

Assessing Dogs which may pose a risk to children (Risk Assessment)

Background:

It is understood that whilst children need to be protected from injuries from dogs, and the potential for severe injury must not be underestimated, dogs are also highly beneficial to children in many ways, especially to those who may have experienced dysfunctional human relationships.

Triggers for dog aggression are complex, and behaviourists no longer refer to the 'pack leader' theory, where dogs are believed to need dominating in order to feel safe and secure. Instead, dogs are seen as social animals that respond best to kindness.

This document should be used to assist assessment of potential (rather than actual) risk of any dog that may come into contact with a child.

Legislation:

The 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act states it is illegal to own, sell, breed or exchange certain dogs. Whether the dog is a 'banned' type will depend on what it looks like rather than its breed name, and police will make this assessment. Banned breeds (including any cross breeds) are:

- Pit Bull Terrier
- Japanese Tosa
- Dogo Argentino
- Fila Brasileiro
- XL Bully

Scoring:

A 'fail' should prompt a professional assessment by an animal behaviourist. See appendix A for details.

DOG AND OWNER	
CHILD	
ASSESSMENT SCORE	

Safer Dogs around Children
(Risk Assessment Form)

Owner's name:	
Owner's address:	
Owner's relationship to Child:	
Children in Household:	
Dog's breed:	
Dog's name:	
Dog's sex:	
Dog's age:	
Has the dog been neutered?	
Description:	
Length of time with current owner:	
Child's name: (where applicable)	
Person completing assessment:	
Date:	

1. ABOUT THE DOG

1.1 History and origins of the dog

Prompts:

How old was the dog when you acquired it?

If it was a puppy, are you aware of any behavioural issues with its parents?

Has the dog had previous owners? If so, what do you know about them and the dog's experiences with them?

Scoring:

Full history known, no concerns (score 0)

Full history known, some concerns (score 2)

Full history known, significant concerns (automatic fail)

History not known, no concerns (score 1)

History not known, some concerns (score 3)

History not known, significant concerns (automatic fail)

Additional comments:

1.2 Health

Prompts:

Is the dog registered with a vet? Record the vet details and when last seen.

Has the 'vet card' been seen?

Does the dog receive regular worming, flea treatment and vaccinations?

Is the dog in good general health?

Does the information provided require follow up call to the vet practice?

Has the dog been neutered?

Scoring:

All health needs met (score 0)

Some health needs met (score 2)

Health needs not met (score 5)

Additional comments:

1.3 Behavioural history

Safety Checklist:

Has the dog ever bitten anyone?	Yes	No
Has the dog ever snapped or snarled at anyone?	Yes	No
Has the dog ever shown signs of aggression to anyone?	Yes	No
Has the dog ever fought with another dog other than in play?	Yes	No
Does the dog chase and/or kill small animals?	Yes	No
Is the dog scared by crying babies/shouting children?	Yes	No
Does the dog get overly excited when people run around?	Yes	No
<i>If the answer is 'yes' to any of the above, then provide additional comments below</i>		
Can the owner touch the dog's food bowl when eating?	Yes	No
Can the owner remove toys from the dog if very excited?	Yes	No
Does the dog tolerate being stroked/physically examined?	Yes	No
Can the owner push the dog around in a playful manner?	Yes	No
<i>If the answer is 'no' to any of the above, then provide additional comments below</i>		

Scoring:

No historical behavioural concerns and familiar with children (score 0)

No historical behavioural concerns but dog is unfamiliar with children (score 2)

Previous incidents of aggressive behaviour to people or animals outside the family (score 5)

Previous incidents of aggressive behaviour to people/animals in the family (automatic fail)

Additional Comments:

1.4 Behavioural management

Prompts:

How obedient is the dog?

Do they go to their area and stay there when told to? Do they respond immediately, or only if threatened?

Does the dog get exercise outside the house regularly?

Does the dog get exercised off the lead regularly?

Scoring:

No behavioural concerns (score 0)

Some behavioural concerns, but well managed (score 2)

Some behavioural concerns, not managed well (score 4)

Significant behavioural concerns (automatic fail)

Additional comments:

2. ABOUT THE OWNER

2.1 Having a dog

Prompts:

Why have you got a dog?

Scoring:

Any social or health reason (score 0)

Any reason relating to protection of self or property (score 2)

Any reason relating to fighting or threatening purposes (automatic fail)

Additional comments:

2.2 Owner interaction with the dog

Prompts:

Can the owner identify and meet the dog's needs?

Does the owner understand the issues relating to the concerns about dogs and children?

Are they able to manage the transition of having children placed in relation to the dog?

Does the owner prioritise the dog over the children in the household?

