

A Pet's Eye View of the World

by Cheryl Wicks, Sammie's Friends Animal Shelter

Recently I was in a class that discussed aggression in dogs and dog bites, among other subjects. I begin to think about not only dog bites, but cat bites and scratches as well. Experts say that all bites are provoked. This doesn't mean it is intentional on the part of the provoker. It means all behavior is motivated by something and we the people are often clueless. We aren't reading the tea leaves correctly and bites and scratches occur. I tried to look at the world through the lens of a cat or dog. I thought that might help to reduce biting incidents.

I often see children and adults kiss dogs they don't know. Adults usually get bitten on the extremities and kids get bitten in the face more often. I thought "How much would I like it if a person I had no relationship with came over and kissed me all over." I wouldn't like it at all. I don't bite but I might hit to get them away from me. Add to this that we are way bigger than our animal companions. This would be an additional intimidating factor. Imagine this: You are at the grocery store shopping and someone proportionately bigger to you than you are to a cat or dog came over and flung you up in the air and said "How are you little fella?" You wouldn't like it.

With other people we realize that the appropriateness of certain actions is based on the nature of the relationship. For instance, a husband might pat his wife on the derriere, but the boss better not do that. We, in general, expect every dog or cat to desire an immediate close relationship with us. We almost take it as an affront if this doesn't happen rather than accepting it might take the animal a little time to warm up and connect.

I see cats played with until they are over stimulated. At that point your hand becomes their mouse and you get a bite or scratch. It's similar to someone tickling you to the point you can't bear it and then you kick them.

Cats get the slow moving tail when they are agitated and have had enough. Many people miss this signal and get bitten or scratched. Dogs back off or growl a little. I see us trying to relentlessly win them over and further agitating them. Give the animal a little space, just as you would like, if your space were being crowded.

My conclusion: We expect far more of animals than we expect of ourselves.

**With a little more sensitivity
and relationship building I believe many bites and scratches could be avoided.**