Dogs and Coyotes

What you need to know

Coyotes are common in urban areas. Understanding canine behavior and modifying our own behavior is essential to peaceful coexistence with our wild neighbors.

### Understanding Coyote Behavior

- Most negative interactions with coyotes in urban areas result from the presence of a dog, and/or from intentional or unintentional food availability.
- Coyotes are much like our domestic dogs and share similar behaviors. Curiosity and play are often misinterpreted as being “bold” or aggressive.
- Coyotes may view dogs as a threat or as competitors for territories and resources. They may defend their mates, their territory and their pups during breeding season (Jan.-Feb.) and pup rearing season (April-Sept.). Understandably, they have a young family to protect.
- Coyotes may attempt to escort or divert your dog away from a den site or a food resource. Coyotes do not want to injure themselves, so they may put on a show to get your dog to move along, including a bluff charge or hunching the back, dropping the head and showing teeth. These “threat displays” are intended to scare your dog away without the risk of making physical contact. If the dog doesn’t move away, or engages the coyote, the threat may escalate. Keep in mind that coyotes in the West weigh only 18-35 pounds!
- Coyotes’ primary food sources in our cities include rats, gophers, insects, fruit and unsecured trash. However, small animals, including small dogs, are vulnerable and may be viewed as competition for food or even as prey.
- Many confrontational coyote behaviors are seasonal.

### What you can do

- Never let your dog chase or play with a coyote.
- In an area where coyotes have been seen, keep your dog closer to you than usual, and keep them under full control (voice-control or leash) at all times.
- Be aware of what is happening around you and what your dog is doing at all times.
- To protect your small dog:
  - Avoid walking near bushy areas or “edge zones”
  - Keep to the middle of meadows.
  - Stand in the middle of the meadow where others are present.
  - If a coyote approaches to a proximity that you feel is uncomfortable, and you can clearly make eye contact, leash your larger dog or pick up your small dog, and haze him (learn how to do this correctly using our Coyote Hazing Field Guide). If the coyote doesn’t leave, it’s likely there’s a den, pups, or food source that the coyote is protecting. Change your routine to avoid this challenging area for awhile.
  - If a coyote performs a threat display, or two or more coyotes charge your larger dog(s), leash up, leave the area calmly, and report it San Francisco Animal Care & Control, 415-554-9400. If you are in a city park, also report the incident to San Francisco Rec and Park, dial 311.

Urban parks belong to all of us — people, dogs and wildlife. By being responsible dog guardians and minimizing dog interactions with coyotes, we can give each other “breathing room” and peacefully coexist.

[ProjectCoyote.org](http://www.projectcoyote.org)

Project Coyote is a national coalition of scientists and educators working together to help communities coexist peacefully with wildlife in urban and rural environments.
Dogs and Coyotes: When to take action

Here’s a quick tip sheet for knowing what to do when you see a coyote. Always pick up your small dog or put your larger dog behind you if you need to haze a coyote.

**Normal Urban Coyote Behavior**

- Active in the daytime
- Most active at dusk and dawn
- Watching you and your dog in plain view or from a camouflaged position
- Sitting on a hill in plain view
- Walking and not noticing you
- Relaxing in a field
- Following you and your dog with curiosity from a comfortable distance
- Hunting gophers in fields and meadows
- “ Escorting” your dog away from its territory, food or pups during pup rearing season (April to Sept)
- Bluff charging your dog in an attempt to move your dog away from pups, during pup rearing season (April to Sept)
- Standing his ground unfazed by your attempts to scare him away, during pup rearing season (April to Sept)
- Waiting at stop lights to cross busy streets
- Dashing across a trail
- More than one coyote relaxing together or greeting each other
- Hearing coyotes howling and yipping (they are greeting and defining territories)
- When hazed, trots away, then stops and looks back (keep hazing until the coyote leaves)

**When to Haze**

- When you are approached and you don’t have a dog
- When approached and you have a dog, (Oct to Feb)
- When coyote seems interested in the food you have, even if he doesn’t approach, but hangs around waiting for a handout
- Coyote is in your yard, unless you think there could be a den on your property. (Call SF Animal Care & Control if you think you have a den)
- Coyote frequents your neighborhood and is comfortable in your neighborhood - (Requires a neighborhood effort and hazing correctly).

Please consult our Coyote Hazing Field Guide from ProjectCoyote.org or pick up a flyer from SF Rec

**Quick Coyote Hazing Tools**

- Surprise with a pop-up umbrella or simple noise maker (keep a penny in a shiny soda can and shake!)  
- Wave your arms overhead, make stern eye contact and yell, “Go away coyote!” Don’t stop until the coyote leaves.
- Download our Coyote Hazing Field Guide from ProjectCoyote.org. Learn the why, when, where, and how of correcting unusual coyote behavior.

ProjectCoyote.org