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**The Dog Owner Education and Community Safety Council**

**Car Crashes and Dog Bites**

Imagine getting into a car crash.  Your car has just a few scrapes but the other driver's car is totaled.  The other driver and his 6 year old son are taken to the hospital to stitch up a laceration from broken glass and the child's broken arm.  The father seems alright enough to yell obscenities at you for causing all of this.   You are terribly shaken and go over the incident in your mind in painstaking detail.  The police officer hands you a ticket for failure to use care when turning.   The accident was your fault.  You can't believe it.  You are usually so careful and you could have sworn there was no one there.  That guy came out of nowhere. You hope they will be OK.  Soon you get the bad news from your insurer that your policy premium will be going up.  You vow to yourself that you will never let this happen again.  The other guy has been extremely inconvenienced.  He has had to spend hours at the hospital while they perform tests to ensure that his son is OK and his sore neck and back are fine but has to wait to be stitched up.  His son's soccer and swimming for the next few months are now over while his arm heals.  The swelling and pain make it necessary for him to miss a few days of work as well.  The car is another nightmare.  There is the hassle of having to wait while it is determined if it can be driven again and then the time needed for repair.  The hassle of getting a rental in the meantime has cost him some hours as well. What a nightmare.  The accident has caused months of hassle dealing with the car and going to the doctor for follow up.  Physical therapy for his son was also prescribed-another addition to his already overbooked life.

Now imagine that a child comes over to play with your daughter and when you leave the room to go to the bathroom, you hear a shriek.  You return to find the child crying and grasping her cheek.  Your child tells you that your beloved dog has bitten her friend in the face.  You attend to the wound and call her parents.  They retrieve their child and immediately take her to the hospital.  You can't believe that your dog would ever bite a child, let alone in the face.  Your dog loves your kids.  They do all sorts of things to him and he never minds.  When calling to ensure your child's friend is OK the parents ask you what you are going to do with your dog.  They tell you that dogs should never bite and never ever bite a child in the face.  You stumble for a response.  This makes them angry.  You are shaken but call your insurance agent to report the injury.  The animal officer arrives to take a report, verify your dog’s shot record and to home quarantine your dog for 10 days. Over the next few days you learn that their child will be OK but that she has 150 stitches and is on antibiotics. You receive a phone call a few days later from the girl’s parents demanding that you put your dog down.  Your dog could have bitten their child in the eye and they can't go forward with the thought that another child could be maimed by your dog.  You don't know what to say.  Then they state that if you do not willingly put your dog down, they will demand that the town order you to do so. Picking up your own daughter from school a few weeks later you see the girl and notice that her face has healed.  You can barely see that anything happened.  Her mother quickly pulls her daughter away from you as if you are contagious.  A few weeks go by and you receive a summons to appear before your town council for a vicious dog hearing.  During that meeting they decide the fate of your dog. Then your insurance agent calls to give you the bad news.  The claim has been put through and processed but they know the company will be canceling your homeowner insurance policy.  You are told that they may not be able to find another company to cover you now that you have had a dog bite injury claim.  At the dog hearing, the parents of the child give an emotional plea for the council to have your dog euthanized to save other children from being hurt.  The council is split on whether to have your dog euthanized so they decide that your dog has to wear a muzzle, not be around children besides your own and must be fenced in and leashed when off property.  Any infraction will mean the immediate euthanization of your dog.  You don't know what to do as your wonderfully loving and loyal dog has been saved but you can't find an insurance company to cover your home owner's insurance.  Your only option is to either put your dog to sleep or buy a special policy that covers just him for over $1000 a year.  Your new homeowner’s insurance quote is now double your current policy rate.

Car Crash VS. Dog Bite Injury   Why such a difference?

The difference is in human perception.  We perceive that the dog and owner are at fault thus our difference in perception allows leeway in crashes even when the car crash was more dangerous and caused more injuries and hassles than the dog bite injury.  Yet you didn't lose your license to drive, you didn't lose your car insurance, the aggrieved party didn’t bring you before a board to further restrict your right to drive.   Instead your insurance went up and your incentive to have it lowered is to drive without incident.  With the dog bite injury the fault has been pre-determined and the emphasis is not on prevention. The reason for the injury was never looked at.  Dogs bite for purposeful reasons and perhaps what caused the injury was the other child hugged your dog.  While in driving blame is assigned to each party by degree, with dogs the dog and owner are assigned all of the blame.  This creates a society of potential victims as people do not have learned how to avoid incidents.  Lack of avoidance has led to the repetition of preventable bite injuries.  By eliminating your insurance and forcing you to decide to keep your dog or euthanize it, you have no incentive to improve your handling skills and prevent future incidents.  The majority of dog owners forced to euthanize their dogs get another and the same lack of attention to prevention is perpetuated.

Meaningful dog bite prevention can occur if information is updated and incentives are provided that allow for change. The Dog Owner Education and Community Safety Council offers defensive driving type programs for dog owners to ensure they have all the tools necessary to prevent injuries. We work with communities to tie licensing incentives to the program as well as sentencing alternatives that promote community harmony. We also work with the aggrieved to empower them on how bites can be easily prevented.

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