ARE YOU AN ANIMAL SAFETY SLEUTH?
LESSON 1: Grades 4-6
SAFE BEHAVIORS & CANINE BODY LANGUAGE

Show Me Standards:  Academic Goals: 1.5, 1.6, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, & 4.7
Communication Arts: 1, 4, & 6; Fine Arts: 1 & 4; Health & Phys Ed: 5 & 7

Introduction to Unit: Introduce this unit to your students by explaining that animals are all around us and depend on us to keep them safe. Whether or not they are our pets or are wild animals that live in our neighborhoods, we owe it to them to do our best to make the world a safer place for both them and us. The student’s role will be to serve as detectives or animal safety sleuths who will scope out situations that aren’t safe for people or animals. Tell them to throw on their cloaks, detective hats and spy-glasses and get rolling!
- As a pre-unit activity designed to evoke curiosity and enthusiasm for the upcoming lessons you can have your students create spy-glasses using toilet paper rolls, yarn, markers and glue. Have each student decorate two toilet paper rolls with markers and then glue them together side by side. Use a hole punch to punch a hole on the outer sides of each role and string yarn through the holes. Viola! They now have spy-glasses for their very important detective work!
- You can also get a tape of the theme music from the movie Mission Impossible starring Tom Cruise and play it at the beginning of each lesson as a transition to these lessons, to spark interest and to carry the theme throughout the week. (Ask your local music store for help finding the music.)

Objectives: Students will be able to identify situations in which animals should be left alone. Students will be able to interpret canine body language and react appropriately to warning signs.

Materials:
- “Is It Safe to Approach This Animal?” flashcards (6 plus answer page)
- “Reading Canine Body Postures” handout
- Children and Dogs: Important Information for Parents” handout (send home for parents)
- “Why Dogs Bite: A Guideline for Children” handout (send home with students)
- Cardstock or paper
- Colored pencils or markers

Method: Introduce this lesson by dividing the class into equally sized detective groups and distributing one of the “Is it safe to approach this animal?” flashcards to each group. Write the following questions on the chalkboard and explain that they will have three minutes to put their detective work to use and analyze their “case”:
1. What is happening in this picture?
2. What is this animal feeling?
3. How might this animal react if you approached him/her?
4. Is this animal safe to approach?
5. Identify one situation that you have been in when you felt the same emotions that this animal was feeling.

When the three minutes are up ask each group to share their flashcards or “cases” and the results of their detective work with the rest of the class.

Discuss the fact that these are all situations in which you should never approach an animal, whether it is your family pet, a neighbor’s pet or especially a wild animal. Place emphasis on the fact that these animals may likely bite, not necessarily because they are mean or aggressive but because they are either fearful, protective or in pain. Stress the fact that animals experience the same emotions that we do and will react if feeling threatened. They often don’t understand our motives and although you may approach the animal to help him/her, they may mistake your actions as harmful ones.
Tell the students that animals often show signs that they are uneasy, scared, or angry by using body language just like we do. Say you are going to have them demonstrate this. Ask for four volunteers to come up to the front of the class one at a time to act out an emotion that you whisper in their ear (sad, angry, scared and in pain). Once the students have identified the emotions correctly, pass out the handout titled “Reading Canine Body postures” and read and discuss the diagrams and vocabulary (submission, aggressive, neutral, passive, active and defensive). Explain that the only dog that is approachable in these diagrams is the dog in the neutral relaxed position but should only be approached if the owner is present and permission has been granted.

*Reminder:* This is a good time to review what to do if approached by a strange dog and how to meet a dog who is with it’s owner. Please refer to the lessons 4 & 5 for grades K-3 titled *Stranger Danger* and *How to Meet a Dog.*

If an animal is injured or needs help, get an adult or call your local animal welfare organization (humane society, animal control, wildlife organization). These numbers can be found in the yellow pages, which they will research for a later lesson. (See the handout titled “important numbers” in lesson 4.)

**Call to Action:** Explain that the detectives are now going to put their knowledge to work by making flip-up cards for younger students in the school. Display the “Is it safe to approach this animal” flashcards in the room so they can be seen by all the students and serve as a reference while creating their flip-up cards. Each group will create a flip-up card for each flashcard (“case”).

Have the students get into their original detective groups and give them several sheets of white paper. Instruct them to fold each paper in half with the crease/fold at the top of the paper so that it will flip open like a calendar. With the paper folded over like this they are to re-create one of the pictures by drawing it on top of the folded card. They are then to flip open the card and write a few short sentences about the case and why you should leave this animal alone. Have them write in pencil so they/you can edit their writing.

