



© Bistockphoto.com

The **TEETH** of the **MATTER**

by Kerry Vinson, B.A.

On more than one occasion I've heard people say that 'once a dog bites it will inevitably bite again.' It's one of those sayings that people tend to believe, because if they've heard it often enough, it starts to sound true. The real question is, how true is it? As I'm not aware of any science- or fact-based research that either confirms or refutes this belief, I can only offer you my opinion as to its validity.

Many people ask me, 'Once a dog bites, won't it bite again?' My answer to this question is a firm 'not necessarily.' This opinion is based on the many hundreds of biting dog cases that I have dealt with over the years, and their often favourable response to behaviour modification techniques that are geared to reducing aggressive tendencies.

Why dogs bite

Before forming an opinion of biting dogs, it's important to understand some of the reasons why they bite in the first place. First, biting is one of the most natural behaviours exhibited by members of the canid species (which includes wolves, coyotes, foxes and dogs). The survival of the species in the wild is dependent on their ability to use their jaws and teeth. The pet dog (*canis familiaris*), through thousands of years of domestication, has learned to reduce these natural tendencies in order to live in human society. Despite this evolution, a significant percentage of domestic dogs have bitten or have the potential to bite a human. As statistics on dog bites in Canada are not well kept, it's hard to get an accurate reading as to the extent of the problem. I suspect the

majority of bites go unreported, as unless someone seeks formal medical treatment there usually isn't any record of an incident. However, the number-one behavioural reason that leads to the euthanization of dogs is aggression. In many of these cases, this drastic solution can be avoided if the owner is willing to make a serious commitment to work with the animal in question and prevent further incidences of biting. Giving such a dog to a shelter or rescue organization doesn't solve the problem, it simply passes it on to someone else.

Of course, the best way to deal with canine aggression is to prevent it from developing in the first place. This starts with instilling bite inhibition from day one, teaching the dog that any aggressive behaviour is unacceptable. This is not done

