

## Children & Dogs

### How to Keep Interactions Safe

Children and dogs can be wonderful, lifelong friends; however, it is important to always remember that it is up to us as their guardians to keep their interactions safe.

**Half of all dog bites are to children.** In about a third of those cases, the bite is from the family dog and most often to the face of the child. Children are much more likely than adults to require medical attention for a dog bite and the bites are far more likely to be severe. Children's faces are physically close to dogs' mouths and kids are tempted to look closely into dogs' faces.

**Why does this happen?** Children may not be able to read a dog's subtle body language indicating stress, fear, or discomfort. (Many adults need help with this as well!) Children's faces are physically close to dogs' mouths and kids are often tempted to look closely into dogs' faces, which can trigger a defensive response. Additionally, children can often invade a dog's personal space or unintentionally threaten their resources by handling/taking their food, toys, or treats.

**Fortunately, the majority of bites or negative experiences for our children and our dogs are often easily preventable.** Building safe relationships takes commitment and consistent effort, along with guidance and supervision by parents for both children and dogs. These relationships require good behavior from parents, children, and dogs.

### Helpful Tips for Setting Your Pet Up for Success

The key to safety around dogs is prevention. Be proactive.

1. **When possible, your new pet should be introduced to your children prior to taking them home.** Ask the shelter or rescue staff if they have information about a dog's experience with children from a previous home. Remember, that previous exposure to children doesn't guarantee that a dog will be safe around your child, but it can help provide you with a bit of background.
2. **Create a safe and comfortable home for your kids and your dog.** Your dog should be provided a quiet place to stay away from noises and activity during their downtime.
  - a. Use a crate or gates to create child-free zones for your dog.
  - b. Teach children to stay away from your dog when it's in the child-free zone.
  - c. Avoid cornering your dog, especially children.
  - d. Make sure that your dog has an escape route and can get away from kids if they want. Don't force them to interact.
  - e. Teach your dog to stay calmly in his crate or other confinement area when you can't supervise.
3. **Dogs and children (especially those under 10 years old), should always be supervised when together – no matter how friendly your dog is or how often they spend time around one another.** Remember, kids (even gentle children) are impulsive and dog behavior changes quickly, so it takes only a few seconds for things to go wrong. Closely supervise interactions between your child and dog, intervening if necessary. Being in the same room is not supervision - you must watch your children with your dog at all times. Your dog should be in their "child-free zone" when you are trying to multitask. Also, as you supervise, you're observing how your kids behave with the dog and how the dog behaves with the kids.
4. **Make your dog a part of the family.** Don't chain or tie her outside and don't leave her unsupervised for long periods of time—even in a fenced yard. Tethered dogs become frustrated and can feel relatively defenseless, so they're much more likely to bite. Well-socialized and supervised dogs are much less likely to bite.



## Teaching Kids How to Interact Safely with Dogs

It's helpful for kids to learn how to behave around dogs in general as well as how to help their own family dog be successful. Teach your children to treat all animals dog gently and with respect, giving the dog her own space and opportunities to rest.

1. **Children must understand that dogs don't automatically love them.** They should ask dogs' owners for permission to approach or pet any animal. Practice mock greetings at home to help them learn what to do. Kids must never reach through a fence, a car window, or a crate or kennel to pet dogs who are unattended. If there's no owner to ask, they can't pet the dog. If a child sees a dog off-leash outside, he should not approach the dog and should tell an adult immediately.
2. **Help children learn how to appropriately handle and approach dogs.** Practice petting with stuffed animals before they try it on a real dog. Show them what polite petting looks like – stroking or gently scratching areas the dog likes such as their chest or shoulders. Discourage reaching over a dog's head to pet them, hugging, putting their faces in the dog's face, tugging, pulling, pushing, and poking. Always have children invite a dog (even your own) to approach them, rather than having children approach the dog. If the dog chooses not to approach, children should leave them alone.
3. **Teach children when dogs should not be approached.** Children should not approach, touch or play with any dog who is sleeping, eating, chewing on a toy or bone, or caring for puppies. Animals are more likely to bite if they're startled, frightened, or caring for young. Dogs should free to enjoy a chew bone, play with a toy, or eat their meal without being pressured by other dogs, children, or even adults. Children should never approach a barking, growling, or scared dog and should never follow or chase a dog that is moving away from them.
4. **Teach children how to safely play with dogs.** Children who don't know better may find a dog's aggressive or warning behavior amusing, and they may actually provoke a dog to lift his lip, growl, or snap. Understand that when a dog reacts this way he feels genuinely concerned or threatened and may respond accordingly. Dogs should not be expected to tolerate behavior that makes them uncomfortable. If they provide cues communicating that they do not enjoy an interaction, this communication should be appropriately respected.
5. **Help your children learn how not to trigger a predatory response.** Frightened or even playful children may run away, shriek, or squeal. Dog's are instinctually predators and may be triggered to chase, possibly take down and bite a child as though it were prey. Never allow children to play "chase" with dogs; instead teach them safe activities to play with their dog.

