



by Michelle Rae Miller
photos supplied by
Lesley Zoromski

Helping the Community to Avoid Dog Bites

A COUPLE OF FACTS:

- Kids-n-K9s non-profit 501c3 was founded in 2016
- National Dog Bite Prevention Week for 2023 is April 9 - 15

PERSONAL BACKGROUND:

- B.S. in Education from the University of Wisconsin - Madison
- Retired Elementary School Teacher certified in K-8 with 15 years of experience
- 20 years as a dog trainer and "dog-owner coach" working since 2003 at Dairydell Canine

WHY KIDS-N-K9S WAS FOUNDED:

Over the years of meeting with families and their dogs, I saw firsthand that children lack understanding of how to discriminate dog body language. Parents also needed guidance with ways to help their children to prevent miscommunication with the dog in addition to learning how to improve interactions. The most negative and far too common result of not understanding dog body language is a dog bite.

As a teacher of young children, I knew that kids learn best with interactive hands-on activities. I wanted to create something fun for children and easy to use for parents. The result was a reusable sticker-sorting activity set, called Stop, Look & Paws. This simple dog safety set allows children and their parents to learn together. The dog stickers illustrate a variety of dog body language as well as daily living situations. Children get to sort the images onto a 2-sided game board labeled "safe to pet" and "not safe to pet". Stop, Look & Paws won a Family Choice award in 2020 for Best Parenting Product and Resource.

KIDS-N-K9S MISSION:

The mission of Kids-n-K9s is to bring dog safety directly into the schools, starting with the youngest grade levels (where most dog bites occur), so this early education and awareness can hopefully prevent future dog bites.

National Dog Bite Prevention Week was April 9th through 15th. It is crucial to be aware of some important dog bite statistics and take time with our young children to improve their understanding of dog body language.

- There are 4.7 million dog bites in the U.S. annually (Centers for Disease Control & Humane Society), with 51% of the bites to children (Humane Society).
- The highest rates of bites are among children ages 5-9 (American Veterinary Medical Association) which is why we focus our in-school efforts primarily on kindergarten
- 77% of dog bites are from dogs that belong to the victim's family or friends (Centers for Disease Control)
- Young children scored badly in discriminating dog body language (Lakestani et al 2005)
- Very young children may misinterpret a snarling dog for one that is smiling (Meints et al 2010)

My efforts in the school for the dog safety program began in 2017 with a 2-part approach. The 1st part starts with an in-class presentation. The 2nd part of this program is to provide the "Stop, Look & Paws" set to each child to take home and share with their family. The decisions that children make with dogs must be supported by the adults in the family.

Our reach and results have been positive to date. Since 2016, 8,000 "Stop, Look & Paws" sets have been distributed to our local children in Petaluma and Sonoma County schools (free of charge). We have also done over 100 classroom and Zoom presentations!

Given Kids-n-K9s is a 501c3 non-profit, we need to secure annual school-year funding for our child/dog safety program. The biggest challenge has been to cover the material cost of the "Stop, Look & Paws" reusable sticker set so that each child has their own to use and learn from in the home with family, multiple times. I'm very happy to donate my time and energy for presentations and running Kids-n-K9s but rely on donations to cover material costs. Initially, local Petaluma and Sonoma County businesses and individuals supported our program. I knocked door-to-door to secure donations and was happy we have so many people and businesses who care about our local children.

It wasn't until 2020 that North Bay Animal Services heard of my efforts and became my sole sponsor. This helped the dog safety program tremendously. Now, Kids-n-K9s can focus the majority of our efforts on school presentations and teaching young children about dog body language. I'm proud to share that even with the pandemic, we did not stop our program and we were able to continue presenting via Zoom to kindergarten and 1st-grade children in their homes. Also, our "Stop, Look & Paws" sets continued to reach students via school drop-offs which allowed for distribution to each child.

If you are interested in donating for material costs for the Kids-n-K9s dog safety school program or if you are interested in having a presentation in your child's classroom, please contact me. If you'd like to help with materials, you can reach us on Facebook and "click" the donate button, or mail a donation to our business office:

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To learn more about dog body language or for your copy of "Stop, Look & Paws," please go to:

www.kids-n-k9s.com

Instagram: kids.n.k9s

Facebook: kids-n-k9s

