

## 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 can 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 they can get frightened or stressed just as we can. 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.



- Never disturb a dog while they're eating or drinking
- Never disturb a dog when they're in bed
- Never approach a dog who isn't with their owner
- Never tease a dog, even if you think it's only fun
- Move calmly and quietly around dogs
- If you're uncomfortable around a dog, do the X Factor
- Remember, you can never know how a dog is feeling
- Always ask the owner for permission before you pet their dog
- Always let the dog sniff you before you rub them
- Always walk your dog with an adult
- Always treat dogs with respect



Dogs Trust offers FREE dog safety workshops for adults and children. Our aim is to ensure that we can all live 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](http://www.BeDogSmart.ie). Our workshops can be delivered in person or online depending on availability and 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 it's a great resource for the whole family.

Visit [www.BeDogSmart.ie](http://www.BeDogSmart.ie) to book a workshop or to download our **Be Dog Smart** Guide.

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## BE DOG SMART



### Tips and advice for all the family



Over 40% of Irish households have a pet dog.\* 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 safely 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 doggie companion, we have lots of helpful tips and advice for you to share and talk about with your family and friends.

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.

\* Dogs Trust Behaviour & Attitudes Survey 2019



## 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.

Here are some examples of situations to look out for.



### 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, but 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 or drinkin.

## Safety While Out and About

Although not every family owns 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 the home.

The essential message to get across is that children should stay calm 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 children or even like them, and they 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 side for three seconds and 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 you can give a gentle rub.
- If the dog does not come over to sniff, it's best to not rub them as they might not want to say hello today.

## What to do if you are scared of a dog

- If a dog approaches you 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 - but 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 suggests 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 they have never bitten before, your dog is trying to tell 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 they are trying to leave the room, let them. Do not let your child follow your dog or continue to engage with them. 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.**