

Keeping dogs and horses safe around each other on Council's beaches



Both dog and horse owners enjoy the benefits of exercising along the beautiful coastline of the Causeway Coast and Glens. However, some dogs have never seen a horse before, and if they are scared or nervous they may react by chasing the horse. This can cause problems for the horse, the rider, other members of the public and the dog. In order that we may all enjoy our trip to the beach please find following some useful advice.

From the dog's point of view...

"I may be scared or nervous of seeing a horse and react by investigating or chasing."

Why do dogs chase?

- Domestic dogs are descended from a predatory species that hunts other animals for food
- Dogs were bred to do different things and will have instinctive behaviour traits, some stronger than others. Knowing about your dog's breed may help you to understand how they could react in certain situations, including being around a horse for the first time.
- Today, most dogs are kept as pets, but their chasing and hunting instincts may still be present
- Some dogs will have never seen a horse before and they will react with a mixture of fear, curiosity or nervousness which could result in aggression or chasing
- Dogs may see the horse and want to play – the horse is unlikely to understand this!

10 ways to avoid a chase situation

- Socialise and try to train your dog to be calm in the presence of horses from an early age so they are not a scary or exciting thing to come across
- Ensure you have your dog under close control and train a reliable recall
- If you do not have a sound recall, please keep them on a lead
- If you see a horse approaching, call your dog to you and keep as still as possible in a visible but safe place
- If you see a rider approaching quickly, make yourself visible so they can slow to a walk before they pass you

- Wear hi-viz or bright coloured top, it's the safe thing to do generally, and riders can see you and react at an earlier opportunity
- Encourage your dog not to bark at passing horses. Rewarding calm behaviour can help reinforce that staying still around horses is a good thing.
- Once horses have passed you, keep your dog under close control
- If there is public access through a field of horses, only enter if your dog is walking calmly on a lead. Remember that inquisitive horses may approach you and your dog.
- **Stop and speak to each other. You have more in common than you think!**

Remember: you are required by law to make sure your dog does not become dangerously out of control

From the horse's point of view...

"If a dog runs towards me in play or aggression I may run away. This might cause problems for me, my rider, members of the public or your dog."

Why do horses run? What are the potential consequences?

- The horse was a prey animal for many large carnivores, such as the wolf
- To survive, they run from any threat of attack. This is often referred to as 'flight' instinct.
- A horse's natural survival instinct is strong and a rider has little influence over this
- A bolting horse presents very real danger for other members of the public present and can also entice a dog into a chase situation
- If the area is not enclosed the horse may run onto a busy road and be hit by a car or other vehicle
- The dog may chase the horse onto the road and also be hit by a car
- The rider may fall off and injure themselves if the horse moves quickly sideways or kicks out
- The horse may kick out at the dog; as many horses have steel shoes on their hooves, these can do some serious damage to a dog
- A horse may not react any differently to an approach from a muzzled dog or even a friendly dog; they do not know they cannot be bitten

10 ways to avoid a chase situation

- Socialise and try to train your horse with dogs so they do not react to their presence
- Keep your horse as calm as possible when passing dogs
- Always slow to a walk to pass dogs, and communicate with the dog owner at the earliest opportunity. They may not have seen you – particularly if you are approaching from behind.
- Give dogs that appear nervous a wide berth so they do not feel threatened
- Wear hi-viz equipment so dog owners can see you as soon as possible and take control of their dog
- If riding in a group, go past in single file at a walk
- Always thank dog owners who keep control and allow you to pass them safely
- Do not shout or wave arms around
- If necessary, stop to allow an excited dog to be caught
- **Stop and speak to each other. You have more in common than you think!**

Horse riding is permitted on Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's beaches in accordance with Council's 'Management Policy for Horses on Beaches'.

The policy applies to Council's beaches between 1 May and 30 September. The main policy restriction is that the riding of horses on Council's beaches is prohibited between the hours of 11am and 7pm. Further information can be found on the link below:

<https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/see-do/beaches/horse-riding-on-councils-beaches>

There are also restrictions in relation to dogs on beaches during the tourist season and further information can be found on the link below:

<https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/news/council-reminds-dog-owners-of-its-beach-restrictions-during-tourism-season>