

# Owner of family pet that tore into 2-year-old in park could face prison

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By [Jarrod Booker](#)



Aotea Mihaka is now in a stable condition after the horrific dog attack that left her with 290 stitches. Photo / Simon Baker

The owner of a roaming dog that mauled a 2-year-old girl in a Christchurch park is expected to be charged with an offence that can mean jail.

Police are continuing to investigate the attack on Aotea Coxon by an american staffordshire terrier-cross, but said they were looking at a charge under the Dog Control Act, which can lead to a jail sentence.

Aotea lost several teeth and needed a plate inserted in her jaw and 290 stitches to repair massive damage to her face. She is in a stable condition.

The dog was destroyed, but the attack has reignited calls for tougher dog laws.

Detective Sergeant Dorothy McPhail said police had been contacted by a number of people who were in the area around the time of the attack at Jellie Park.

"We have had some people contact us who claim to have seen the dog earlier in the day. We are following up those inquiries, but we can't confirm if it is the same dog."

The owners told the Herald their dog, Jake, had never shown any aggression in the three years they had owned it.

It was always gentle around their 18-month-old son.

The dog had escaped from the fenced backyard while the couple were away from the house.

It was revealed yesterday that Aotea had gone with other children to the park unsupervised after they were told to wait for an adult.

Animal control team leader Mark Vincent, of the Christchurch City Council, said the attack was a reminder that despite rules, regulations and surveillance by dog control officers, sometimes "dreadful attacks" still occurred.

The dog in this case was not on the council's Dangerous Dogs Register of about 180 dogs that had bitten or attacked a person.

"If you have a breed of dog that has a history of attacking people or other dogs, it would be sensible to take your dog to a dog training club or obedience school. And keep it on a leash when out in public."