

The Best Way to Keep your Child Safe? Supervision!

A dog can be a child's best friend and most loyal companion as they grow up. This relationship is something we should cherish and respect. While most dogs are lovable and make wonderful family pets, we must always remember that every dog has the potential to bite.

All too often we hear that when a child is bitten, it is by a familiar dog and has taken place within a home environment. Bearing this in mind, the most important rule to remember is:

Never leave your child alone with a dog!

This includes all dogs, from the smallest up to the largest. Even the friendliest, cutest and cuddliest dog may bite if provoked. Like us, dogs have a level of tolerance that we must respect.

Dogs are living, breathing creatures who think and feel and can, therefore, get frightened or stressed. Recognising this will go a long way to fostering a safe relationship between our families and our four-legged friends.

As well as teaching children how to behave around dogs, it is important for us to know how to identify when our dog is uncomfortable. That way we can remove them from potentially stressful situations before anything happens. Although we can never really know how a dog is feeling – they can't talk to us and tell us – being aware that they have feelings and looking out for signs of tension are the key tools for staying safe. Positive body language for a dog is soft, relaxed and wiggly.

BE DOG SMART

Here are some tips to remind children how to stay safe around dogs.



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Dogs Trust Ireland offers FREE dog safety workshops for adults and children. Our aim is to ensure that we can all live together happily and safely together with our canine friends, at home and outdoors.

If you are interested in finding out more about our Be Dog Smart Safe Code or would like to arrange a Be Dog Smart Workshop in your school, library or community centre, visit www.bedogsmart.ie. Covering most of Dublin, the East, South East, Midlands, Cork, South Munster and Galway, our Education and Community Officers are waiting to hear from you.

Alternatively, our free Be Dog Smart Guide is available to download from our website. It offers plenty of advice and tips on issues like preparing your dog for the arrival of a new baby, training and socialising your puppy and travelling with your dog. The guide also looks at safety around dogs, both inside and outside your home, and is a great resource for the whole family. A safe dog equals a safe human!

Visit www.bedogsmart.ie to book a workshop or download our Be Dog Smart Guide.

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BE DOG SMART



Tips and Advice for all the Family



Over 30% of Irish households have a pet dog.⁽¹⁾ Even if you don't have one at home, you are very likely to meet a dog at some point or another. This could be at a friend's house or while out and about in the community. That is why it is vital for your child to understand how to behave around dogs.

Whether you are a dog owner preparing to bring home a new baby or a parent wanting to ensure your teenager stays safe while outdoors with their doggy companion, we have lots of helpful tips and advice for you to talk about and share with your family.

Owning a dog, or being around a dog, brings many wonderful benefits and dogs can be so much fun for children of all ages. With a little foresight and research, you can easily ensure that all your family members will Be Dog Smart.

Downes,¹ M., Canty, Mary J. & More, S. (2009) Demography of the pet dog and cat population on the island of Ireland and human factors influencing pet ownership. Preventative Veterinary Medicine 92. 140-149.



Being Dog Smart at Home

As parents, it is important to foster a healthy relationship between our children and our family pets. Adults have a responsibility to be mindful of any stressful environments or behaviours that could lead to potentially dangerous situations. We must also encourage children to treat dogs with appropriate care and consideration. The following tips and suggestions will help to keep everyone safe in your home.



Overenthusiastic play

Young children sometimes get carried away with play, running around and making lots of noise. This noise and movement might frighten your dog or it could cause your dog to get excited too. If this happens, your dog might jump up and nip in play.



Space invaders

We've all seen those 'cute' photos of kids hugging dogs but it's important to remember that dogs can feel threatened when being hugged or kissed. Some dogs do tolerate it. It is safer for children to refrain from this type of contact.



Poking and pulling

As children grow, they like to explore the world with their hands. While this might be harmless for inanimate objects like toys, it is not safe practice with dogs. Teach your children to play appropriately and to be gentle when they interact with your dog, as a hurt or worried dog could bite.