For example: Draw a picture of the Momma cat with her babies on the top of the folded flip-up card and then open the card and write something like:

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This Momma cat is with her babies.
Leave her alone.
She may think you are going to hurt her babies
and might try to bite you.
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Have each group make a complete set of these flip-up cards and arrange a visit to a classroom with younger groups of students so your detectives can share their work and teach others in your school to be safe around animals too!

**Attention Teachers:** See the following activity sheet “Pet Safety Jumble”

**Related Reading:** Please send these handouts home with your students:
- “Children and Dogs: Important Information for Parents” handout
- “Why Dogs Bite: A Guideline for Children” handout

**Web sites:** For recommended animal-related web sites visit [www.apamo.org](http://www.apamo.org) and choose “Animal Issues” from the left-side menu, then choose “Links” from the top of the page. Or [click here](http://www.apamo.org) to launch your browser and link directly to the list.
SAFETY AROUND ANIMALS

1. Don't bother animals when they are eating or sleeping.

2. Leave wildlife alone. Wild animals can bite and scratch. A wild animal that acts friendly may be sick - and could make you sick too.

3. While outdoors, watch where you put your hands and feet.

4. Move slowly and talk quietly around animals.

5. Leave mother animals alone when they are with their babies.

6. Always ask permission before handling someone else's pet.

7. Don't stick fingers in cages.

8. Never tease an animal or use an animal to scare another person.
Reading Canine Body Postures

While dogs cannot speak, they do display their state of mind via their body language. By taking careful note of ear position, pupil dilation, facial tension (particularly around the muzzle and forehead), tail carriage and body weight distribution, an observer can detect whether a dog is relaxed or fearful, or acting in a submissive or dominant manner toward the observer.

**NEUTRAL RELAXED**
- Head erect
- Ears up
- Mouth relaxed, slightly open
- Weight evenly distributed over all four feet
- Tail relaxed, wagging

**AROUSAL**
- Ears up, forward
- Eyes large, hard staring
- Muzzle tense, lips lifted to display teeth
- Stiff legged, weight over front legs
- Tail up, bristled, stiff wag

**AGGRESSIVE ATTACK**
- Ears erect, tilted forward
- Eyes staring
- Lips curled
- Teeth bared, snarling
- Charging, weight forward
- Tail stiff, raised

The dog has been stimulated by something in his environment. When the dog is excited by something pleasurable, the hackles will be down and the tail will be carried a little lower and will loosely wag. The muzzle will be relaxed and the tongue may be seen. This posture may be displayed to subordinates in order to express higher ranking pack position.

operationpetpartners  A community effort helping St. Louis pets.

Credit: ASPCA
ACTIVE SUBMISSION
This pacifying posture is used when a dog acknowledges another dog or human's higher social ranking, or to inhibit another's aggression.

PASSIVE SUBMISSION
Bellying up indicates surrender, a pacifying gesture offered to a more dominant or aggressive individual.

DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION
When fearful, a dog will give warning signals to indicate he does not wish to be approached. If, unheeded, he will bite to protect himself.
Living with a pet can be beneficial to children. Pets can enhance a child’s self-esteem, teach them responsibility and help them to learn empathy. However, children and dogs are not always going to automatically start off with a wonderful relationship. Parents must be willing to teach the dog and the child acceptable limits of behavior in order to make their interactions pleasant and safe.

Selecting A Dog
What age is best? Many people have a “warm fuzzy” image of a puppy and a child growing up together. If you have a young child and are thinking of adopting a puppy (less than one year old) there are a few things you need to consider.

- Time and energy: Puppies require a lot of time, patience, training and supervision. They also require socialization in order to become well-adjusted adult dogs. This means they need to be taken places and exposed to new things and new people. If you have a young child who already requires a lot of care and time, will you have enough time to care for a puppy, as well?

- Safety: Puppies, because they’re babies, are somewhat fragile creatures. A puppy may become frightened, or even injured, by a well-meaning, curious child who wants to constantly pick him up, hug him or explore his body by pulling on his tail or ears.

- Rough play: Puppies have sharp teeth and claws with which they may inadvertently injure a small child. Puppies also tend to jump up on small children and knock them down. All interactions between your child and puppy will need to be closely supervised in order to minimize the chances of either being injured.

- Advantages of getting an adult dog: Adult dogs require less time and attention once they’ve adjusted to your family and household routine, although you’ll still need to spend time helping your new dog with the transition to his new home. You can better gauge how hardy and tolerant an adult dog will be of childish enthusiasm and you can work with your local animal shelter to adopt a dog with a history of getting along well with children. As a general rule, if your child is under six years old, it’s best to adopt a dog that’s over two years old. Although puppies can be a lot of fun, and it’s exciting and rewarding to help them grow into wonderful companions, they do require significantly more time to train and supervise than an adult dog.

