



BE SAFE AROUND DOGS

**A comprehensive guide for dog owners
and non-dog owners on how to
stay safe around dogs**



Millions of families in the UK have dogs. With so many pet pooches around, the chances are your child will come into contact with a dog at some point either at home, at a friend's home or when out and about. So whether you own one or not, it's vital that your child understands how to behave around dogs and how to stay safe.

This booklet has lots of tips and advice about kids and dogs that you and your family can talk about and share; from how to prepare if you're a dog owner expecting a baby, to ensuring that your teenager is safe when out and about with their doggy companion.

Owning a dog and being around dogs has so many wonderful and rewarding benefits and can be so much fun for kids of all ages – with a little foresight and research you can easily ensure that all your family members are dog smart!





REASONS WHY DOGS MIGHT BITE

Remember that even the smallest, cutest and cuddliest dog can bite if they feel they have no other options or are provoked.

There are many specific scenarios to be aware of which could cause a potential risk, for example a dog could bite because they are:

- 🐾 Scared of or worried about the situation/place/person.
- 🐾 Trapped and backed into a corner.
- 🐾 Unwell/in pain.
- 🐾 Protecting the person/property.
- 🐾 Feeling over excited.
- 🐾 Surprised or shocked.

The majority of bites happen in the home with family dogs or with dogs that are well known. Even though you might know your own dog, or a friend's dog, and think that they would never hurt anyone, you still need to take steps to ensure that your children are safe at all times.

The most common mistake that people make when it comes to our four legged friends, is forgetting that a dog is a living creature that thinks, feels and gets frightened just like us.

**Never leave your child alone
with ANY dog, always supervise
whatever the situation.**



THE BASICS: DOGGY DO'S AND DON'TS

Giving your children the knowledge and understanding to be safe around dogs is vital, but it is just as important to train your own dog. If you are a dog owner you have a responsibility to train your dog well and make sure that they are a happy, socialised and well-rounded dog. In addition, many children and adults can be scared of dogs so owners need to be mindful that not everyone loves dogs.

Make sure that your dog has a basic understanding of good behaviour; spend time brushing up on their skills. This will make everything a lot easier for you both and is something that dogs enjoy. If you're starting from scratch consider a training class, or if your dog has some behaviour issues it would be worth speaking to an approved behaviourist. Here are some important commands that your dog should definitely know:

Drop it

- 🐾 Get together some of their favourite toys that they like to chew on, along with some tasty treats.
- 🐾 Encourage your dog to chew on one of the objects whilst having the treats in your other hand.
- 🐾 Once they have the toy in their mouths, hold the treat near their noses and say 'drop it'.
- 🐾 Once they drop the toy, feed them the treat as you remove the toy with your other hand.
- 🐾 Repeat and practice often.



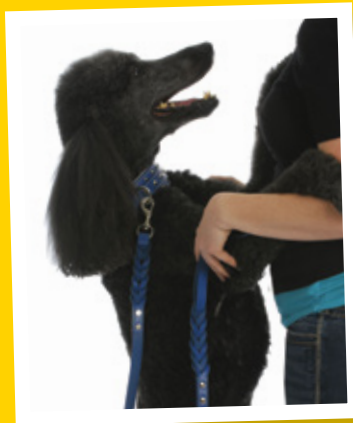
Leave it

- Start with holding some treats in your hand, let your dog see them. As soon as they are interested give the command 'leave it' then close your hand.
- When you do this your dog will try to get to the treat. Repeat the phrase 'leave it' and ask them to sit down or give a paw before you give the treat from the other hand.



Don't jump up

- The best way to stop and prevent this problem is to teach your dog to sit for any attention and praise. They then won't feel it necessary to jump up for attention but will sit nicely instead.
- Once they have all four paws on the ground you should then reward them with lots of attention, praise and strokes.



Go to your bed

- Start by choosing a place where you would like to send your dog, it could be their bed or a rug or mat, or a place where your dog feels safe and relaxed.
- Stand close to the bed or area which will be the chosen place and give the command, 'go to bed' and then lure them over with treats.
- As soon as all four paws are on the bed or mat give them the treat.
- Practise this many times gradually moving away from the bed.



