

Dog and Child Safety

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A very common reason for dogs to be surrendered to a shelter or re-homed is that the dog is exhibiting concerning behaviors around children: growling, nipping, barking, etc. Often, the dog is placed at fault because the child was “just being affectionate”. However, MANY dogs are uncomfortable around children. Kids are loud, they are fast, they are unpredictable, they are very physical with their affection, and they rarely (if ever) check to see if the dog seems happy that they’re around. Kids also like to show their affection in ways that dogs just do not like in general such as hugging or using them as a pillow, or petting them while they’re busy with a toy or treat. Especially as babies and toddlers get more mobile, they often are seen as much more unwelcome by dogs. Dogs are just expected to tolerate any actions by children, but this is incredibly unfair. Dogs are living creatures and they have the right to say “no” to being touched. It is your responsibility as a dog owner to make sure that your dog’s wishes are respected and that all interactions between your dog and children are enjoyable for both parties.



This dog is actively trying to avoid the child's gentle pets. He is uncomfortable with the interaction and is asking for it to stop. This is when the adult needs to step in and end the interaction.

Dogs usually start off by showing body language behaviors that they do not want the interaction. Whale eye, lip licking, avoidance behavior, and stiff muscles or a tightly closed mouth are all signs that the dog wants the interaction to stop. Most children (AND adults) are not educated to watch for these signs. When these signs are ignored or missed, the dog learns that they dont work and resorts to louder ways of communicating like growling or snapping. When that behavior is punished and the unwanted interactions continue, all the dog learns is that saying “no” isnt enough and they have to physically enforce their space.

Facial Expressions of STRESS



LOOKING AWAY



WHALE EYE



CLOWN MOUTH



BROW FURROWED



EARS ALERT



EARS BACK/FLATTENED



EARS SIDWAYS



GRINNING



CHEEK PUFFING,
TEETH CHATTERING



SQUINTING,
BLINKING

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Dog stress facial expressions.

Dog/Child Resources:

77% of dog bites are to children from dogs that they know well (family dog, friend's dog, neighbor's dog), not some scary untrained stray dog or a dog used for fighting or an abused dog. The VAST majority of these bites can be prevented if the interactions were supervised by someone who knew what to look for. You don't need a degree in canine behavior to know whether your dog is comfortable or not with the interactions. Here are some great resources to help you learn about proper dog-kid interactions, what body language to look for, and how to set your family up for success:

- www.stopthe77.com **The Family Dog**: Great family friendly videos that are so worthwhile I make everyone watch them, parents with children but no dogs and even dog owners with no children. There is a good chance that even if the dog doesn't live with kids and vice-versa that they will still end up in situations of close interaction with each other and it's always important to know what to look for to make sure the interaction is enjoyable for everyone.
- <https://poochparenting.net/> **Pooch Parenting**: Great online classes for parents with children and dogs and a lot of good advice for setting up successful interactions. Info for preparing for baby and bringing baby home.
- <https://www.familypaws.com/> **Family Paws Parent Education**: Another great resource for learning canine body language and how to make interactions fun for everyone at every stage of a child's growth. Info for preparing for baby and bringing baby home.

Here are some great ideas to make sure interactions are fun for everyone!

- First off, make sure all interactions are actively supervised with the adult involved. The dog will trust you more and therefore they will likely be more comfortable with the interaction right off the bat. This means that either the dog or child should be contained when nobody is around to supervise.
- Play time! Have the kid toss a toy for the dog, or the adult toss a toy with the kid next to them to participate.
- Treats! Dogs love food and they especially love chasing food. Have the child toss treats for the dog.
- Do a shared activity, where the dog and child are engaged in the game but not with each other. Reward both for playing nicely near each other.
- Play the “Go Wild and Freeze” game! It’s best for the adults to teach the dog the rules of the game before including the children, but it’s great especially for dogs that get over-excited and jumpy/mouthy when children are playing.
- Don’t approach the dog, instead, invite the dog to join you and the child for some affection. If the dog declines, have the child toss the dog a treat and then redirect the child to another activity.
- Never allow interactions while the dog is resting, has a bone or chew toy, or is eating.
- Never allow close contact interactions such as hugging, riding on, stepping on, laying on, etc. Dogs are not stuffed animals and many dogs consider these interactions very unpleasant.
- Make interactions short and sweet. End them on a good note by giving the dog a treat and then redirecting the child to another activity.

Once you start preventing unwanted interactions and creating enjoyable interactions, the dog’s behavior towards the child will improve. They will start to trust that their space will be respected, so they will overall be more comfortable

with interactions instead of dreading them. Additionally, they will learn that when the child is involved, good things like treats and play will happen to them, which will make them start to look forward to interactions with the child.



A shared activity can be fun and engaging for both dogs and kids