What breed is best? Although some general statements can be made about specific dog breeds, the characteristics of an individual dog are just as important as a dog’s breed.

- Size: Small breeds of dogs, such as toy or miniature poodles, chihuahuas or cocker spaniels, may not be good choices for a young child. These small breed dogs are more easily injured than larger dogs and may be more easily frightened by a lot of activity, loud noises and by being picked up and fondled frequently. Frightened dogs tend to snap or bite in order to protect themselves. Larger dogs may be better able to tolerate the activity, noise and rough play that is an inevitable part of living with children.

- Breed type: Some of the sporting breeds, such as labradors and golden retrievers, make good pets for families with children. Breeds that have been selected for protective behavior, such as chows and rottweilers, may not be as good for families with children. It’s sometimes difficult for this type of dog to comfortably tolerate the many comings and goings of children and their friends, who may be perceived as territorial intruders. Herding breeds are inclined to “herd” children, chasing and nipping at their heels.

Who Will Care For The Dog?
It’s unrealistic to expect a child, regardless of age, to have sole responsibility for caring for a dog. Not only do dogs need basic things like food, water and shelter, they also need to be played with, exercised and trained on a consistent basis. Teaching a dog the rules of the house and helping him become a good companion is too overwhelming a task for a young child. While responsible teenagers may be up to the task, they may not be willing to spend an adequate amount of time with the dog, as their desire to be with their friends usually takes over at this age. If you’re adopting a dog “for the kids,” you must be prepared and willing to be the dog’s primary caretaker.
Starting Off Right
Following are some guidelines to help you start off on the right foot. Remember, small children should never be left alone with a dog or puppy without adult supervision.

Holding:

- It’s safest for both your child and puppy if your child is sitting down whenever he wants to hold the puppy. Puppies are squirmy and wiggly and may easily fall out of a young child’s arms and be injured. If held insecurely, a puppy may become frightened and snap or scratch in response. After your child is sitting, you can place the puppy in his arms.
- Have your child offer the puppy a chew toy while he pets the puppy. When puppies are teething, they tend to chew on everything, including hands and arms, so having a chew toy handy will divert the puppy’s teeth away from your child. An added benefit is that the puppy will come to associate pleasant consequences (getting a treat) with being held by your child.
- For larger dogs, have your child sit in your lap and let the dog approach both of you. This way you can control your child and not allow him to get “carried away” with pats that are too rough. You are also there to teach your new dog to treat your child gently.*

Petting and giving affection: Children often want to hug dogs around the neck. Your dog may view this as a threatening gesture, rather than an affectionate one, and may react with a growl, snap or bite. You should teach your child to pet your dog from underneath the dog’s chin, rather than hugging him or reaching over his head. You should also teach your child to avoid staring at, or looking directly into, your dog’s eyes.

Giving Treats: Children tend to become somewhat fearful and anxious when a dog tries to take a treat from their hand. This causes them to jerk their hand away at the last second. The dog may then jump up or lunge to get the treat which may result in the child being knocked down. Have your child place the treat in an open palm, rather than holding it in his fingers. You may want to place a hand underneath your child’s hand to help guide him.

Supervising Play: Children move with quick, jerky movements, have high-pitched voices and often run, rather than walk. All of these behaviors somewhat resemble the behavior of prey animals. Almost all of a dog’s play behaviors are based on predatory behavior. Consequently, your dog may respond to your child’s behavior by chasing him, nipping at his heels, jumping up at him or even trying to knock him down.

At first, your child may need to play quietly around your new dog until he becomes more comfortable and calm and your child has gained more control over the dog. Your dog must also learn that certain behaviors on his part are unacceptable, but he must also be taught what behaviors are the right ones. Our handout: “Dealing with Normal Puppy Behavior: Nipping and Rough Play” outlines procedures for discouraging rough play and encouraging appropriate play. However, most children under the age of ten are not capable of carrying out these procedures, so it’s helpful to teach your dog a “leave it” command that you can use when play gets too rough. Taking an obedience class together is a good way to teach your dog to respond to commands.

An approach that is not helpful is to punish your dog for his behavior. If he learns that being around children always results in “bad things” happening to him, he may become defensive in their presence.

Possessions: Your dog won’t know the difference between his toys and your child’s toys until you teach him.