Sit

- 🐾 Have your dog in front of you. Show them the treat in your hand.
- 🐾 Move the treat above your dog's head, as you give the command 'sit'. Their head should go up for the treat, naturally placing them in a sit position.
- 🐾 Treat and praise your dog. Never force them to sit by pushing, this is not likely to work and may hurt them.



Down

- 🐾 Ask your dog to sit and show the treat.
- 🐾 Slowly move your hand towards the ground in front of your dog as you use the command 'down'.
- 🐾 They should follow your hand with their nose and lie down. Treat and praise them.



Come

- 🐾 Get your dog to come to you for a treat. Treat and praise them as they reach you.
- 🐾 Now ask your dog to 'sit' and 'stay', take a step back, then show the treat and ask them to come.
- 🐾 Repeat this over and over again, gradually stepping further away from your dog, until they come to you every time when called.
- 🐾 Practise in different indoor situations before trying it in a safe outdoor space. Always remember to take treats or a toy on walks.



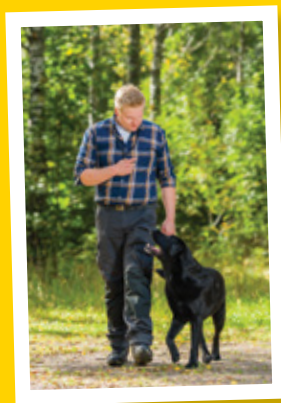
Stay

- 🐾 Ask your dog to sit or lie down - count a few seconds before praising and allowing them to move.
- 🐾 If they get up, ask your dog to 'sit' and 'stay' again and count only one or two seconds before praising them and allowing them to move.
- 🐾 If they do this short 'stay' correctly, gradually increase the distance between you and your dog and/or the time that they are asked to stay. Every time the dog moves when not supposed to, go back a stage in distance and time and build up gradually.



Heel

- 🐾 Practise somewhere with few distractions at first.
- 🐾 Choose which side you want your dog to walk on and stick to it.
- 🐾 Hold a treat in one hand in front of their nose. Show your dog the treat and walk forwards.
- 🐾 As they follow your hand, say 'heel' and give your dog a small bit of the treat.
- 🐾 Keep some treat in your hand and keep going. As they keep to your side, say 'Heel' and give more treat. Don't stop walking; feed while you are both on the move.



Once your dog has learned these basic commands implementing new rules to ensure safety between dog and child should come a lot easier. Always watch your dog and child together! If you see anything that the dog is doing that you are not happy with, regardless of whether the dog means any harm (e.g. mouthing, pawing) step in and remove the dog from the situation and place in another room. When your dog behaves well around your child give them loads of praise and treats. Eventually good behaviour around the child will be associated with fun and pampering.

Please visit our website for training videos and further instructions on these commands:

www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/training-videos



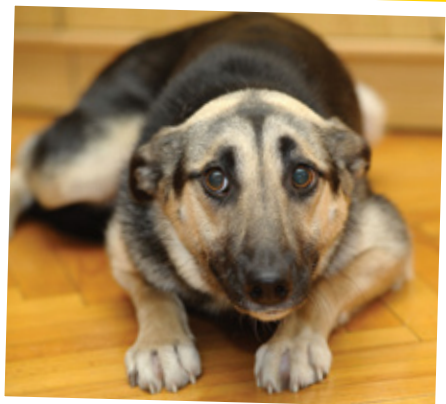
BODY LANGUAGE

No matter how well behaved and good natured your dog is, it is important to always be on the lookout for warning signs that the dog might be feeling stressed, scared or just uncomfortable.

Here are a few things to be aware of:

Fear

Stiffening and straightening is a sign that something is bothering the dog and they could be scared. Look out for wide eyes and flat ears as well as cowering, as these are all signs your dog could be frightened and this may lead to defensive bites.



Anger

Anger leads to aggression so pin pointing when your dog is angry is vital. Growling should never be ignored, even if your dog has never bitten before. It is a warning; if you do not stop what you are doing then the dog will use a different tactic, potentially biting. Showing of teeth, barking and flat ears may also be a sign your dog is becoming aggressive.



Stress

A few easy to see signs of stress would be yawning at inappropriate times, lip licking when it is outside the context of eating, paw lifting, panting and tail low between the legs.



