Dog mauls child in home!

Sounds awful doesn't it?

But unfortunately headlines such as these convey the message on how vulnerable our children can be whether it is at home, walking to and from school, at friends or playing in the local park.

Over the past two and half years the Victorian State Government has been committed to encouraging responsible pet ownership in the community. The Victorian Canine Association has been contracted to deliver this program within Victoria on behalf of the State Government.

The facts:

□ Approximately 80% of dog attacks, serious enough to cause hospitalization occur within the person's home, or in a home of someone they know, by a dog they own or one that is known to them.*

□ Public areas such as roads, footpaths and playgrounds accounted for 19% of known dog injury bite locations.

□ The majority of victims admitted to hospitals with injuries caused by dog bite injuries are children.

□ Most children were injured on the head, face, scalp area, which reflects their short stature as well as the tendency to allow their heads to come in close proximity with dogs while playing with or cuddling them.

Refer- *'Prevention of Dog Attacks in Public Places. A Local Government Strategy adopted by 11 Victorian Councils'* -Neva Van de Kuyt, Bureau Animal Welfare Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria.

– *The Facts of Dog Bite-Victorian Public Hospital Injury Surveillance'* Karen Ashby

Urban Animal Conference Papers 2001.

To date the Responsible Pet Education Program for Schools has delivered over 2500 visits to primary schools throughout the State, which equates to some 250,000 children. All schools regardless of their geographical location and the system to which they belong (E.g. State, Independent and Catholic) have been able to access this program.

At present this program is serviced by 62 dedicated, highly motivated Pet Educators located throughout metropolitan Melbourne and country Victoria. All Pet Educators are Police Checked and their dogs temperament tested.

Who better to educate our children about responsible pet ownership than responsible pet owners?

The program has a dynamic Teachers Kit. This has been designed to address current curriculum initiatives throughout Australia. The program also focuses on current and specific government legislation here in Victoria –Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act of 1994.

The Kit has been divided into four units, which covers Prep to Year 6.

These units acknowledge:

1.the essential concepts and content, processes and skills, which students need to cover.

2.an emphasis on complimenting the development of numeracy and literacy skills in the early years.

3.are in line with current learning theory and presented in a teacher friendly format.

The Program Coordinators have developed the Kit so that it can be modified to meet the needs of other States and countries by integrating their relevant educational guidelines and legislation.

Responsible Pet Education Program for Schools

The Teachers Kit is further supported by the new Internet site, which was launched in June last year and allows both teachers and students alike to access the most up to date information regarding responsible pet ownership. The Internet site has been specifically designed for junior and senior primary students and includes some interactive elements such as games. In the age of high impact information technology, games encourage children to visit on a regular basis keeping the message of responsible pet ownership fresh in their minds.

The program has two mascots, Victoria the Cat and Victor the Dog who are enjoying a high and growing profile with the children and the wider community. Recent media attention highlighted the importance of this program in empowering children to behave safely around dogs.

A young bite victim in Bendigo, Victoria, who was pulled off his bike and attacked, sustained minimal injuries due to the fact that the program had recently visited his school and he had been able to employ the strategies he had been taught to deal with aggressive dogs.

The program's slogan, **'Educating today, taking care of tomorrow'**®, reinforces the fact that effective change in community attitude and thinking is not an overnight process. Changing community attitudes and understandings in relation to responsible pet ownership is a long-term undertaking, which will require both effective education and legislation working in tandem.

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Role playing with preparatory age children on how to approach a dog



Above
Lucy the Great Dane and our Pet Educator Jo doing the 'meet and greet'

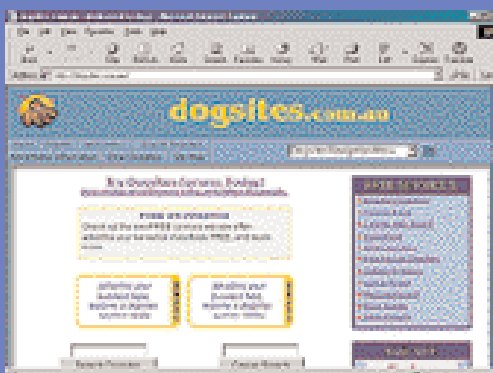


Left
How to pat a dog- Dale with her Alaskan Malamute Chewy doing the 'meet and greet'



Dale demonstrates how to pat Chewy the Alaskan Malamute.

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