

Let's protect kids with tougher dog law

John Kass. Chicago Tribune. Chicago, Ill.: Nov 10, 2005. pg. 2

All dogs can bite. Small dogs bite small. Big dogs bite big. Problem dogs always seem to be owned by selfish people who don't have enough brains to train and socialize their animals. So here's an idea:

(Copyright 2005 by the Chicago Tribune)

You can't reason with a vicious dog as it opens its jaws to ruin a child.

And you can't reason with barbarians who raise untrained, aggressive dogs as an extension of their testicular virility.

We've seen too many stories like that lately. And now comes another story about the boy and girl from McHenry County who were savaged by pit bulls. The kids are 10, as old as my own twin sons.

I think I've got a way to deal with this. Some dog lovers will shriek. But I love dogs, too, and have raised and trained bird dogs and hope to train another one in the next year or so as the boys get older.

Legislating against breeds won't work. Get rid of pit bulls and bulldogs, and they'll find other aggressive breeds to market. And legislating against barbarians doesn't work either. Instead, let's deal with the possible.

Like the weight of a dog.

All dogs can bite. Small dogs bite small. Big dogs bite big. Problem dogs always seem to be owned by selfish people who don't have enough brains to train and socialize their animals. So here's an idea:

You want a dog that weighs more than, say, 15 pounds?

Then you pay \$1,000 a year in fees and licenses for the right to own one. The fee could be knocked down to, say, \$200 a year if the dog is spayed or neutered and passes temperament and obedience tests at least two times a year under the supervision of state-licensed animal trainers who would certify the animal's behavior.

This would give police the leverage necessary to immediately confiscate dogs that don't have the licenses (and shots), and the animals would be immediately destroyed.

If you don't like it, then move. Or socialize your dog. Most responsible dog owners do this. They walk their dogs outside elementary schools as pups and later as older dogs. The owners carry bits of hot dog in a bag, so kids can pet and feed animals, to establish children as a positive in the dog's mind.

But if you want to keep your dogs forever isolated behind back-yard fences or tethered to posts, becoming increasingly aggressive toward children, then you don't deserve the right to have one within miles of someone else's kids.

There's more.

If we're going to be serious about protecting children and dogs, we've got to stop the practice of backyard breeding. That's how most unwanted dogs are created. So if you want to breed dogs, you should pay a much heftier fee, say \$3,000 a year, and be registered with a recognized breed club through the American Kennel Club or the International Kennel Club or other legitimate canine organization.

The idea is to make dog ownership and breeding difficult. There is no 2nd Amendment for dogs. A large dog

in a populated area is a social responsibility. And casual ownership is dangerous.

All pups would be tattooed and implanted with a microchip for identification, their hips X-rayed, with temperament testing. Animals without the identification could be immediately seized and put down. Any unlicensed breeder would be slapped with a felony and possible imprisonment.

You think that's draconian? Consider the alternative.

Nick Foley, 10, is hospitalized in critical condition. He was savaged by pit bulls in McHenry County outside a neighbor's house near Cary as his friend, Jourdan Lamarre, also 10, was trying to sell Girl Scout candy. She's been hospitalized too.

The neighbor had a right to have dogs under the law. I'm not picking on him. The same tragedy could have happened with other breeds and has happened with other breeds.

Like I said, I love dogs. But if you're going to have large dogs with powerful jaws, then they must be under control and the owners must be responsible.

I assume the ones who will shriek the loudest are those who value animal life over a child's life. They're selfish that way. Some view dogs as their children. And it's time we parents of humans get together on this thing.

We've all been close to it. You get out of the car, the infants bundled against the cold, you're setting them in the stroller, you're alone, you look up and there are two or more dogs on the sidewalk, dogs with shoulders, pale eyes, staring you down.

There was that woman on the South Side awhile back, run down by fighting dogs and killed in the Dan Ryan Woods. There has been story after story about rough dogs and stupid humans who care nothing about the animals.

Those who use dogs for fighting define their manhood by the suffering of animals. Trying to reason with that type of person is hopeless. They come in all sizes and skin tones, but one thing about them remains constant. Kindness was beaten out of them long ago, by their parents or lack of parents, by some wild lust for cruelty. Reasons don't matter anymore.

Trying to find reasons for them now is a waste of time.

They're formed, hardened and fixed by blood. What's pathetic is that they measure their power by the strength of a dog's bite.

And we should do what we can to make sure it is never measured against a child.

jskass@tribune.com

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.