



# Why All Dogs Can Bite and How to Reduce the Risk with R.E.A.D.

## Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

## Transcript

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SG Hey everybody, welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett and today, super special podcast. As a community, let's get together and let's reduce the number of dog bites. Let's reduce in particular the number of children that get bit by dogs every year. And it's massive. If you're anything like me, when I was a kid, it was just an expectation that dogs get along with kids, right?

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Dogs are good people. If you go back to episode three in here on Shaped by Dog, I talked about how Hollywood has made it really difficult for dogs. And this is one area they sure have made it difficult. Because even when I got my first dog in my late twenties, there was an expectation that, yeah, you're just going to get along with kids because I have a lot of nieces and nephews. I love children so yeah, get along with kids. That's the way you do. But I've just was lucky that that first dog of mine did get along with children because, well, let's get into this. First of all, in the United States alone, a hundred people an hour get bit by dogs every day of every hour, a hundred people an hour.

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So, over the course of a day, 900 people a day in the United States require attention at the emergency center of the hospital. More than half of those people are children. Of those dog bites that happen, 77% are by the family dog or a friend's dog. So, it's like friendly fire. It's dogs that we know, and we think we can trust.

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And if you believe as I do, that our dogs are doing the best they can with the information or the education we've given them, in the environment that we have asked them to perform. Where have we gone wrong? It's both. We've put these dogs in an environment where, as my mentor Bob Bailey says, we expect way too much of our dogs and way too little of ourselves.

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So, what can we do about it? And that's where I want to talk to you today. And I might go a little over time, but that's okay because this is so important. You know, there was this paper done by the University of Colorado. They put this out in June of 2020. With as high as those dog bite incidents are with COVID and people being home with the dog, with parks and dog parks being closed, with us not being allowed to exercise our dogs as much, with children being in the home and all of this together 24/7, the incidents of dog bites at this children's hospital has gone up three fold in 2020.

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So, it's super important that we get a handle on this and figure out A, why it's happening and B, how we can stop it. And I have got a lot of actionable solutions for you here today. There's really signs that get missed. And so, I want to share with you, I've made it really simple. We've got to be able to read our dogs. My late husband used to say, Susan, I could read you like a book. And what he meant was I know exactly what you're going to say. I know exactly what you're going to do. Because our relationship was so good, he could predict correctly what was going to happen. He could read me like a book.



## Why All Dogs Can Bite and How to Reduce the Risk with R.E.A.D.

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We need to be able to read our dogs before we put them in a situation where they're going to be around children. All right. And so, I've got an acronym for you. It's READ (R-E-A-D), and the first, the R is *relax*. And it is, what is the relaxation of our dogs physically? What can we read when they're around kids? Now we need to take into consideration, is this dog in pain? So, I have a, almost 17-year-old dog. She's very arthritic. If a child were happened to fall on her, she would probably turn and snap in pain.

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And you can't say, "Oh my gosh, I never expected she would do that". You know, my dog Swagger, who always hangs out here during the podcast. A couple of years ago, he got his paw caught in an ex-pen and he was screaming and yelping. And I rushed up and I, I, you know, my friend grabbed him, and I went to releases his paw from the, from the top of the ex-pen and he nailed me. He bit me. I wasn't shocked. It wasn't he was bad. He was in pain. He was in pain. And so, dogs in pain will bite. And so, there's the obvious pain. If you have an arthritic dog, you know, don't have them around your kids.

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Number two, there, there might be pain you don't know about it. Like maybe dogs got a really bad ear infection. Holy snappers, that will create a lot of pain for a dog. And so, if a child happens to grab their ear or go to scratch their ear, snap and boom, they might get bit. Again, what is the relaxation of the dog? Is there physical pain that we maybe don't know about? So, if a dog is arthritic or they maybe have an upset stomach or a sore toe, it's about the comfort level of the dog.

