# Dr. Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale (Official Authorized Version)

## An assessment of the severity of biting problems based on an objective evaluation of wound pathology

**Level 1.** Obnoxious or aggressive behavior but no skin-contact by teeth.

**Level 2.** Skin-contact by teeth but no skin-puncture. However, may be skin nicks (less than one tenth of an inch deep) and slight bleeding caused by forward or lateral movement of teeth against skin, but no vertical punctures.

**Level 3.** One to four punctures from a single bite with no puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. Maybe lacerations in a single direction, caused by victim pulling hand away, owner pulling dog away, or gravity (little dog jumps, bites and drops to floor).

**Level 4.** One to four punctures from a single bite with at least one puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. May also have deep bruising around the wound (dog held on for N seconds and bore down) or lacerations in both directions (dog held on and shook its head from side to side).

**Level 5.** Multiple-bite incident with at least two Level 4 bites or multiple-attack incident with at least one Level 4 bite in each.

**Level 6.** Victim dead.

The above list concerns unpleasant behavior and so, to add perspective:

**Levels 1** and **2** comprise well over 99% of dog incidents. The dog is certainly not dangerous and more likely to be fearful, rambunctious, or out of control. Wonderful prognosis. Quickly resolve the problem with basic training (control) — especially oodles of Classical Conditioning, numerous repetitive Retreat n' Treat, Come/Sit/Food Reward and Back-up/Approach/Food Reward sequences, progressive desensitization handling exercises, plus numerous bite-inhibition exercises and games. Hand feed only until resolved; do NOT waste potential food rewards by feeding from a bowl.

**Level 3:** Prognosis is fair to good, provided that you have owner compliance. However, treatment is both time-consuming and not without danger. Rigorous bite-inhibition exercises are essential.

**Levels 4:** The dog has insufficient bite inhibition and is very dangerous. Prognosis is poor because of the difficulty and danger of trying to teach bite inhibition to an adult hard-biting dog and because absolute owner-compliance is rare. Only work with the dog in exceptional circumstances, e.g., the owner is a dog professional and has sworn 100% compliance. Make sure the owner signs a form in triplicate stating that they understand and take full responsibility that: 1. The dog is a Level 4 biter and is likely to cause an equivalent amount of damage WHEN it bites again (which it most probably will) and should therefore, be confined to the home at all times and only allowed contact with adult owners. 2. Whenever, children or guests visit the house, the dog should be confined to a single locked-room or roofed, chain-link run with the only keys kept on a chain around the neck of each adult owner (to prevent children or guests entering the dog's confinement area.) 3. The dog is muzzled before leaving the house and only leaves the house for visits to a veterinary clinic. 4. The incidents have all been reported to the relevant authorities — animal control or police. Give the owners one copy, keep one copy for your files and give one copy to the dog's veterinarian.

**Level 5** and **6**: The dog is extremely dangerous and mutilates. The dog is simply not safe around people. I recommend euthanasia because the quality of life is so poor for dogs that have to live out their lives in solitary confinement.