

Kids and dogs: Keeping peace in the home

Man's best friend.

Recent biting incident prompts local trainer to remind owners, parents of their responsibilities



RUTH DAVENPORT
ruth.davenport@metronews.ca

A local dog trainer says dog owners and parents can, and should, do more to ensure interactions don't end in hospital visits and headlines.

A four-year-old girl was hospitalized and a dog taken from its owner after the dog bit the child in a Cole Harbour home on Dec. 9.

The incident generated considerable coverage because the dog is a pit bull, but statistics suggest the scenario plays out in thousands of Canadian households every year.

"A lot of it has to do with a lack of supervision and making sure a dog is used to the type of roughhousing a child may do," said Tristan Flynn, who holds qualification from the Certification Council for Pet Dog Trainers.

According to the Canadian

How-to

Flynn's top tips for child-dog interactions:

- Condition your dog as much as possible.
- Let it happen on the dog's terms.
- Supervise, supervise, supervise.

Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program, most non-fatal dog bites involve kids between five and nine years old, and happen in a home environment when the child is "playing with dog."

"Most of it is a lack of understanding of body language and a lack of listening to the dog," said Flynn.

Flynn emphasized the importance of owners conditioning their dog to accept imperfect handling through positive reinforcement.

"When a dog gets its tail pulled, that shouldn't be the first time it experiences that, if it's a child doing it," he said. "It should be something you practise: You pull the dog's tail, you



Local certified dog trainer Tristan Flynn hangs out with Honey and Kira, both members of the pit-bull breed, and Freya, back. Flynn says conflicts between kids and dogs of any breed can be avoided through positive conditioning. JEFF HARPER/METRO

give it a treat. You condition them so that if a child happens to do it, it's not a big deal."

Flynn said dogs should be allowed to approach visitors in their own time and never forced to submit to petting,

kisses or play.

Kids should ask permission before approaching a dog, and should let the dog sniff the back of a hand before trying to pet.

Above all, Flynn said an adult should closely monitor all

interactions.

"Any child should not be with a dog unsupervised," he said. "That's not just to protect the child, that's to protect the dog, because a child can overwhelm a dog who is stressed."

Pound pit bulls indicate lack of training

Managers at HRM's pound say the number and condition of pit bull and pit-bull mixes in their care suggests a critical

dogs reclaimed by owners.

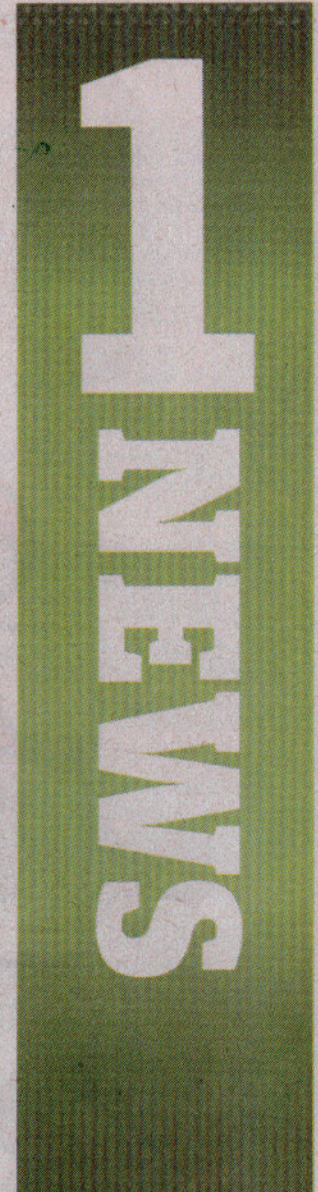
"On the Labs, it's 73 per cent, but only 44 per cent of the owners came back for their

have been able to provide care.

Assistant manager Tracy Sullivan said most unclaimed pit bulls are around 18 months

training in place, and they're just bouncing off the walls," she said. "I think the owners are done, they just can't figure

just that people who are buying this breed for the look aren't willing to put training into them."



CHRISTMAS SALE

Guitars, banjos, mandolins, ukes, etc...at great prices!

HALIFAX FOLKLORE CENTRE

1528 Brunswick St.
422-6350
Located just off Spring Garden Rd.