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And so, the relaxation will also take into consideration the environment that the dogs in. What's the energy level, the hubbub about that home right there? And that brings me to another paper. This was done by Biagio D'Aniello. Okay so, I actually went to the University of Naples to meet with Biagio after I read this paper, because I was so fascinated by the work he did, he actually took little samples of people's sweat when they were extremely happy or under stress. And what he did, he proved that dogs respond to our stress. If the dog is in a house where there's a lot of fighting, and there's a lot of kids having tantrums, or there's a lot of stress, the dogs mimic that stress. They feel that anxiety too.

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The only way they know how to communicate with us is either growling or snapping. And so, you've got to take into consideration, what is the relaxation of the dog? So that's our R of READ, be able to read your dog. What are they telling you? The E is the dog's *emotional state*. What is the dog's emotional state? Usually it's two ends of the spectrum. They're super anxious, or they're super excited.

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So, the dogs who are really anxious, they're going to show you that with... go back to episode number four here on Shaped by Dog where I talk about TEEMP (T-E-E-M-P), TEMP, a dog will show you physically that they're anxious. They are not comfortable with this environment. It may be that they've never been around kids before, or maybe that they're not confident, or maybe that the kids are running and flailing and screaming and it's scaring them. Or at the other end of the spectrum, my five-year-old dog Momentum, when the kids get running and flailing and screaming, she gets super excited. Excited and she'll start racing around them and you'll go, "Oh look, she's having fun with the kids".



## Why All Dogs Can Bite and How to Reduce the Risk with R.E.A.D.

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One of those kids are going to get nipped. I know it. I know it. And so, I don't allow that situation to happen because if a dog's really excited, maybe the kids are playing really rough with the dog and the dog's going, "yeah, yeah, yeah", and then boom, one of the kids is going to get bit. What is the dog's emotional state? What are you reading? Again, the T E M P, what is the dog's body language telling you? And the other thing is how excited is that dog or are they getting overexcited? Can you read your dog? The A is *awareness*.

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Does the dog even have an awareness? So, let's say you have a dog who is sleeping and a toddler kind of comes in the room and trips over them and falls right on them, boom, very likely that dog's going to get up and snap. They're animals who've been raised from generations of "watch out, someone might attack you". So, boom, get, I mean, obviously they're domesticated, but they still are animals. So, any animal, if you get surprised, you aren't aware of what's going on, then like you're going to jump. You're going to go, "Ooh! and dogs go, "Woo!" with their mouth.

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So, what is the awareness of that animal? Are they, you know, the older they get the sounder they sleep, or maybe the dog's going a little deaf, or maybe the dog is going a little blind, or maybe the dog is so busy chewing a bone he doesn't see the kid coming in and going, "hi"... boom! "Someone's going to take my bone". Maybe the dog is eating food, and you're going to say, "Oh no, no, no, my dog should be able, I should be able to do that". Heck no. Like you can build up to a level, but we'll get to that. But it isn't an expectation that all dogs are going to be okay with that.

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What is the awareness of the dog that there's even people or there's a child around? What is that awareness? And then that brings us to the D and the D is, is there ability for the dog to *depart*. Have you ever heard of fight or flight? And most dogs don't want to fight with people. They don't want to snap, I would say 99.99% of all dogs don't want to, but if they feel cornered, if they're on a leash or they're tied up or you're holding them, "no, you've got to meet little Sally, she loves you". They're going to snap. What is the dog's ability to depart? READ: *relax*, emotion, *emotional state*, the dog's *awareness*, the ability to *depart*, READ. Can you, and are you reading your dog? So important that you be able to do that and advocate for your dog.

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So, our dogs, there's a level of trust between us. They count on us to do the right thing. Two things have to happen. Number one, we have to raise the level of education of the kids. Now some of these kids might be like 18 months old, so it's your responsibility as a parent. And we also have to look out for the dog. So, let's talk about the kids first. This is just super important.

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Never assume that any dog is good with kids. I don't care if they had a history of being good with kids. Don't ever leave a dog unsupervised, especially with toddlers. It's that assumption that could lead to problems. Because again, you might not know that that dog is hurt, or you might not know that that dog was asleep, and the kid stumbled in there. So never leave them. Don't believe the movies guys. Hollywood tell stories. Like the vast majority of dogs have to be conditioned to be around children.



