

## **SFDOG OFFERS TIPS TO AVOID INCIDENTS WITH OFF-LEASH DOGS**

SAN FRANCISCO - The San Francisco Dog Owners Group (SFDOG) offers some tips to dog owners and guardians to make sure incidents such as the recent attack on a police horse by an off-leash dog do not occur.

"Do not let your dog off-leash if you are not certain it will come when called," says Sally Stephens, SFDOG spokesperson. "That's the key. It's all part of being a responsible dog owner."

According to Beverly Ulbrich, the "Pooch Coach," a local dog trainer and behaviorist, you can test your dog's recall by attaching it to a very long rope (20-30 feet long). With no tension on the rope, the dog will feel as if it is off-leash. Call it to come to you. If it does not come, pull it to you via the rope, thus enforcing the "come" command. Try calling the dog in various places and situations, building up to many distractions, such as other dogs, children, bikes zooming by, etc. Do not let your dog off-leash until it comes during any circumstance when on the long leash. Of course, you need to start working on recall at home first. If the dog is not absolutely great with coming on command in your home and yard, it is not going to be very good at all in more unfamiliar locations.

"Responsible dog owners also keep a constant eye out for people and things that might interest or upset their dog," Stephens says. For example, if your dog barks at motorcycles, listen for the sound of a motorcycle approaching. As soon as you hear it, call your dog to your side, before the dog sees it, and attach a leash until the motorcycle has passed.

"If your dog has never seen a horse, and you see one in the distance, call your dog to you before the horse approaches, and leash or hold the dog," she says. "Then you can find out if your dog is scared by the horse. If it is, it can't run away or cause a problem because you got it under control before anything could happen."

"Dog owners and guardians have to always anticipate what can happen and control their dog accordingly," she adds.

If your dog is upset by something, like a motorcycle or a horse, you can work with a trainer like Ulbrich to de-sensitize your dog to it. Training techniques include rewarding the dog (kept on leash during the training) when it doesn't react to the thing that bothers it, and giving it an appropriate correction if it does react. This training is best done under controlled circumstances, however, to ensure everyone's safety during the training.

"It's important to expose dogs to a variety of people, places, and sounds, especially when you first get a dog or puppy," Ulbrich says. "This will help desensitize them to new sounds, smells and other things, and could prevent problems later on."

Ulbrich often suggests that dog owners take puppies, on leash, to Golden Gate Park on Sunday afternoons. "You'll see just about everything there - rollerbladers, bicycles, joggers, all types of people, horses. If the dog sees and hears these things when it's young, it is less likely to be scared by them later on."

"It's important to remember," Ulbrich says, "that just because a dog is great off-leash at a park, that doesn't mean it can handle being off-leash in the city. They are different environments and a dog can be scared or "spooked" by anything with which it is unfamiliar."

"You really do have to know your own dog," Stephens adds. "And constantly be on the lookout for things that might scare or bother him or her."

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