Scoring:

Good understanding of dog's needs and the issues associated with having a dog (score 0)

As above but additional actions needed (score 1)

Reasonable understanding of dog's needs and the issues associated with having a dog (score 2)

As above but additional actions needed (score 3)

Poor understanding of dog's needs and the issues associated with having a dog (score 4)

As above, but additional actions needed (score 5)

Additional comments:

2.3 Addressing concerns

Prompts:

Is the owner motivated and capable of addressing any concerns about the dog?

What action would the owners take if any concern arose from their dog's behaviour?

Scoring:

Capable and willing to address concerns (score 1)

Capable but unwilling to address concerns (score 3)

Not capable and not willing to address concerns (automatic fail)

Additional comments:

3. ABOUT THE HOUSEHOLD

3.1 Domain of the dog

Prompts:

Is the space that the dog(s) live in suitable for their size or number of dogs in the space?

Are the sensible boundaries set for where the dog is permitted to go, including when there are visitors at the door?

Is there an area that the dog can go to feel safe if they feel threatened?

Can the dog be kept away from people if needed?

Are there any signs of dog damage in the household?

Scoring:

Suitable safe spaces and boundaries in place (score 0)

Suitable safe spaces but limited boundaries in place (score 2)

Limited safe spaces but boundaries in place (score 3)

Limited safe spaces and limited boundaries (score 5)

Additional comments:

3.2 Hygiene

Prompts:

Are animal and human foods kept separately?

Do the dog bowls appear to be regularly washed?

Does the dog beg for food during the owner's meal times or during food preparation?

Is there a designated place for dog to go toilet? Is this area regularly cleaned? Is it a place that is also used by children or adults?

Does the dog have a suitable area to sleep at night? Is this away from children?

Scoring:

Appropriate hygiene in place (score 0)

Some hygiene measures in place (score 2)

Limited hygiene measures in place (score 4)

Additional comments:

3.3 Other issues

Prompts:

Is there an established household routine?

Are there concerns about domestic abuse, aggression or domestic tension in the household?

Is the owner linked to any historical or current criminal activity, anti-social behaviour, drugs or violence?

Scoring:

None to Low level concerns (score 1)

Low to Moderate concerns (score 2)

Moderate to Elevated concerns (score 3)

Elevated to High concerns (score 4)

Extreme concerns (automatic fail)

Additional comments:

4. ABOUT THE CHILD

4.1 The Child

Prompts:

How old is the child? Has the child got previous experience of dogs?

Do they have an understanding of how to behave appropriately around dogs?

What are the supervision arrangements for the dog around the child?

Has the child got any behaviours that may impact on the dog?

Scoring: NB any child under the age of 5 years (or developmental equivalent) cannot be classified as low vulnerability.

Low level vulnerability (score 0)

Moderate level vulnerability (score 1)

Elevated level of vulnerability (score 2)

High level of vulnerability (score 3)

Extreme vulnerability (automatic fail)

Additional comments:

5. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Prompts:

Comment on the how the vulnerability of the child will interact with any risks identified within the household, owner or dog.

Comment on if there are protective measures that are in place to mitigate these risks.

Comment on whether there is a recommendation for a professional assessment to be undertaken.

Assessment and Analysis of Risk:

Scoring:

Low level overall risks (score 1) - No additional action required

Moderate level overall risks (score 2) - Give advice about changes needed

Elevated level of overall risks (score 3) - Further assessment *recommended*

High level of overall risks (score 4) - Consultation with Children Services/Police

Extreme overall risks (automatic fail) - Referral to Children's Services/Police

AREA	SCORE
About the dog (9 or below to pass)	
About the owner (5 or below to pass)	
About the household (6 or below to pass)	
About the child (1 or below to pass)	
Overall Assessment (2 or below to pass)	
TOTAL (23 or below to pass)	

APPENDIX A: Identifying a suitable behaviourist for further assessment

The government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has issued guidelines (October 2014) around dealing with irresponsible dog ownership and has identified the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) as the organisation to use to locate a behaviourist.

ABTC is the regulatory body that represents animal trainers and animal behaviour therapists. It sets and maintains the standards of knowledge and practical skills needed to be an animal trainer or animal behaviour therapist, and it will maintain the national register of appropriately qualified animal trainers and animal behaviourists. It promotes the welfare of animals in their interactions with human, lobbying for humane methods in training and behaviour modification, and for the education of the animal owning public.

More about the Animal Behaviour Training Council:

www.abtcouncil.org.uk

Find a dog trainer:

www.abtcouncil.org.uk/register-of-instructors.html

Find a dog behaviourist:

www.abtcouncil.org.uk/clinical-animal-behaviourists.html