

The Focus Guide to Kids and Dogs



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Setting up for success

“Making sure children and dogs can be separated when unsupervised is **essesntial**“

Gated Communities

We are huge fans of gated communities. It's really important that both children and dogs have spaces where they can be away from each other. Something as simple as a baby gate can help you to keep interactions safe.

Things can go wrong with even the sweetest natured dogs so it's important young children and dogs are **never** left unsupervised.

Safe Spaces

Whether you have a puppy or an adult dog, creating a 'safe space' for them can help protect the relationship between them and the children in the household.

This is a 'dog only' zone where the dog can go to chill out or enjoy a long lasting chew

Preparing for a baby

Ditch the routine

When dogs have a strict routine they can find it really difficult when that routine changes. So before baby arrives find ways to mix it up ahead of time.

- Go for shorter walks
- Walk at different times and take different routes
- Have non-walk days

Plan for household changes

Think about all the things that will need to change when the baby arrives. For example, where does the dog sleep? Do they lay on your lap every time you sit on the sofa?

Start to implement these changes before the baby arrives so it doesn't come as a shock to your dog when someone else is in their spot.

Desensitisation

Babies bring lots of new sights, sounds and smells. The more of these you can introduce your dog prior to their arrival the better!

Sights

Get yourself a baby doll and carry it around the house, sit with it on your lap, pop it in a sling. Reward your dog for calmness and disengaged.

When you bring baby furniture into the house let the dog sniff and explore at their own pace. If you've brought flat pack furniture you can even let them watch and sniff while you put it together.

Practise loose lead walking next to a push chair ahead of time, some dogs can find walking next to wheels overwhelming go slow and steady with this one.

Sounds

Find recordings of babies crying and play them at a low volume Initially this needs to be quiet enough that your dog hardly pays attention. Reward calmness and gradually increase the volume.

Crawling and Toddling

“At this age we really need to up our management strategies to keep everyone happy and safe”

Baby on the move

When babies first learn to crawl and walk their movements can be a bit erratic and unpredictable. Some dogs can find this a bit worrying! This is where gated communities are really helpful. It's super important that children and dogs are always supervised, especially when babies are moving around. Wobbly toddlers might try to steady themselves on a dog which could upset the dog.

Grabby Hands

The grabby phase usually accompanies the moving around phase! Again supervision and gated communities will be your best line of defense here. Something extra to consider is that little hands can easily reach through baby gates. Make sure you teach your dog to settle away from the gate so your child can't reach through to get a handful of fur!





Feeding time

Food can easily become a source of conflict with children and dogs. Children should never be allowed to approach dogs when they're eating, whether they have their dinner or a special treat, use those gated communities to keep children away from the food bowl.

Equally, when the kids are eating it's best to have the dog out of reach too. While it's tempting to let your dog do the Hoovering up while your child is eating, we don't want the dog to learn to jump up at the table for scraps or the child to feed the dog something dangerous.

If you have older children, meal times can be a great training opportunity. Reward your dog for staying on their bed while you eat by occasionally tossing rewards onto their bed.

Is my dog comfortable?

“Learning to read signs that your dog is uncomfortable is the best way to prevent incidents occurring between children and dogs.”

A Kiss to Dismiss

Dogs do lick to show affection, however they will also lick when they are asking for space. So what does this look like?

These licks are usually accompanied by tight facial muscles, whale eye (showing the whites of the eye), and other signs of discomfort like furtive glances or pulled back ears.



Respecting your dogs space

As much as we love to kiss and cuddle our dogs, squeezing them in our arms, laying on top of them and wrapping our arms around them can make lots of dogs uncomfortable.

The majority of dog bites to children occur to the head and face. It's important we don't let children encroach into a dogs space.



Take a look at the golden retriever on the right. He is showing the whites of his eyes, there is tension in his brow, his ears are back and he's panting. He is trying to use his body language to ask for space.

