



Diogelu Gwent
Gwent Safeguarding

Safeguarding Children and Adults around dogs



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Protocols and Procedures
Group

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1. Aims of this Guidance

There have been a number of occasions where children and adults have been killed or seriously injured by dogs both within and outside the household. It is important to remember that it is never safe to leave a child unsupervised with a dog, regardless of how friendly or trusted it may be.

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

This guidance is intended to provide a useful reference tool for any Practitioners working closely with children, families or adults at risk.

The guidelines set out to explain and describe:

- The children and adults most likely to be vulnerable and the dogs most likely to be dangerous.
- The information that should be gathered when any child or adult is injured by a dog and the criteria that should prompt a referral to Social Services.

2. Dangerous Dogs

The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) 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.

From the 13 May 2014 the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, section 3 was extended to include the offence of being in charge of a dog dangerously out of control in a public place to 'any place in England or Wales', which includes private places.

In the UK it is against the law to own certain types of dog unless the owner has a certificate of exemption. These dogs are: **Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino, Fila Brasileiro, and XL Bully**. If any agency has any knowledge or report of a dog of this type, the matter should be reported to the police immediately via 101 or e-mail their concerns to Gwent Police using contact@gwent.police.uk, the e-mail equivalent of the 101 service. The Police can then carry out relevant checks as to the circumstance of such ownership and verify any exemption.

However, **any dog**, irrespective of breed, 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 and adults, all agencies should be alert to the possible risks and consequences.

3. Increased risk

The benefits of owning pets are well established. Having a pet can have physical and emotional benefits for a child and adults as well as teaching them about responsibility and caring for living creatures. However, there are also risks and when you visit a family that has a dog or observe a dog in the community you need to consider whether or not the dog poses any threat to the child's or adults health, development or safety.

All children and adults are potentially vulnerable from attack(s) from dog(s).

- Young and very small children are likely to be at greatest risk.
- Adults with care and support needs or Adults at risk are more likely to be vulnerable.
- A young child and some adults may be unaware and unprepared for the potential dangers they could face.
- A young child may 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'.
- Is it a large dog in a small home.
- Is the dog left alone with the child or adults with care and support needs or adult at risk.
- If you consider a dog is a serious risk to a child or adult, you should contact the police immediately.

4. 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 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.

Owners:

- Owners linked to criminal activity, anti-social behaviour, drugs or violence may have reason to encourage aggressive behaviour from dogs.
- In some cases, such incidents have occurred where owners have encouraged aggressive behaviours from the dog, some of these owners have had links with criminal activities and some not.

Families, who experience 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.

(Public Health Wales, 2014)

5. Practitioner Guidance

The RSPCA offer the following 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.

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 the dog."

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

- The dog's name and breed.
- The owner.
- The reason for keeping the dog (Dogs that are kept and/or bred for the purpose of fighting, defending, or threatening are likely to present more risks than genuine pets).
- Any children or adult in the home (particularly young children and adults at risk).

This information should be logged with Police via 101 and shared with the RSPCA. Information should also be shared appropriately with Children's and Adult Services if a professional has concerns about a child or adult at risk, making referrals as required (as detailed below).

6. When to make a referral

All agencies should **consider** making a referral to Children's services where there is a report of a child being injured by a dog (or exposed to risk of injury). A referral should similarly be considered to Adult Services in the event that an adult at risk is reported to have been injured by a dog or is exposed to risk of injury. In deciding whether to make a referral, consideration should be given to:

- The nature of the injuries,
- The circumstances of the attack/incident,
- The age of the child (chronological and developmental),
- Whether the parents/dog owner sought medical advice/treatment,
- Whether the dog has previously shown any aggression,
- What action the parents/dog owner has taken to prevent any recurrence

Some referrals might be logged 'for information' only by the agencies, if it is clearly established that no significant or continued risk is likely to the child, or other children (for example, if the dog has already been 'put down' or removed).

