# **Safer Dogs around 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 way, 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 is to be used to assist assessment of potential (rather than actual) risk of any dog that may come into contact with a child.

The following document has also been produced to assist practitioners in carrying out a risk assessment of any dog. ***Prompting Professional Curiosity - Signs of Poor Welfare in Dogs***

## **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

## **Looked After Children or Prospective Foster Carers/Adopters**

Northamptonshire Childrens Trust (NCT) do not support placement of fostering or adoption in households where there are banned breeds.

## **Child in Need or Child Protection**

Northamptonshire Childrens Trust (NCT) strongly recommends that this assessment is undertaken to consider any dog that may come into regular contact with children.

## **Scoring**

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| **DOG AND OWNER** |  |
| **CHILD** |  |
| **PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT** |  |

The scoring element of this assessment has been removed in favour of professionals using their professional judgement to assess if a further assessment by an animal behaviourist is necessary. See appendix A for details.

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| **Owner’s name:** |  |
| **Owner’s address:** |  |
| **Owner’s relationship to Child:** |  |
| **Children in Household:** |  |
| **Dog’s name:** |  |
| **Description:** |  |
| **Length of time with current owner:** |  |
| **Child’s name:** (where applicable) |  |
| **Person completing assessment:** |  |
| **Date:** |  |

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| 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?* |
| **Comments** |
| * 1. **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?* |
| **Comments** |
| * 1. **Behavioural history**   *Prompts:*  *Is the dog familiar with children (consider if they are used to children that this matches the proposed age range for placement)?*  *Have there been any previous incidents of negative or aggressive behaviour near children, adults or animals?* |
| **Comments** |
| * 1. **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?*  *Are there problems if their food is removed or food bowl is touched whilst they are eating?*  *Are there problems if their toy is removed or touched whilst it is near the dog?*  *Does the dog get exercise outside the house regularly?*  *Does the dog get exercised off the lead regularly?* |
| **Comments** |

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| 1. **ABOUT THE OWNER** |
| **2.1 Having a dog**  *Prompts:*  *Why have you got a dog?* |
| **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?* |
| **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?* |
| **Comments** |

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| 1. **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?* |
| **Comments** |
| * 1. **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?* |
| **Comments** |
| * 1. **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?* |
| **Comments** |

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| 1. **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?* |
| **Comments** |

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| 1. **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.* |
| **Professional Judgement** |
| **Agreed Outcome** |

**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 newly formed regulatory body that represents animal trainers and animal behaviour therapists to both the public and to legislative bodies. 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 DEFRA:**

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs)

**More about the Animal Behaviour Training Council:**

[www.abtcouncil.org.uk](http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk)

**Find a dog trainer:**

[www.abtcouncil.org.uk/register-of-instructors.html](http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk/register-of-instructors.html)

**Find a dog behaviourist:**

[www.abtcouncil.org.uk/clinical-animal-behaviourists.html](http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk/clinical-animal-behaviourists.html)