Avoidance

Keep an eye out for whether or not your dog is engaging with your child with healthy body language. If the dog is attempting to avoid the child by moving away, backing off or trying to leave the room, then allow the dog the opportunity to do this. If the child keeps following, the dog may snap/growl or even bite to warn them away.





ANTENATAL

Preparing your dog for your new arrival

Having a baby is a big event for the whole family, including your dog; you should begin to prepare them as soon as possible for all the excitement. The more time you spend on training your dog and helping them to adjust to the changes that are coming, the easier the whole process will be. Your dog will experience lots of changes, sights, smells and sounds which may upset and distress them. Start working with your dog as soon as you can to help the process go as smoothly as possible, don't wait until your baby arrives as you will then have a lot on your plate!

First things first

1. Your dog should have an understanding of good behaviour and know the basic commands such as Sit, Lie Down and Stay. They should be able to walk on a lead without pulling and know not to jump up. If they need to brush up on their skills you could attend a local training class, as well as working with them at home.
2. If your dog has any specific behavioural problems, these need to be solved before the baby arrives. You should seek advice from a registered behaviourist.
3. Make sure that your dog is up to date with all vaccinations, flea and worming treatments. This is important to do anyway, but even more so with a baby coming in to the home.

Lifestyle Changes

When a new baby arrives a lot will also change for the dog in the household. Their feeding times, walks etc. will often need to be readjusted to the families' new routine. You can help to manage your dog's anxiety and stress by getting them used to lifestyle changes before your baby arrives. Making small changes gradually can make the transition easier.

- 🐾 If your dog is going to be kept out of certain rooms once your baby arrives, start doing this as soon as possible. Ideally your dog should be kept out of the baby's bedroom.
- 🐾 If you will be making new rules such as keeping them off the furniture then introduce it as soon as possible. Give them other options such as their own bed.
- 🐾 Your dog might be used to being the only 'child' in the house and at the moment has all of your attention. In preparation for the change you should start to leave them alone for short periods each day so they will get used to being happy with their own company whilst you are doing other things.
- 🐾 Develop a routine with your dog that you will intend on sticking to when the baby arrives. For example, if you intend to change their walking or feeding times, then gradually switch to the new routine. Alternatively, if you are not planning any kind of routine, start to vary your dog's routine so they don't come to expect things at certain times.
- 🐾 Consider a dog walker as you may not have the time at first to give your dog all the exercise that they need. Again start this change before the baby arrives so they are happy and comfortable walking with a different person.



New Sights, Sounds and Smells

Bringing a baby into the house for the first time could be overwhelming for your dog as there will be so many different smells and sounds that they may have never experienced before. There are a couple of things that you can do to try and help:

- 🐾 Introduce new equipment and furniture, things like cots, playpens and high chairs into the house gradually so your dog gets used to them.
- 🐾 Teach them to walk gently next to the pram.
- 🐾 Teach them the difference between their toys and those that belong to the baby. If they go to pick up one of the baby's toys then re-direct their attention away to their own toys.
- 🐾 Purchase a CD of baby noises, play it for short periods of time to get your dog used to the noise, after a while your dog will just get used to the noise and pay no attention.
- 🐾 You can start to use some of the baby's lotions and creams on yourself so they get used to new smells.
- 🐾 Borrow some friends' baby clothes so your dog can become familiar with general baby smells.

This might sound like a lot of work but being well-prepared will make all the difference for smooth transition and a happy household for all.



When Your Baby Arrives

When you come home with your baby for the first time there will be a lot to deal with. Even with all the preparation, your dog is bound to find it stressful, especially if they have never been around children before. Luckily, there are a few things that you can do to help your dog adjust and quickly see your baby as an integral part of the family.

- 🐾 Try not to make a big deal with your dog about the arrival of the new baby.
- 🐾 Teach them how to approach the baby properly and gently. Allow them to make safe initial investigations and approaches.
- 🐾 Give your dog treats and lots of praise when they behave well around the baby, this will help them see the baby as a nice thing to be around and nothing scary or intimidating.
- 🐾 Do not place your baby on the floor with your dog. Dogs do not know to be careful and could innocently hurt your baby.
- 🐾 Do not shout at or hit your dog if they approach your baby in the wrong way, they are still learning and won't understand what they have done wrong.
- 🐾 Make sure that your dog has enough to do and is kept well exercised; a bored dog could get up to mischief and develop behaviour problems. Get a dog walker if you find you do not have enough time.
- 🐾 It is very important that your dog has a place that they feel safe and relaxed, a place where they know they can retreat to if things are getting too much for them. When dogs feel backed into a corner that is when problems can arise.

