

## Husky mauls infant in Willetton

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The nephew of the Willetton parents whose two-week-old baby was mauled to death by the family's pet Siberian husky said today his family was devastated by the attack.

The nephew, who did not want his name published, released a statement through police who are investigating the death.

He asked for the family's privacy to be respected as they try to come to terms with the death.

The newborn baby girl died early this morning after she was attacked by the family dog at a Willetton home last night.

Police were called to the house about 9.45pm after the parents found the family's Siberian husky in the baby's room, where it was asleep in its crib.

Cannington Det-Sgt Jason Beesley said the parents were watching television in a nearby room when they heard a noise coming from their bedroom, where the baby was asleep in a cot.

Det-Sgt Beesley said the parents believed the dog was outside at the time.

The baby suffered life-threatening head injuries from dog bites and was taken to Princess Margaret Hospital, but died while at the hospital's intensive care unit about 2.45am.

It is understood the husky, which was up to eight years old and had been raised by the family, was removed from the house when the baby came home a week after being born and was only returned yesterday.

The baby was the couple's first child together. Three of the couple's other children from previous relationships, the youngest of which was eight years old, were believed to be in the house at the time of the attack.

Forensic officers attended, and coronial officers and Cannington detectives are investigating the incident.

"It is a terrible accident for the parents and serves as a warning for other parents," Det-Sgt Beesley said.

"The family are distraught ... it's an unfortunate and tragic accident."

Police Media Sgt Graham Clifford said the dog was expected to be put down but police were waiting on final approval from the family.

One neighbour, Francis, described the family as a lovely, caring family.

"I was looking forward to seeing the baby," Francis, who did not want her surname published, said. "I was just finishing knitting some booties for the baby."

Francis said she was unaware of the tragedy until this morning, while other neighbours reportedly heard emergency crews attending the house.

She said her husband often said hello to the family, who had lived at the Harry Way house for about two years, as he worked in the front yard.

"We enjoy hearing the children play when they are there," Francis said.

Francis said she had never seen the husky but had heard it barking before.

Harry Way resident Phame Hobbs said she had seen her neighbour's husky outside regularly and said the dog always appeared placid and approachable.

Ms Hobbs, whose seven-month-old daughter Jasmin regularly interacted with her family's two dogs, a German shepherd and blue heeler, said she would think twice about leaving her daughter alone in a room with the dogs in the future.

"It scared the life out of me, as a mother it was pretty hard to hear, I don't know what I'd do," Ms Hobbs said.

"I'm not leaving Jasmin unattended with them (the dogs) ever again."

Ms Hobbs' sister, Tennille, said she had walked their dogs past the neighbours' husky on several occasions.

"It would just sit there watching us, it wouldn't even bark...it would just sit at the gate watching other people walk past," she said.

"It's shocking, I had no clue what even happened. It's just horrible."



Canine Association of WA acting president Phil Thompson said he was shocked by the incident and saddened for the family of the infant.

He said he was also surprised that a Siberian husky was involved as the breed is generally regarded as a peaceful animal.

"This is the first I have heard of this anywhere in the world," Mr Thompson said. "It (aggressiveness) has never been a character trait of this particular dog."

RSPCA spokeswoman Marianne Ellis said Siberian huskies were not regarded as an aggressive breed and were not included on the list of restricted breeds.

Ms Ellis said the tragedy highlighted the importance of dog training and supervising both pets and children at all times.

"No matter how well you think you know your pets, never predict how they will react in different situations," Ms Ellis said.

Since March 2005, WA laws require fighting dog breeds such as pit bull, dogo argentino, Japanese tosa, presa canario and fila brasileiro to be sterilised, tagged and muzzled in public. They must also be kept in a suitable enclosure at home.

The laws mean dogs of restricted breeds aged six months and over can be seized and destroyed if they are not sterilised and owners face fines of up to \$5000 for failing to meet the new regulations.

More than 2000 Australians are admitted to hospital every year as result of a dog attack.

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