- Your child must take responsibility for keeping his playthings out of your dog’s reach.
- If, and only if, you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn’t, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, then give him an acceptable chew toy and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- Don’t give your dog objects to play with such as old socks, old shoes or old children’s toys that closely resemble items that are off-limits. They can’t tell the difference!
Dogs can be possessive about their food, toys and space. Although it’s normal for a dog to growl or snap to protect these items, it’s not acceptable. At the same time, children need to learn to respect their dog as a living creature who is not to be teased or purposefully hurt and who needs time to himself.

If your dog is growling or snapping at your child for any reason, the situation needs IMMEDIATE attention. Punishing your dog is likely to make matters worse.

This information is intended to be used as a guide when training your pet. We recommend checking with your veterinarian for additional suggestions concerning this situation.
Excitement
The noises and movements you make when you play are very exciting to dogs. When dogs play with other dogs, they often play roughly with their sharp teeth and claws. Sometimes dogs forget that they can’t play the same way with you, and because they don’t have hands, they use their mouths to grab things. A dog can hurt you by accident, just by being too excited.

What you should do: Play gently and calmly and if a dog gets too excited, freeze and walk away. Take some time out to give you both a chance to calm down.

Pain or Sickness
When a dog is in pain, he doesn’t understand where the pain comes from. If you touch him, he may think you are causing the pain and will bite you to stop the pain.

What you should do: If a dog is acting like he is sick or hurt, leave him alone -- even if he belongs to your family. Tell an adult, and together you can get medical help for the dog.

Anger
A dog will protect anything that’s important to him: his toys; his bed; his food and water bowls; his people; his yard; his house; or his car. If you come near something that a dog feels is off-limits to you, he may bite to make you leave his “property” alone!

What you should (or should not) do: Don’t go into a yard where there’s a dog you don’t know. Don’t reach through a car window or a fence to pet a dog. Don’t pet a dog that’s tied up. Don’t touch a dog’s “property.”

Fear or Surprise
Quick movements and sudden or loud noises are scary for dogs, and they may bite to protect themselves. If a dog thinks you’re a stranger who might hurt him, he may not know how to get away, so he’ll protect himself by biting.

What you should do: When you’re around a dog you don’t know, be quiet and move slowly. Always ask the dog’s owner for permission before you pet him. If the owner isn’t there for you to ask, LEAVE THE DOG ALONE.

Warning Signs
Watch and listen for the warnings a dog will give you to let you know when he is upset. If his ears are laid back against his head, or his legs are very stiff, he is probably warning you that he feels threatened and will protect himself if he must. If the hair on his back is standing up, that’s another warning. If a dog is growling or barking with his teeth showing, it means he is ready to bite. A dog’s warning signs mean that you’re doing something he doesn’t like, so stop doing it!

What you should do:
- Freeze.
- Count to five, slowly and silently.
- Move away very slowly, sideways or backwards.
- If the dog jumps on you, act like a rock by curling up into a ball and covering your face and head with your arms.
What you should NOT do:

- Don’t stare at the dog -- that means “I dare you to bite me!”
- Don’t run, jump or wave your arms around.
- Don’t scream.
- Don’t throw anything at the dog or hit him.

If A Dog Bites You

If you’re bitten by a dog, or any animal, you should:

- Have an adult take you to a doctor.
- Wash the wound with soap and warm water.
- Write down the type, size and color of the animal. Was it wearing a collar? Did it have any identification tags? Where were you when you were bitten? Where did the animal go?
- Report all of this information to the animal control agency in your city or county.

This information is intended to be used as a guide when training your pet.

We recommend checking with your veterinarian for additional suggestions concerning this situation.
Pet Safety Jumble

No one wants to get scratched or bitten. The sentences below tell about ways to stay safe around pets. Unscramble the **bold** words in the sentences below. Write the correct word in each blank. Use the word box if you need help.

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1. Always leave **ragnets** ________ dogs alone.

2. Before you pet a dog or a cat, always ask the **rown** ________ if it is OK.

3. If an animal might be hurt, leave the animal alone. Get an **ultlad** ________ to help.

4. If a dog or cat might be **rangi** ________, do not pet him or her.

5. A dog may **cortpet** ________ a yard, a toy, some food, or a person. If a dog is protecting something or someone, **veela** ________ the dog alone.

6. If a dog growls at you or **sehacs** ________ you, stay still. Don’t run. A dog is more likely to **fifns** ________ you and go away if you stay still.

7. If you are ever bitten or scratched by an **amilna** ________, tell an adult right away. Explain what the animal looked like and where you were when you were **nitbet** ________.

Imagine you are a dog protecting your fenced yard. On the back, write a paragraph that explains why protecting your home is important to you.