

HOPE Animal Shelter Dog Bite Policy

Effective 4/28/2023, HOPE Animal Shelter will begin utilizing the Dr. Ian Dunbar bite level system to evaluate the severity of dog bites and determine the course of action needed for each individual dog.

Any and all Level 3 or higher dog bites require evaluation of the offending dog by appropriate behaviorist/trainer/veterinarian.

All dog bites, regardless of their level, are to be documented as soon as is practical and all bites are to be reported to the Executive Director and Shelter Manager immediately.

A happy and healthy dog with no reason to feel threatened or insecure has no reason to bite. While the many factors which lead to a dog biting someone may be complicated, there is usually a reason behind the behavior. These are multi-faceted, but their training, socialization and education are usually the most important factors.

Dr. Ian Dunbar's bite scale takes into consideration both the reasons why a dog may bite a human and what can be done about it. The bite scale levels are:

1. Level 1: aggressing but no skin contact.
2. Level 2: teeth make contact, but do not break skin.
3. Level 3: a single bite with shallow wounds.
4. Level 4: single bite with deep wounds
5. Level 5: multiple bites with deep wounds
6. Level 6: death of the victim and/or flesh consumed.

Dogs should learn bite inhibition. This is when they grasp someone or something with their mouth but know not to bite hard. The following levels range from dogs with bite inhibition to those with none.

Level 1: aggressive but no skin contact. This is generally an aggressive display which includes biting at the air and grunting, but not any physical damage. Frequently this involves aggressive signals such as showing their teeth and growling, although they may not even approach the person. However, if the dog snaps and bites the person's clothing without harming their body, this would fall into the level 1 category.

Level 2: teeth make contact, but do not break skin. With this type of bite, the victim may have teeth marks, but they will not have any perforation in their skin. In these cases, the dog is sending a very serious signal that they are being subjected to some type of stress. This dog is exhibiting bite inhibition.

Level 3: a single bite with shallow wounds. This level of bite results in a bite which causes between 1 and 4 superficial perforations of the skin. The wounds do not exceed deeper than half the length of the canine teeth. This type of bite is variable and can have many causes including:

- The dog is afraid
- Rough play escalates into aggression
- The dog's predatory instinct is triggered
- The dog received trauma
- Poor socialization
- Other causes

Any dog involved in a level 3 bite, must be evaluated by a veterinarian to determine if there is a physical cause and if no physical cause is found, a plan for appropriate training must be complied with appropriate behaviorist/trainers and must be followed by all staff and volunteers.

Level 4: single bite with deep wounds. When a dog bites only once but the wounds are deep, it will be considered a level 4 bite. The bite may cause 1 to 4 perforations which are deeper than half the length of the canine tooth. The cause of this type of bite, is also often fear. It usually occurs in dogs which try to defend themselves against what they perceive as a serious threat. Any dog that has inflicted a level 4 bite on a human must be evaluated by a professional trainer and a plan of action must be completed.

Level 5: multiple bites with deep wounds. Fifth level bites cause deep wounds, similar to the previous level. However, they occur multiple times and can happen in multiple areas. Dogs that inflict fifth-level bites are considered dangerous dogs. While rehabilitation is a possibility, the liability factor must not be ignored. Any dog that has inflicted a level 5 bite on a human, must be evaluated and will likely need to be euthanized.

Level 6: death of the victim and/or flesh consumed. At this level, the only option is euthanasia.

Our goal in utilizing Dr. Ian Dunbar's bite level system, is to keep not only our staff and volunteers safe, but also to keep the public safe and to provide a healthy and safe environment for the animals in our care.