



# Prevent-a-Bite: Safe Interactions between Dogs and Children

Promoting safe, positive relationships between children and family dogs through education and understanding.





## Why dogs and children are great together

Dogs can be wonderful companions for children, offering friendship, responsibility, and plenty of fun. Growing up with a dog helps children develop compassion, empathy, and respect for living things. Having a family pet can also teach kids valuable lessons about caring for others.

However, it's important to recognise that dogs and children communicate differently, which is why teaching children how to safely interact with dogs is essential. This guide will help parents, caregivers, and educators equip children with the knowledge to enjoy safe, positive relationships with their canine companions.

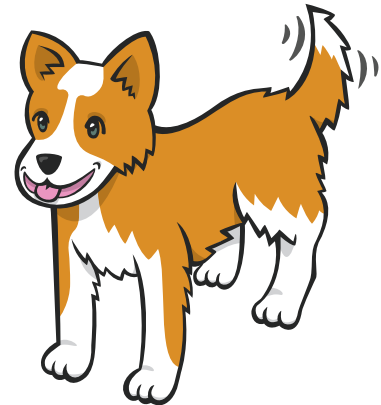
# Helping children learn about dogs and their body language

Dogs have their own way of communicating, mostly through body language. Children often don't understand these signals and may approach a dog in ways that feel threatening or overwhelming. It's important to teach children how to recognise a dog's body language and respond appropriately.



## HAPPY DOGS:

- relaxed body posture
- smooth hair
- wagging tail
- relaxed mouth
- ears in natural position



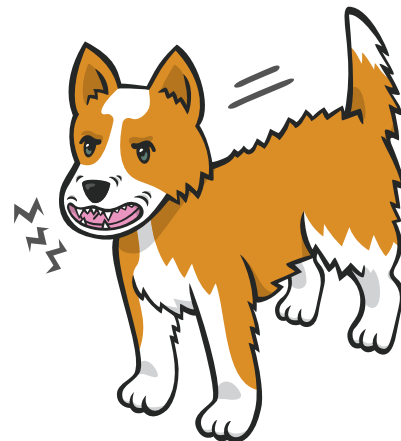
## WORRIED DOGS:

- yawning
- lip licking
- averting their gaze
- turning their head away
- dropping ears
- crouching
- low wagging
- tucking their tail



## UNHAPPY DOGS:

- baring of teeth
- narrowing of eyes
- raising of the hairs on the neck and back
- shifting of weight to allow escape
- growling or snarling
- barking or snapping



# Understanding your dog's behaviour

Dogs communicate primarily through body language, using a wide range of signals to express how they feel. As a parent or educator, it's important to teach children to recognise these behaviours so they can interact with dogs in a way that keeps everyone safe.

- **Subtle Signs of Stress:** Dogs often show subtle signs when they're uncomfortable, such as yawning, licking their lips, or turning their head away. These are early indicators that the dog might be feeling overwhelmed or threatened.
- **More Overt Signals:** If the early signs are ignored, dogs may escalate their behaviour to more overt signals like growling, baring teeth, or even snapping. Teaching children to respect these signs is crucial in preventing bites.

**Positive Reinforcement:** It's essential to encourage children to be a source of good experiences for the dog. Teaching children to give treats for good behaviour or play gentle games with the dog helps the dog associate positive interactions with the child.

**Understanding your dog's behaviour will not only keep children safe but also improve the bond between them and their canine companion.**

## The Three Categories of Interaction: How to respond

Understanding how your dog reacts in different situations can prevent accidents and ensure everyone stays safe.

1. **Enjoyment:** The dog is happy and relaxed, and the interaction between the dog and child is going well. Continue to supervise but allow this positive interaction to continue.
2. **Tolerance:** The dog is showing mild signs of stress (e.g., turning away or yawning). It's important to either redirect the child or give the dog space. The situation could escalate if left unchecked.
3. **Enough:** The dog has reached its limit, showing clear stress signals such as trying to move away, growling or snapping. Intervene immediately and give the dog a chance to calm down away from the child.

## Common Things to Consider

- **Supervision is Key:** Never leave a child unsupervised with a dog, even if it's your family pet.
- **Teach Respect:** Children should be taught to respect a dog's space, especially around areas like the dog's bed, food, or toys.
- **Appropriate Play:** Encourage gentle games like fetch or hide-and-seek, and avoid rough play that might provoke the dog.
- **Safe Zones:** Ensure your dog has a safe space, such as a crate or bed, where they can retreat when they feel overwhelmed. Children should be taught to leave the dog alone when it is in this space.
- **Understanding Boundaries:** Teach children to avoid approaching dogs when they are sleeping, eating, or injured, and to always ask permission before petting an unfamiliar dog.

**By teaching children how to understand and respect dogs, we can foster positive and safe relationships that benefit both the child and the pet.**

With proper supervision, respect for boundaries, and an understanding of canine behaviour, children and dogs can grow up together in a safe and happy environment.

*Let's make sure that both our kids and dogs enjoy their time together, building bonds that last a lifetime.*



**RSPCA** 

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