Remember; never leave your baby or child alone with ANY dog – no matter how well you know the dog.





TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

It goes without saying that your new bundle of joy will not stay stationary for long! As your baby becomes increasingly curious of everything around, progresses into crawling and starts exploring with their hands and mouth, it is your responsibility to ensure the safety of your child and that your dog is not put in any situations where they feel uncomfortable.

It is essential that your child is taught the proper way to act around their canine sibling, but please remember not to rely on your child to be the responsible one.

Here are some potential risky situations to watch out for:



Space invaders

As your child grows it is important to teach them to respect the dog's space and belongings. An effective way of achieving this is to have a quiet area of the house that is solely the dog's. This can be a crate or a bed, but the vital point is to ensure that no human beings invade this space. So make sure that your child understands this rule. Once this has been established as a rule, your child will hopefully recognise when your dog is looking for peace and quiet, and your dog will not feel trapped or panicked as they can retreat to their safe space when they need to. Just like us, dogs may tolerate and even enjoy getting hugged and kissed sometimes but they will likely find constant affection from a child to be overwhelming or even threatening. To combat this, never leave your child alone with the dog and keep a vigilant eye out for signs of distress.



Let sleeping dogs lie

Dogs can feel particularly vulnerable when they are sleeping, eating or drinking. As mentioned earlier, respecting your dog's space is important. Once you have set an area of the house with feeding bowls and sleeping quarters it is important that your child understands they must leave them alone when they're eating, drinking or sleeping, otherwise the dog could react badly.



Pulling, poking and teasing



Children love to explore with their hands and are curious but it is important to make it clear that hair pulling and eye poking can hurt or irritate the dog. Over time this could cause the dog to lash out in an attempt to make this stop. Teaching your child how these actions make the dog feel and the consequences is essential. Also, as your dog is used to getting their treat/toy after a certain command or a certain body language it can become incredibly frustrating to be teased constantly. Try asking your child how they would feel in that situation, and encourage them to understand it from the dog's perspective.

Running and shouting

Loud screaming and shouting can try even the most patient of parents. Just imagine the effect this has on a dog. Their hearing is vastly more sensitive than our own. This can frighten the dog or even over-excite them, especially in the case of running and shouting. If the dog thinks it is time to play the dog may jump around and nip. So to prevent any avoidable problems it is best to teach your child to always be calm around the dog.



Some safe games that your child can play with your dog

Children and dogs need a fulfilling and fun relationship so play together is a very important part of that, provided it is in a safe way. Here are a few examples of games the whole family can play:

Hide and Seek

This childhood game isn't just reserved for the human kids. Your pup can partake in the fun too. Find one of your dog's favourite toys or grab a handful of treats. Have your dog sit and stay in one room. Then, go and hide in another. Once you've situated yourself in a good hiding place, call your dog. When they find you, reward them enthusiastically with treats and praise. This game will work both the dog's brains and senses.



Doggy Treat Hunt

It doesn't have to be Easter for your dog to play this egg-hunt-inspired game. Grab their favourite smelly treats, either alone or stuffed inside a treat-holding toy, and hide them around the living room or backyard. Make sure your canine companion is in another room so they don't see or smell the secret hiding spots. Then invite your dog into the room or backyard and watch them sniff away.

Round Robin

This fun activity is perfect for a family with children. Every member sits around the room (at least 20 feet from one another) with a handful of treats. Then, every person takes turns calling out their dog's name. Every time the dog comes, they should be rewarded with treats and praise. When your dog has accomplished the game indoors, try taking it outside and spread out even further from one another!



Simon Says

This game is great for dogs who already know the basics: Simon Says 'sit', 'stay', 'down', 'roll over', 'shake' etc. Grab some treats and test your dog's ability to understand these commands. Make sure to mix up the commands to really keep your dog on their toes. Give the dog a treat after each go to reward them for good behaviour.