### Learn to Read Your Dog

All dogs can and will bite if provoked, however usually they use a series of warnings to let us know they're in a situation where they feel threatened. Signs like showing teeth, snapping, or growling are obvious, but there are often smaller, more subtle cues that come first. Learning how to read these can help prevent problems early. If a dog displays any of these behaviors, it may be time to intervene immediately.

- Avoiding interaction by backing or turning away, hiding or attempting to hide, or avoiding eye contact
- Licking their lips when no food is nearby, panting when not hot or thirsty, or acting sleepy and yawning when not tired, lifting a single paw, or furrowing their brow
- Attempting to make themselves smaller or less threatening by cowering, crouching, or flattening to the ground, flattening ears backward, lowering head, or rolling on back to expose stomach
- Hyper-vigilant behaviors such as darting eyes or ears (moving quickly in many directions) or pacing
- Moving or walking in slow motion, becoming very still or stiff, or freezing in place
- Attempting to make themselves look bigger by standing or leaning forward, holding ears up & forward, the fur on her back and tail may stand on end or puff out, and her tail may be straight up—it may even wag. important to realize that a wagging tail or a crouching body doesn't always mean friendliness.





# STAY SAFE AROUND THE DOGS YOU KNOW

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## THEIR BODY



Pet dogs gently with one hand, collar to tail (not on the head).



Sit WITH dogs, not ON them.



DON'T dress up dogs.



DON'T kiss, hug or pick up dogs.

## THEIR FEELINGS



Learn what dogs are saying and listen when they need you.



Be kind. Do things dogs like.

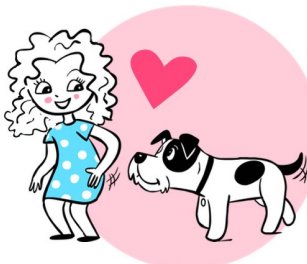


DON'T yell, scare, hurt or tease dogs.

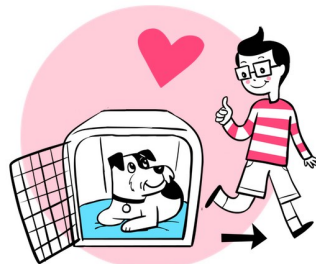


DON'T be bossy (or make dogs do things they don't want to).

## RESPECT



Always invite dogs into YOUR space instead of going into theirs.



Walk away from dogs when they're in crates or resting anywhere.



Train and play with dogs using treats and toys.



Let grown ups take care of dogs when they have something they shouldn't.



DON'T go up to dogs when they're eating or chewing.



DON'T put your face in dogs' faces.



DON'T take anything from dogs...



...EVEN if it's yours! Ask a grown up for help.

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## THEIR SPACE



## THEIR STUFF

# Identifying Fearful Body Language in Dogs

These body language signals indicate that a dog may be fearful.



Ears back



Tucked tail



Trembling



Avoids eye contact



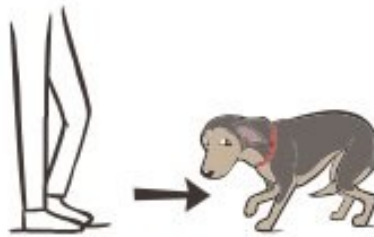
Crouching



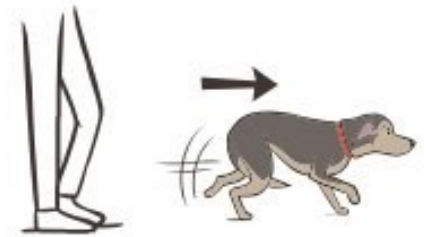
Cowering



Lip licks



Backing away



Running away



Not interested in food



Does not approach