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Meet the candidates, week 29: “Neighbors report more sightings of coyotes around the neighborhood, and parents and dog owners are concerned. Tell me about your thoughts and how we can live in harmony with wildlife in our neighborhood.”

We have three elderly dogs in our family, and we have had our own encounters while out with them in Golden Gate Park. It can be stressful for all parties. As time has passed, coyotes have become more a natural part of our urban ecosystem, and coexistence with them — as well as protection of our canine companions — can be achieved through some practical steps. We must employ a balanced approach between wildlife protection and public safety. This means coordinating with Rec and Park, Animal Care and Control, and other related departments. We must also strive to:

1. **Stay vigilant and educated:** Coyotes generally avoid humans, but they can be drawn to urban areas in search of food. Understanding their behavior is key. Coyotes are most active at dawn, dusk, and night, so keeping pets indoors during these times is advisable.
2. **Secure food sources:** Make sure trash bins are securely closed and any pet food or scraps are kept indoors. Coyotes are opportunistic feeders, and reducing access to food can prevent them from being attracted to our neighborhoods.
3. **Keep pets safe:** When walking in unprotected areas, we should keep our dogs on leash during walks and avoid letting them roam freely, especially at night. For those with backyard spaces, ensure that fences are secure and tall enough to keep coyotes out.
4. **Use deterrents:** There are various humane methods to deter coyotes. Motion-activated lights, noisemakers, or even sprinklers can help keep them at a distance.
5. **Emphasize coexistence:** Educating the community about coyote behavior and the importance of maintaining a respectful distance can reduce unnecessary fear. Coyotes play an essential role in controlling rodent populations and maintaining a balanced ecosystem. If you notice a coyote acting unusually aggressive or appearing too comfortable around humans, it's important to report it to local wildlife authorities.

Creating awareness among neighbors and ensuring everyone takes preventive steps will go a long way in keeping both humans and wildlife safe.