

Volunteering - Keeping Safe with Dogs

Potential harms

- Dogs over boisterous/excited behaviour including mouthing, jumping up/knocking over/relief accidents etc.
- Contact with (dog) internal or external parasites causing illness, irritation, or allergic reactions
- Contact with secretions from dog/puppy e.g. vomit, urine, faeces, blood, etc. with infectious/Zoonotic disease-causing illness i.e. Salmonella, Campylobacter, Ringworm
- Dog or lead location causing a trip or fall or persons standing on dog
- Inappropriate interaction behaviours with dog causing distress and aggression in dog

Best practice and controls

Where your role involves care of a specific dog or group of dogs you will be provided with comprehensive training and guidance on how to do this correctly and safely for both you and the dog.

Basic hygiene

All volunteers may have contact with dogs during their activities so it is important that you follow basic hygiene rules such as:

- Washing hands after handling the dog, preferably with an antibacterial soap/alcohol-based hand sanitiser, and advising others who have contact with the dog to do the same
- Preventing and discouraging dogs from licking hands and faces
- Avoiding eating and drinking during the handling of the dog
- Proper clearing and disposal of faecal matter and body fluids. You must always 'pick up' after a dog goes to the toilet. Faecal matter should be bagged, the bag tied and placed in a suitable waste receptacle. When out in public you should only place it into a dog waste bin. If the waste bag is to be put into your general waste receptacle, Guide Dogs recommend that you 'Double Bag' the waste
- Any instruments that you use to clean away faecal matter must be cleaned after use, preferably with an appropriate disinfectant

Out and about with a dog

- Only undertake activities with your dog that have been agreed by your Guide Dogs manager
- Always ensure you have control of the dog and pay attention
- Ensure you and others around the dog keep calm and do not send mixed messages or encourage unwanted behaviours
- Follow all dog handling and training advice provided by your Guide Dogs manager
- Only use the commands, toys and equipment advised by Guide Dogs
- If the dog is showing signs of distress or is too excited you should remove the dog from the situation and/or seek assistance from your Guide Dogs manager
- Ensure the dog and its lead/toys/bed etc. are not positioned where they could pose a trip hazard
- If you are not happy with the way someone is behaving around/touching your dog do not hesitate to advise them to stop and move the dog away. Be wary of children as some do not know how to behave appropriately around dogs and may accidentally cause the dog some distress

Remember to have:

- Water and bowls
- Poo bags
- Items for clearing away accidental messes
- Something for the dog to lie on and a toy

Dog attacks and fights

Unfortunately, there are instances where a guide dog is attacked by or involved in a fight with another dog. There are some basic guidelines that you should know which will help you identify high risk behaviour, prevent a dog attack and also to try and stop a fight as safely as possible.

Identifiers of high-risk behaviour:

- Backing away on approach
- Lowering their body posture to the ground
- Standing leaning forwards, usually accompanied by a fixed stare
- Snarling
- Standing tall on tips of the toes, leaning slightly forward with ears pointed forward and up
- Staring

- Raised hackles (hair between shoulders or down lower back)
- Growling (particularly if combined with teeth showing)
- Showing teeth
- Stiff slow movements
- Biting at the air
- Mouthing
- Repeated attempts to avoid interaction

How to avoid a dog fight/attack

- Never approach a dog which is not on a lead or under control by a responsible person
- If a dog shows aggression to you or your guide dog, ensure your dog is on its lead, do not run away or turn you back on the dog, as this can provoke an attack. Try to walk away slowly.
- Do not scream or shout, try to stay calm
- Do not stare at the dog

Stopping a dog fight/attack

There is no truly safe way to intervene in a dog fight, and Guide Dogs insist that you never put yourself at risk of injury. Even though it may be hard, if you cannot break up the fight without putting yourself at serious risk, you must not intervene. Never reach into or try to step between a dog fight - you could get bitten by mistake.

Suggestions for breaking up a dog fight

- Always call for help
- Hose down the dogs with water. Spraying dogs with water can shock them into breaking up, however this may cause difficulty afterwards getting hold of wet dogs as they may be slippery or cause slipping because of wet flooring
- Find a broom or something with a long handle that you can wrap with a towel to separate the animals without getting yourself in the middle
- Drop a blanket or towel on one or both dogs to disorientate and instigate a split

Be aware at all times that either of the dogs may redirect to you during or shortly after the incident, if you are attacked, try to protect your face and neck with your arms, keeping your fingers curled up in a fist and stay tight in a ball. Also remember that your dog will be scared, in pain and may bite out of fear.

You must call the police following an incident involving a third-party dog attack on an animal or person.

Children and dogs

Specific advice and instruction regarding children and dogs will be provided as part of your role specific training. Some overarching advice that should always be followed includes:

- Young children and dogs should only interact when under adult supervision. A young child should never be left alone with a dog
- They should be separated if one of them becomes over excited or overly boisterous. Baby gates are recommended to provide a “time out” facility for both situations and in doing so keeping both dog and child safe
- It is important for all children to be taught that dogs are not toys and that there are certain rules they need to follow
- Never let your child ambush or force themselves on the dog. If they want to play, the dog should be invited over. If the dog does not wish to play at that time, ensure that your child does not try to force the dog into a play situation
- Most dogs dislike close face-to-face contact unless they have instigated it themselves, so teach your child to keep their face away from the dog’s face. Allowing a dog to lick the face or hands must be discouraged
- Ensure the dog has its own space and can have peace and quiet when it wants it

Collection of urine and faecal samples

If you are asked to collect a sample from a dog by Guide Dogs or a veterinarian, you will be provided with the correct equipment and instructions on how to do this. Always remember to follow basic hygiene rules when doing this activity.

Exercise of dogs

You must not group walk or free run a dog unless you and the dog have received the specific instruction, training, and authorisation from Guide Dogs.

Each volunteer dog role will have specified ratios of handler to dogs and you must ensure you adhere to this.

General guidance

- Before setting off for a walk always give the dog the opportunity to go to the toilet
- When walking the dog only use the equipment provided by Guide Dogs
- Ensure that the dog is wearing a standard collar with an identification disc at all times
- Ensure you wear suitable clothing and footwear when exercising a dog
- The dog must always be walked on your left side unless advised otherwise
- Never leave the dog unattended when out for a walk (for example do not leave a dog on its own outside a shop)
- Guide dogs must always remain on a lead in the presence of livestock
- Dogs should not be exercised within 1 hour before or after they have been fed as this can cause a life-threatening condition called gastric torsion or bloat
- Dogs infected by kennel cough must not be exercised in public places
- Do not allow the dog to go swimming
- Do not throw sticks, stones, or balls for the dog as these objects can cause serious injury to the dog's mouth and throat and develop an inherent chase instinct
- Always pick up after the dog if it spends whilst out
- If the dog gets too excited or boisterous you should put it on the lead until it has calmed down, or stop the free run and leave the area
- Ensure the location of the dog is known at all times and that it is under control
- Keep the dog in your view at all times, do not have your back towards the dog, avoid distractions such as using a phone or in-depth conversations
- Avoid over stimulating your dog during a free run or walk, such as encouraging it to run with children or jump up

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