

Safety: Dog Bite Prevention for Children & Families

As adults, we are the "lifeguards" of the household. It is our responsibility to protect and educate the children in our lives on how to navigate the world of dogs—both the ones they live with and the ones they meet on the street.

According to the CDC, **77% of dog bites to children come from a dog they know** (their own pet or a friend's dog). Bites rarely happen "out of the blue"; usually, the dog was shouting for space in a language the humans didn't understand.

The Golden Rule: Active Supervision

Supervision isn't just "being in the same room." If you are on your phone or watching TV, you aren't supervising. **Active supervision** means:

- **Constant Observation:** Watching the interaction like a hawk.
 - **Intervention:** Stepping in *before* a situation escalates.
 - **Physical Barriers:** Using crates, baby gates, or "x-pens" when you cannot give the dog and child 100% of your attention.
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Decoding Dog Language

Dogs communicate mostly through body language. You can teach your child that a dog "talks" using their entire body, not just their bark. For a fun visual lesson, check out [Doggie Language: A Dog Lover's Guide to Understanding Your Best Friend](#) with your kids to learn all about these silent signals.

The "Green Light" (Relaxed)	The "Yellow Light" (Stressed)	The "Red Light" (Danger)
Loose, wiggly body	Yawning (when not tired)	Rigid, stiff body

Soft, squinty eyes	Licking lips (without food)	Growling or lip curling
Mouth open and relaxed	"Whale Eye" (seeing the whites of the eyes)	Intense staring/freezing
Tail wagging the whole body	Tucked tail or ears pinned back	Snapping or lunging

The "Never" List: Boundaries for Children

Children often treat dogs like stuffed animals, but dogs have personal space requirements just like humans. Teach children to **never**:

1. **Disturb a Sleeping Dog:** "Let sleeping dogs lie" is a rule for a reason. Startling a dog can trigger a defensive snap.
2. **Approach While Eating:** Never touch a dog or their bowl while they are eating or chewing a high-value bone.
3. **Hug or Kiss:** While we love hugs, most dogs find being "trapped" by a hug very threatening.
4. **Climb or Ride:** Dogs are not ponies. This is painful for the dog and dangerous for the child.
5. **Corner a Dog:** Always ensure the dog has a "clear exit" so they don't feel trapped.

The "Pat, Pet, Pause" Method

Teach your child to ask the *dog* for permission, not just the guardian. Use this three-step protocol:

1. **Pat:** The child should stay still and pat their own leg. If the dog wants to interact, they will approach. **If the dog stays put, the greeting is over.**
2. **Pet:** If the dog approaches, pet them on the **chin, chest, or side**. Avoid reaching over the head, as this can be intimidating.

3. **Pause:** After 3–5 seconds, stop petting. If the dog nudges the child's hand or leans in, they want more. If the dog walks away or looks away, they've had enough.
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What to Do if a Loose Dog Approaches

Teach children the "Be a Tree" method if an unfamiliar dog approaches them:

- **Stop:** Stand still.
 - **Fold:** Fold your "branches" (hands) in front of you.
 - **Watch:** Look at your feet (avoiding direct eye contact, which can be seen as a challenge).
 - **Wait:** Stay still until the dog loses interest or an adult arrives.
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Essential Resources

- [Dog Meets Baby](#): Expert advice for introducing infants and toddlers to dogs.
- [The Family Dog](#): Excellent videos (like "Stop the 77") designed specifically for kids.
- [Family Paws](#): Specialized support for new parents and dog owners.
- [Doggone Safe](#): Non-profit dedicated to dog bite prevention through education.

Pro-Tip: If you see your dog "looking guilty" or hiding when a child is around, they aren't feeling guilty—they are feeling overwhelmed. Give the dog a break in their crate or a quiet room immediately.