# Why All Dogs Can Bite and How to Reduce the Risk with R.E.A.D.

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It can happen, but you have to be able to put in the work, you have to be willing to put in the work. Okay. So, you have to be intentional about the outcomes that you want with kids and dogs. And so, you know, one of the mistakes people make is that they go, 'Oh, I'm going to have a baby. I'm going to have a dog so they can be raised together'. Please, you got your hands full with that baby. Wait until your kids are 7 to 10 years old before you get that dog. Right? And if you have the dog and younger kids, I need you to be intentional.

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Remember our goal. We don't want children to get bit. So, number one, you need to know this. Not all dogs need to meet kids and not all kids need to meet dogs. That give them time. So, if you have a toddler, they don't need to meet dogs. They can meet them from a distance, right? "Bow-wow, Bow-wow, Yay! Bow-wow". Have them learn about the love of dogs from a distance.

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They don't have to be right on top of them. Alright, number two, teach your kids to never approach a dog without asking the owner of the dog, "Does this dog like kids?". Don't ask the question, "Can I pat your dog?", because that makes me feel awkward and uncomfortable. And that puts a level of shame on me if I say, "Well, I don't really know if my dog's friendly with kids, I'm not sure".

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Ask a better question to get a better answer. Ask, "Is your dog used to children and does he like being around kids?". So, if you're a parent that's the question to ask. And teach your children that, "Is your dog used to being around kids?", "Does he like kids?". Because if you asked me that, I would say, "Really my dog is not used to being around kids, but if you'd like to meet my dog, I'm going to put her in a sit and I'm going to get her attention on me, you can come up to the front of her and you can just stand beside her and reach out and pat her ribs". It's safe, you're quiet and calm, everyone's happy, but don't ask the question, "Can I pat your dog?".

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You're asking them to, "Well, let's test it out and see, I think you might be able to, fingers crossed!". Right? It's too big a risk guys, it's too big a risk. So, number one, just know not all kids need to be dogs just yet. They can meet them when they're older. Number two, teach your children to never approach a dog without asking the owner first and ask a better question, which means if your children come across a dog without an owner, say they're tied up outside a store or they're chained in someone's backyard, or they're in a crate, don't go up and talk to that dog. Don't stick your fingers in. Stay away. You got to have permission first.

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Okay. Number three, let's help the kids understand appropriate communication with a dog. And there's this great app. It costs a couple of bucks, but there's a great app that you can download. It's called the Dog Decoder. And what it is, is a series of little drawings that teach you and allows you to teach your kids, what does it look like when a dog is scared, what does it look like when a dog is angry or, you know, it shows that, all right. So, get the dog decoder. Number four, help your kids to understand the best way is to move slowly, talk quietly and stroke a dog calmly. Move slowly, talk quietly, pat a dog calmly their body.



# Why All Dogs Can Bite and How to Reduce the Risk with R.E.A.D.

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You don't have to pat their head and you stroke not pat. You don't poke. You don't pat. You don't... why am I doing this to myself? You don't poke. You don't pat. You don't smack. Yeah, I'm really getting into this podcast. Okay. Assume there are no kid proof dogs guys, let's just go with that understanding. And don't allow small children to play rough games with dogs.

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Now I will teach a seven, eight, nine-year old to play tug of war because they will have the cognizant ability to be able to understand the rules of the game. So, the seven or eight-year-old can control the game by controlling the rules. But kids under that is really, really difficult. So, easy, just don't let them play rough with the dogs.

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Alright. Now, what if you have a dog and you would like them to be around kids? Number one, just like not all kids need to meet dogs, not all dogs need to meet kids. Is it necessary? Because there is no shame when somebody says, "can I pat your dog?". You know, just say, "actually my dogs not really been around kids. I would love my dog to get used to kids so, I'm going to give you some cookies. Can you just toss them at my dog?". That's an interaction that you can teach people, this is a great way to interact with my dog. And by the way, next time don't ask if I can pat your dog. Ask, "is your dog good with kids?".

