

notebook

Videos promote client dog bite awareness

Last November when then-President Bush's Scottish terrier Barney was caught on video snarling and biting the hand of a reporter outside the White House, it became an instant Internet sensation. But had the correspondent understood the proper way to approach a dog, he probably would not have been bitten and Barney would have been spared the bad press.

"You don't want to come down with your hand on top of the dog coming downwards toward the head, because that can be scary for the dog," said Adam Goldfarb, issues specialist, companion animals for The Humane Society of the United States. "That reporter came down from on top and Barney nipped him."

According to the CDC, dogs bite more than 4.7 million people each year, which makes preventing dog bites through awareness and education an important public service, particularly for veterinarians and technicians. In addition to protecting humans, dog bite prevention helps protect the dogs themselves.

"One of the highest ranked reasons for relinquishing dogs to shelters is bites," said Dr. Sheryl Pipe, senior director of humane education at the ASPCA.

In more serious incidents, dogs



might be hurt by a person in self-defense, or euthanized.

Goldfarb said the No. 1 step for preventing dog bites is for owners to spay or neuter their pets.

"A study showed over 70% of dogs involved in biting incidents were male dogs that had not been neutered," he said.

But most methods of preventing dog bites involve learning how to behave around dogs. Pipe said it is important for children as well as adults: "While half of the bites that are reported each year occur in children, half don't."

In order to help families learn about ways to safely behave around dogs, AAHA features an animated video in the pet care library at *HealthyPet.com* called "Play Nice With Dogs." Using safety tips from AAHA, 7- to 12-year-old students at The Art Place in Michigan created paper cut-out artwork to demonstrate safe ways to interact with dogs.

The animated children and dogs

playfully teach viewers to ask owners for permission to pet a dog, to not hug or kiss dogs near the face, to stay away from sleeping dogs and to leave dogs' bones and toys alone. In the segment that suggests people offer a fist for a dog to approach and smell, a bright yellow dog is so excited after it sniffs the child's hand that it hops up and down and then rolls on its back for a belly rub (and the happy child thanks the owner).

Pipe said "Play Nice With Dogs" is one of many valuable resources veterinarians can use as a tool to educate their clients about dog bite prevention, as the short video is easily accessible through the AAHA website.

"It's a really wonderful opportunity for members of the veterinary profession to reach out to the families that come into their practice, to spread the word and benefit the people in their community," she said.

by Jen Reeder

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