



Playing Defense

By Dr. Sally J. Foote

One of the scariest situations to be in, as a dog owner, is having a large-breed dog barreling down the street aiming for your dog, which is innocently walking along on a leash.

Yikes! Now what do you do? You have to act quick, but what's the first thing you should do to protect your dog and yourself? I have been in this situation, and it is really scary.

Here is a guide to get you through this awful situation. There is no one-size-fits-all fix, so use this information as it best fits your situation.

1: Know your neighborhood. If there a dog nearby is constantly running the fence, barking, lunging and jumping up or on the fence, that dog is out to get your dog. The gate may be open one day, or the dog may get enough gumption to jump or scale the fence.

Many backyard fences are too short to hold a dog. I have seen many dogs scale a 6-foot privacy fence. Avoid walking past this yard. Go different routes. Don't tempt fate.

If that is not possible, tell the neighbor that you need them to keep their dog up at the times you are walking your dog. Otherwise, ask them if you can throw a hot dog or other super yummy treat into the yard away from the fence. You would be training this dog to like the sight of you and teaching the dog to go away from the fence. Yes, this can work.

This dog is also not having fun. It is aggressing because it does not want this dog around. Happy dogs don't do this.

2: For loose dogs, get a bush, parked car, garbage can or something between you and this dog. Get out of the dog's line of sight. Move quickly without running. Running will entice the loose dog to chase. If the dog starts heading to you, stomp your foot harshly and yell in a deep, gruff voice, "Go" and "Get your dog inside." Make a ruckus to get others out to help and call the dog away. Do not scream in a high-pitched voice. Always use a deep voice.

After you get your dog home, call animal control and make a formal complaint if the dog is off leash. All communities have leash laws. They are for public safety.

See that the law is enforced. It may be the one time this has happened, and a remorseful, apologetic owner will be more watchful of their dog. If the owner does not seem to care, make them be responsible for their pet and to the laws.

3: Use a protective tool. Wasp spray will shoot out in a stream and is available at all hardware stores. Carry this when you walk and be ready to spray it at the perpetrator.

Baseball bats or big sticks are risky as the dog may attack you. Instead, carry an umbrella to quickly snap open and use as a shield. Don't hit the dog; use it as a shield and yell in a deep voice, "Get your dog out of here. Somebody call off this dog."

4: Do not turn your back on this dog. Walk backward to get away. If you turn away from the dog, many use this as an opportunity to attack.

5: Always wear solid shoes when walking your dog. I have seen many more injuries to people and their dogs because they were wearing flip-flops that slipped off or they tripped over them. Wear only sneakers, boots, or other solid shoes when walking dogs.

6: Do not ever leave your dog alone in the yard on a chain. Loose dogs can come up and intimidate or attack these dogs. To the loose dog, these dogs are in the loose dog's territory, and the chained dog cannot defend itself or escape. Stay out there with a garden hose handy to spray off any intruders.



Dr. Sally J. Foote says an umbrella is a great tool to ward off a loose dog.

Even if a loose dog does not threaten you, it can still be a dangerous situation. Report this and be responsible to yourself and the safety of others. A dog may be fine around its owner, but when the owner steps inside, it is a different story. I have personally seen many severe dog attacks from roaming dogs that were not reported. Make the report. Sometimes being the nag helps to make the situation better.

Dr. Sally J. Foote can be found at the Okaw Veterinary Clinic in Tuscola. She has articles on puppy socialization and other topics at okawvetclinic.com.