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So, you need to champion for your dog. Number one, you are your dog's best advocate. Number two, take the time to condition your dog to be around children if you are going to be in a position where your dog has to be around kids. Now, if you don't have kids in your life and you don't have friends with kids, you can manage that. This brings me to number three. When people come to visit who have kids and you aren't sure, put your dog away, put them in a back bedroom, give them a bone to chew, lock the door or put them in a crate.

You can supervise the meeting with the kids at first and then put the dog away, so they don't have to stress. Alright, now this next one is super important. Believe your dog. Believe your dog when your dog growls at a child. I don't care if it's a, "eeeeehhhh" like a life, you know, blood curdling kind of "I'm going to rip out your liver!", or if it's a, "aaaaaa" kind of a growl, believe your dog.

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Do not ever discipline your dog. Don't tell them they're bad. Don't tell them no, don't tell them shut up. Don't hit them. Thank them. Thank them for the appropriate communication, because there is a trust. And you misunderstood. You didn't read appropriately so your dog is helping you out. Your dog is saying, "I don't feel comfortable in this environment".

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And if you go, "Hey!", and you give them a smack and you get mad at them, you're taking away their voice. You're taking away their ability to communicate with you. And if you do this enough, or if you're harsh enough, or if you are correct to firm enough, the dog won't growl next time they'll just bite. So, what do you do if your dog growls at a child? You call the dog away, throw cookies on the floor. If they're fixated on the kid, throw some cookies on the floor to distract them.





# Why All Dogs Can Bite and How to Reduce the Risk with R.E.A.D.

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And people go, "Oh, oh, Susan, you're feeding the dog for growling". No, I am not. There's two different kinds of training. There's training where the dog makes a choice, I put my paw here and you give me a cookie. And there's training that's called *pavlovian*. I know I'm getting a little bit technical but remember the Russian scientists Pavlov. Ring a bell, food is presented. Well when your dog growls, they aren't in control. It's their lack of confidence which causes them to go, "Oh, I don't like this situation". And it's up to you to say, "Oh my gosh, my bad. I put you in a situation".

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Remember, dogs are always doing the best they can with the education we've given them, in the environment we're asking them to perform. So, get them out of that environment and then take the steps to counter condition that dog. And by counter conditioning, it is an intentional program where you reinforce the dog from a distance for not growling at children. For giving them an alternate response.

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So, when you see kids, like come close to my leg and pop my leg or whatever, and then there's lots of things we can do that instead of growling, they can go, "Oh, danger Will Robinson! Danger Will Robinson! There's a child over here!". Can you help a dog who is afraid of children to become okay with kids? Absolutely. My now 17-year-old dog, or almost 17-year-old dog Encore used to be terrified of children. Absolutely she would have bit. And I was intentional.

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It took me two years to get her to the point where she absolutely would play with kids. Again, I would never leave her unsupervised, but I would never leave any dog unsupervised with children. And I hope you wouldn't either. Please, please, please share this podcast with everybody you know who owns a dog. Share this podcast with everyone you know who has a child or anybody who has children visiting them.

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That's it for today. Please leave me a comment. Let me know what you're thinking of this episode. And if there's something else you'd like to hear, leave me a comment and let me know. We'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

## Resources:

[Podcast Episode 3: How Hollywood Made Life Tough for Dogs](#)

[Paper - Dog Bites in Children Surge during Coronavirus Disease-2019: A Case for Enhanced Prevention](#)

[Paper - Interspecies transmission of emotional information via chemosignals: from humans to dogs \(\*Canis lupus familiaris\*\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 4: T.E.M.P. \(Tail, Eyes/Ears, Mouth, Posture\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 22: The Invisible Bubble of Pressure and Your Dog](#)

[Dog Decoder App](#)



# Why All Dogs Can Bite and How to Reduce the Risk with R.E.A.D.

## About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
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