

## For Immediate Release

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### **Woods Humane Society Offers Safe Dog-Handling Tips to Increase Awareness During National Bite Prevention Week, April 10-16, 2022**

San Luis Obispo, CA (April 11, 2022) — In honor of [National Bite Prevention Week](#) from April 10-16, 2022, [Woods Humane Society](#) has created a series of tips to help new dog adopters and the general public avoid dog bite risks.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, an estimated 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year, and the most common victims are children ([www.AVMA.org](http://www.AVMA.org)).

“Our staff takes great care to handle our dogs safely and to counsel new adopters in safe handling,” says Woods Humane Society CEO Neil Trent. “However, on rare occasions, bites occur after a dog has been adopted. Frequently, these instances are unwittingly triggered by common human actions that may seem harmless, but that actually cause a fear response among many dogs.”

To help the SLO County community avoid these unnecessary risks and interact safely with newly adopted dogs, the [Woods Dog Behavioral Training](#) team recently shared a series of short videos and [5 Tips for Safe Dog-Handling](#):

#### **1. Leave the Leash On**

One little-known fact among new adopters is that grabbing a dog by the collar can be dangerous. Woods Behavioral Training Coordinator Eric Stockam says that dogs can be sensitive to being touched or grabbed near the neck, so when people unknowingly reach out to stop an unwanted dog behavior, they could be putting their hand in harm’s way. For this reason, he recommends leaving the dog’s leash on, even in the house, as you begin working on such behaviors as barking, jumping on the furniture, or getting into the trash or litter box. With this technique, dog owners can easily and safely make corrections and lead dogs gently away from distractions and mischief, without grabbing the dogs by the collar.

#### **2. Cookies for Collar-Touches**

As new owners get to know their new dogs, Behavioral Training Manager Michelle Rizzi says they can begin working toward desensitizing their dogs to collar grabs and neck sensitivities. She demonstrates doing this by simultaneously offering the dog a cookie or other high-reward dog treat while gently and softly touching the dog near the neck or collar. Over time and with practice, the dog will begin to associate collar-touching with positive interactions so that an owner can safely take hold of the collar when needed, rather than leaving the dog leashed at all times.

#### **3. Let Lying Dogs Lie**

For dogs that are new family members or completely unknown, Stockam says it’s wise to refrain from approaching them when they are lying down, sleeping, or even rolled over on their backs. He explains that while the dog could be showing you its stomach in order to receive a belly rub, this position is also a sign of submission, which means the dog may be trying to signal that it does not want a confrontation with you. In order to be sure, he says to call the dog over to you and wait for the dog to stand up and walk over for a pat—on its own time.

#### **4. A Heads-Up About Head Pats**

Dogs do not like to be surprised—even if we mean well and are only trying to pet them. To avoid startling them, Rizzi says to keep in mind what the dogs can and can't see. Petting dogs on the top of their heads actually blocks their eyes and can feel annoying or even threatening to some dogs. To be safe and sensitive to your dog's feelings, let the dog sniff your hand before petting under the chin, instead. Also, refrain from coming up to or reaching out to pet a dog from behind it (which could startle the dog), or from petting or pulling on the dog's tail.

#### **5. Hugs and Kisses are for Humans**

Although many people love their pets as family members, Rizzi reminds pet owners that dogs and cats do not show affection the same way humans do. Hugs, which are a sign of love and kindness between people, feel like restraints to dogs and can result in preventable bites. Similarly, kisses, which involve putting your face very close to a dog's mouth and teeth, are uncomfortable and potentially threatening for the dog, and are therefore unwise and unsafe for the person. Rizzi instead recommends using rewards, verbal praise, and gentle pets under the chin to show a dog that you care.

The organization is also helping to spread the word about a [free coloring book](#), created by the California Department of Public Health and available for download on the Woods website. The booklet is filled with information about dog safety, body language, and more, to help children understand how to stay safe around dogs.

For more information about safe handling and dog bite prevention, Woods recommends contacting its [training](#) department directly. For educational opportunities for youth and families to learn about animal handling and safety, contact the [Humane Education](#) department.

For more information, visit [www.WoodsHumane.org](http://www.WoodsHumane.org) or call (805) 543-9316. Woods Humane Society is located at 875 Oklahoma Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA 93405 and at 2300 Ramona Rd., Atascadero, CA 93422.

**For media inquiries or high-resolution images, please contact [Media@woodshumane.org](mailto:Media@woodshumane.org).**

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### **About Woods Humane Society**

Founded in 1955, Woods Humane Society is a privately funded, non-profit, animal sheltering and welfare organization that annually places more than 3,000 dogs and cats into loving homes. All animals are spayed/neutered, vaccinated and microchipped prior to being placed for adoption. Visit [www.woodshumane.org](http://www.woodshumane.org) to view available animals, donate or learn more. To make an adoption appointment, call Woods Humane Society SLO, located at 875 Oklahoma Avenue in San Luis Obispo, at (805) 543-9316, or Woods Humane Society North County, located at 2300 Ramona Road in Atascadero, at (805) 466-5403.