The small dog in the bottom right picture is also asking for space. His ears are pulled back, his eyes are wide, his mouth is clamped shut and he generally looks quite tense.

If these signals are regularly ignored, dogs may feel the need to use 'louder' signals, like growling, snapping and biting when they need to ask for space



Canine Ladder of Aggression

Aggression is a last resort behaviour for dogs. Before they lunge, growl, or bite they will do lots of subtler, distance seeking behaviours in an attempt to diffuse the situation, only escalating up the ladder when this doesn't work.

It's really important that we never punish a dog for asking for space. A dog who growls is not a 'naughty' dog, they are a dog who is feeling uncomfortable.



Pet, Pet, Pause

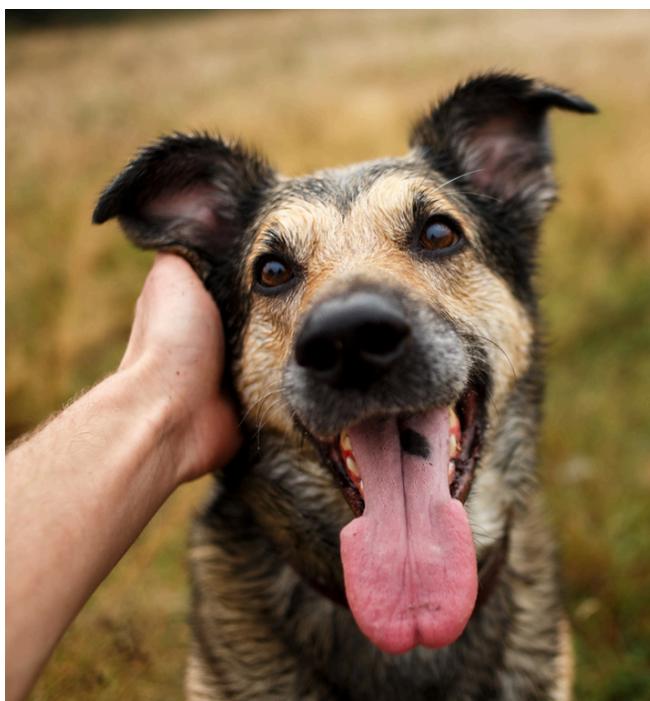
Lots of dogs enjoy physical contact from humans but, just like us, they may only like being touched in certain places, or they may not want to be touched if they are tired, or a bit uncomfortable. Some days they may want affection, some days they may not and it's important we teach children to respect that.

Pet, pet, pause is a simple way to check if your dog is enjoying being stroked, and is a great way to teach children about consent. Stroke the dog twice, 'pet, pet' then pause

If the dog seeks out further contact, with a look, a paw, or moving into you, then pet them again, and repeat.

If they don't solicit more physical contact, we don't continue to pet them.

Remember... just because the dog is sat next to you, doesn't mean they want to be touched



Games for kids

“Once children are old enough, the best way to build their relationship with a dog is to get them involved in training.”

The Orientation Game

This game rewards dogs for engaging with their handler with the added bonus of reinforcing keeping four paws on the floor

1. Throw a treat out to your side and allow your dog to go and get it
2. As soon as they turn round to look at you, mark that moment! (YES!)
3. Throw a treat out to the other side
4. Repeat, repeat, repeat!

Spins and Twists

1. Hold a treat in front of your dog's nose
2. Slowly move that treat toward their bottom (we're looking for a curly croissant shape)
3. Keep moving the treat slowly until they've completed a full circle
5. Use your marker as soon as your dog has completed the circle and give them the treat
6. Do the same thing in the opposite direction so you don't end up with a wonky dog!

Middle

The aim of the game is to get your dog standing between your legs.

1. Stand with your legs apart in an 'A' shape
2. Lure your dog around your side and through your legs
3. Mark and reward your dog when their head is in between your legs and they are facing in a straight line forwards
4. Throw a treat out in front of you to 'reset' them ready for another practice.

