

Safety around dogs

The bond between your child and dog can bring fun and happiness to family life. We don't expect our own dog to bite, but any dog can bite if they feel they have no other option.

Children are most likely to be bitten at home, by a familiar dog. Luckily most bites are preventable and close supervision is key.

 **A calm, happy dog** is less likely to react unsafely to children's natural exuberance.

- Give your dog a safe space of their own where they can go if they need time out. Have a rule to leave them alone when they're there.
- Keep them occupied – physical exercise and mental activity help keep your dog happy.
- Teach your child to be calm and kind with your dog. Avoid shouting, teasing or restrictive cuddles.

 **Close supervision** is the most important thing to keep children safe.

- Watch, listen and remain close when your child and dog are together.
- If either your dog or child seems unhappy, positively and calmly separate them. You can throw your dog a treat or toy, or lead your child away.
- **Understand your dog's body language** so you can spot signs they feel uncomfortable or stressed.
- When you know you'll be distracted during busier times, use safety gates to keep children and dogs separate. Or, take your child or dog with you.

 **Trigger times** – teach your child to leave your dog alone when they are:

- Sleeping – no-one likes to be woken up suddenly.
- Eating or having a treat – they might think you're going to take their food.
- Have a toy or something else they really like – they might not want to share!



 **Your growing child** – as your child changes, the risks can change too.

- Teach the rules to your child from an early age and keep explaining them as your child understands more.
- As your child becomes more mobile, review changes needed, like adding safety gates.
- Think ahead about your changing family life and new risks that can emerge. Read our fact sheet on bringing baby home.

 **Still worried?**

- If you're worried by the way your dog is with your child, talk to your vet. They'll check your dog's health and can refer you to a qualified animal behaviourist.
- Visit the **Animal Behaviour and Training Council** website to find a qualified behaviourist near you.