Some referrals might prompt 'information leaflets' on Dogs and Safe Care of Children to be issued (please see appendices), 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 or joint section 47 investigations would lead to further discussions with other agencies:

- 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).

7. Additional Resources

This is a list of resources that provide advice for both professionals and families for keeping children safe around pets. Consider which is most useful for your work and, if relevant, which is appropriate to be delivered to the families you work with. All emphasise the key message to never leave a child unsupervised with a dog.

- **Title:** Keeping babies and children safe around dogs in the home Source: Institute of Health Visiting: https://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/docs/default-source/Luton---iHV-Top-Tips/ihv_pt_keeping_babies_and_children_safe_around_dogs_april_2017_web.pdf?sfvrsn

Format: 2 page printable PDF factsheet.

Description: This resource contains tips for parents around preparing a dog for the arrival of a baby, how to keep dogs safe around a baby, and behaviour to encourage in children as they grow older and interact with dogs. This is particularly useful for health visitors, midwifery and other professionals who may be working with new-born infants or a family expecting a baby where there is already a dog in the household but may be less useful for older children or families where dogs and children are already both present in the home. Aimed at families and suitable to be printed and delivered

- **Title:** The six golden rules to keeping children safe and dogs happy Source: RSPCA <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/company/children/safe>

Format: 1 page printable PDF poster / infographic. Code is also available to embed the infographic on websites.

Description: Brief, visual infographic outlining what to teach children to encourage safe behaviour around dogs, aimed at carers/families. Can be printed and delivered directly to parents or displayed in professional offices or on websites. This is a useful simple and memorable tool for safe behaviours but does not address where children may be nonmobile or disabled and unable to modify their own behaviour.

- **Title:** Staying safe with dogs Source: Dogs Trust [Dog Help and Advice | Dogs Trust](#)

Format: 2 page PDF document that can be printed and folded into a tri-fold leaflet.

Description: Contains information about understanding a dog's behaviour in order to recognise risk. Also contains tips around behaviours to encourage in children, and how to act around unknown dogs. Aimed at dog-owning carers / families, but the tips for approaching unknown dogs may also be useful for professionals and non-dog owning families. Actions for keeping children safe are based around encouraging certain behaviours and does not address where this is not possible for non-mobile and/or disabled children, although the recognition of dog behaviour may be useful for these families.

- **Title:** Keeping your toddler safe around dogs Source: Blue Cross <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/advice/dog/keeping-your-toddler-safe-around-dogs>

Format: 2 page printable PDF leaflet. There is also an option to request Blue Cross to deliver educational talks to children and families around pet safety. 4

Description: This is a readable leaflet with tips for carers/families specifically for toddler aged children. Due to the age of the children more emphasis is placed on

actions that parents can take around their dog, which is likely to be more appropriate for young or disabled children who may not be able to modify their behaviour. While the leaflet is printable and can be delivered to any family, Education or childcare professionals may wish to consider requesting an educational talk from Blue Cross to deliver to groups of children and/or their families.

- **Title:** Dangerous Dogs and Safeguarding Children Source: Bath and North East Somerset LSCB online procedures (SWCPP) [Dangerous Dogs and Safeguarding Children \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://proceduresonline.com)

Format: Online only resource for professionals

Description: Online chapter containing advice for professionals around assessing risks to children and actions that can be taken. It also contains links to further resources and references to relevant legislation, such as the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991), the Animal Welfare Act (2006), and the Anti-social behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (2014).

Dogs and Children: Top tips to keep them safe and happy together

[Dogs and Children | Top tips to keep them safe and happy together \(capt.org.uk\)](https://capt.org.uk)

Your dog and your baby fact sheet

[Your-dog-and-your-new-baby-fact-sheet-2023.pdf \(capt.org.uk\)](https://capt.org.uk)

Child safety around dogs fact sheet

[Child-safety-around-dogs-fact-sheet-2023.pdf \(capt.org.uk\)](https://capt.org.uk)