SAFETY TIPS FOR TEENAGERS

This booklet gives Be Dog Smart tips for children of all ages, but there are some additional points especially relevant to teenagers. Young people will be more likely to be left alone with their dog and out and about walking them. They therefore need to be more responsible for their own safety and the dog's too! Although your teenager may be very capable and street smart, remember, it is still your responsibility to use your common sense as their parent or carer to assess the situation, minimise potential risks and ensure your teens know all about how to stay safe with their doggy companion.

A few things to remind them:

- 🐾 It is a legal requirement for dogs to wear a collar and tag in public at all times; you can be prosecuted if you do not comply with this.
- 🐾 When walking along the road, dogs should be on a lead. Even the most well trained dog can still get scared or decide to run away, which could cause an accident and get them both hurt.

- 🐾 Your child/teenager should not ride their bike or roller skates whilst exercising their dog, this is extremely dangerous for both.
- 🐾 Never wind up and tease the dog at home or when out and about. This will only lead to behaviour problems for your dog and result in a possible bite.
- 🐾 Rough play fighting is also a bad idea, it may be fun for them initially, but can soon spiral out of control. If a dog thinks that they can play this way with everyone, they may scare or intimidate people who are not used to the behaviour.
- 🐾 Ensure they exercise the dog in a safe, secure dog-friendly place.
- 🐾 They must never use their dog to intimidate and show off, this could lead to trouble. Dogs are not objects or weapons!





STAYING SAFE AROUND DOGS WHEN OUT AND ABOUT

As well as teaching our children to be safe with their own dogs at home it is important that they understand that not all dogs are like their own. Some dogs do not like children at all, so it is important that children remember this!

These are a few basic rules that you should teach your child about how to deal with dogs they meet when out and about.

- 🐾 Always ask the owner before touching any dog, no matter how cute they look.
- 🐾 Never touch a dog that is left alone tied up outside a shop, or to a fence etc.
- 🐾 Never run and shout around dogs, this can over-excite or scare them, which might encourage them to chase or nip.
- 🐾 Do not enter a garden if there's a dog running loose in it and never put your hands through a fence to stroke it.
- 🐾 Never chase or tease any dog.

Here are some more specific scenarios to go through with your child to help them understand the difference between safe and potentially dangerous interactions with dogs.

Approaching a new dog

- 🐾 Always ask the owner for permission before touching a dog.
- 🐾 Ask the owner where the dog likes to be stroked.
- 🐾 Gently hold out your hand in a ball shape, with your fingers curled, without reaching towards the dog, to let the dog sniff you and get to know you.
- 🐾 Stroke the dog gently with the back of your hand where the owner has suggested. When they look like they are enjoying this, you can stroke them with the palm of your hand. Always stroke gently rather than patting or rubbing up and down.

If a dog approaches you

- 🐾 Stand still in a confident upright position and look away from the dog. Do not crouch down as the dog may not understand what you are doing.
- 🐾 If you are holding a ball or food, throw it gently away from you. The dog might be interested in what you have dropped and go over to sniff it. You can then walk away slowly.

If a dog jumps up at you

- 🐾 If a dog is jumping at you, cross your arms over your chest and keep your fingers tucked in. Turn so the dog sees your side, as it is less threatening to the dog.
- 🐾 Stand still in a confident upright position and look away from the dog.
- 🐾 Wait for the dog's owner or an adult to come and help, before you walk away slowly and calmly.

If a dog knocks you over

- 🐾 If you get knocked over curl up in a ball, like a hedgehog! Cover your face and head with your arms and stay like this until an adult comes to help, or the dog goes away.





HELPING EVERYONE BE SAFE AROUND DOGS



Ultimately kids will be kids and dogs will be dogs - we adults are the ones who need to be watchful and teach them to enjoy each other's company in the right way, understanding each other's behaviour and respecting each other's needs.

Dogs Trust is very keen to ensure children and dogs can live together safely and happily, at home and in the community.

If you would like to arrange a FREE Be Dog Smart family workshop at your children's school, local community, leisure centre or even your local Dogs Trust Rehoming Centre then please visit our website www.bedogsmart.org.uk and contact your local Education and Community Officer to arrange a visit.



www.learnwithdogstrust.org.uk