

Defending Against a Dog Attack

Dogs are wonderful companions and beloved members of the family. Our dogs are part of the family, and my girl would be heartbroken if she couldn't snuggle under the blankets with me! However, it's important to remember that even the friendliest dog is still an animal. In situations where they feel nervous, afraid, or threatened, their instincts can lead to defensive behavior.

Below are proactive strategies to prevent negative encounters and outline clear steps to [keep yourself safe](#) if you ever face an unfamiliar or aggressive dog.

Prevention and Preparation

- Learn canine body language. Recognizing early signs of fear or stress can help you de-escalate a situation. Be aware of a stiff posture, a fixed direct stare, raised fur along the back (hackles), growling, or bared teeth.
- Respect a dog's space. Never approach an unfamiliar dog, especially one that is eating, sleeping, or caring for puppies. Always ask the owner for permission before you attempt to pet any dog.
- Teach children how to interact with dogs safely. They should never pull tails, ears, or fur, and should learn not to approach a dog without an adult's supervision.
- When walking in areas where you might encounter loose dogs, consider carrying a simple deterrent. An umbrella you can open suddenly, a jacket, or a backpack can be used to create a barrier.

Reacting to an Aggressive Dog

- Stay calm and still. Panicking can escalate the situation. Stand still and position yourself sideways to the dog to appear smaller and less confrontational. Keep your hands at your sides and avoid sudden movements.
- Avoid direct eye contact, which can be perceived as a challenge. Instead, look slightly away, using your peripheral vision to keep track of the dog's movements.
- Use a firm, low voice to give simple commands like "No" or "Back away." If you have an item like a backpack or a water bottle, slowly place it between you and the dog. Do not throw it, as this could trigger a chase instinct.
- Only once the dog loses interest or begins to disengage should you attempt to move. Back away slowly without turning your back or running. Running can trigger a dog's natural prey drive.



If You are Attacked

- If you have a jacket, bag, or bicycle, offer that to the dog for it to bite instead of your body.
- If you fall, curl into a ball, tuck your head, and use your arms and hands to protect your ears, neck, and face. Remain as still and quiet as possible.
- If you are carrying an item like an umbrella or a stick, you can use it to keep the dog at a distance. Aim for sensitive areas like the nose or throat if necessary to stop the attack.
- If you carry a dog-safe pepper spray, use it as directed to disrupt the attack.

After an Incident

- Move to a safe location away from the dog, like inside a building or a car.
- Seek immediate medical attention. Dog bites can cause serious tissue damage and are prone to infection. Clean the wound with soap and water and see a healthcare professional immediately.
- Contact your local animal control or public health department. Providing a description of the dog and the location helps prevent future incidents and ensures the dog is checked for rabies.