Let sleeping dogs lie!

Dogs need their own space, just like we do, and often their bed is the only place in the home that belongs to them. Teach your children to respect your dog's space. Don't allow them to approach your dog when they are in bed, even if they are not asleep.



Eating and drinking

Would you enjoy someone petting you while you were eating your dinner? Neither would a dog! Give your dog a nice quiet area to eat. Choose a space that is tucked away from your children so that they are not tempted to encroach on your dog's space. Teach your children that dogs must always be left alone when eating.

Safety While Out and About

While every family does not own a dog, we often encounter dogs when out and about. So it is important to teach your children how to keep themselves safe when they meet dogs outside of the home. The essential message to get across is that children should stay calm when around dogs. That means no chasing or teasing and no running around or screaming when they encounter a dog, especially one that is not known to them. Remember, not all dogs are used to or like children and might not want to be approached. We should never assume that a dog is friendly and should advise our children to always be cautious around new dogs.



The advice below will help your children to Be Dog Smart when out and about.

How to safely approach a dog

Children should ALWAYS ask an owner before they pet their dog, even if the dog is super cute! And remind them that they should never talk to strangers without you there.

- When approaching a new dog (and only when the owner is present), walk up to the owner and ask permission to rub the dog. Do not walk straight up to the dog and never run towards the dog.
- Stay nice and calm when you approach. Dogs can get overexcited by lots of activity and we don't want them to jump up!
- If the owner gives permission, stand still with your hands by your sides for 3 seconds & see if the dog is interested.
- If the dog comes over to sniff you ask the owner where the dog likes to be rubbed and then gently stroke with the back of your hand.
- If the dog does not come over to sniff, it is best to not rub them as they may not want to say hello today.

What to do if you are scared of a dog

- If approached by a dog and you feel scared, stand still and upright. Bring your arms into an 'X' across your chest, keeping your hands up and away from the dog. We call this the 'X Factor'!
- Don't look at or talk to the dog. Turn your head up towards the sky and don't give them any attention at all.
- Walk away calmly and slowly (don't run), keeping your arms crossed in an 'X'. Ignore the dog and don't turn back to see where they are.
- Walk indoors or towards someone that can help you – not a stranger.
- Never try to run away from a dog – they love to chase things! If we run, the dog might think we're playing a game with them and could chase us or jump up.
- When riding a bike, get off and use the bike as a barrier between you and the dog. Walk calmly indoors or find someone you know who can help.



What to do if a dog jumps up at you

- If a dog jumps up at you, do the X Factor. Keep your hands up and cross them over your chest. Then turn to the side slightly.
- If you get knocked over by a jumping dog, curl up into a ball on the ground covering your head and your neck with your arms. Wait for an adult to help or for the dog to go away.



Get to know your dog's signals



A frightened dog

Cowering with wide eyes and flat ears are signs that your dog might be frightened and this could lead to defensive bites. The back might be lowered and the tail down between the legs. Stiffening and straightening of the body can also be a sign of fear.

An angry dog

Showing of teeth, barking and flat ears can all be indications of anger in your dog. Do not ignore growling. Even if your dog has never bitten before, your dog is trying telling you something. Don't deter your dog from growling either. It is an important warning sign to express their feelings instead of going straight to a bite.



A stressed dog

Keep an eye out for subtle hints that your dog is stressed. Licking their lips when no food is nearby, panting when they are not thirsty or hot, acting sleepy, yawning at inappropriate times and pacing the room are all hints that your dog might be under stress.

An unsure dog

If your dog is trying to move away from you or your child, or is trying to leave the room, allow them the opportunity to do so. Do not let your child follow or continue to engage with your dog. Otherwise, this could lead to growling, snapping or, at worst, a warning bite.



Remember, these are just some common signs of stress and worry but a dog can show distress in many different ways. Get to know your dog's own signals.