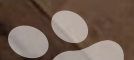


# Baby and Toddler Safety Around Dogs











**Canine  
Partners**

Amazing dogs. Transforming lives.



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## Introduction




Dogs are truly wonderful at being able to adapt and assimilate into our lives, there is a reason why we call them 'man's best friend'.

This can make it harder for us to remember that they are different; have their own language and way of communicating, at times there are things that we or our children may do that they find worrying.





Canine communication can be very subtle; sometimes we may not see or understand what they are trying to communicate until the dog escalates to a more obvious signal to us.

## Top Tips

**‘Grumble zones’ - These are generally areas in the house or garden where the space has become crowded, and the dog may feel trapped. The most common situations for this are:**

-  Children have a lot of stuff and communal areas can unintentionally become blocked leaving the dog without a way to exit easily.
-  Tight areas where you need to move past each other e.g. in the hall, on the stairs and doorways.
-  The dog is lying down with a high-value toy or long-lasting treat and the baby/toddler is crawling towards them.

**Have a strategy that works for you and does not cause bottle necks:**

-  Make sure there is enough space and exits in communal areas so the dog can choose to leave.
-  For tight spaces, cue the dog to an alternative location or send them on ahead of you and your child.
-  Use barriers or baby gates to prevent your child or dog from entering these zones without your support.
-  The dog should have its own space to enjoy high-value items.



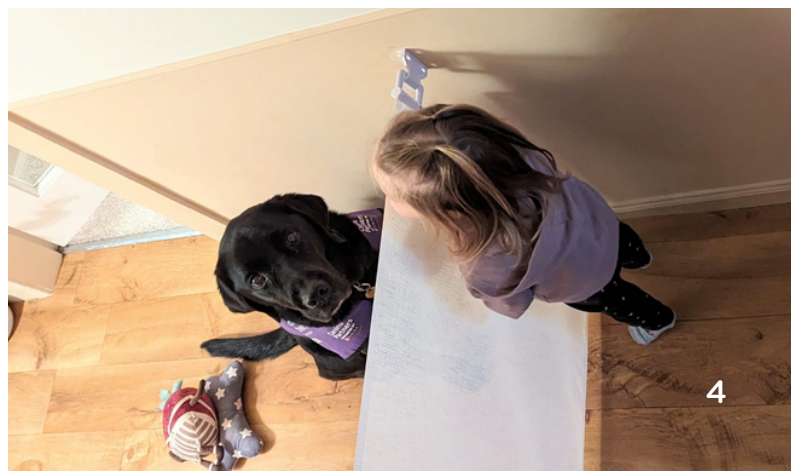
# Differences from the start

Newborn puppy's eyes and ears are closed for the first few weeks of their life; they live in a world of scent and warmth. A newborn baby can see straight away. From the start, we reward direct eye contact and make it very important as we have modelled, reinforced, engaged and communicated with babies this way from the very beginning. Young children cannot really understand the differences in communication styles across species and will model the behaviour that they have been rewarded for.

This can sometimes cause conflict with dogs as direct stares can be disconcerting to them, add in the fact that babies and toddlers are by their nature unsteady and unpredictable can cause a dog to be concerned and want to have more space between them and the child.

Whilst your dog may find eye contact with you their 'person' comfortable, as there is a relationship with a familiar bond, it does not follow through that it would be the same with a child and they may show signs of anxiety.

Young children or babies crawling right up to a dog and staring at them can cause the dog to feel in conflict. They can see the child as concerning especially if the dog has something of high value to it like food or a toy. It is important to always provide the dog with escape routes that you can cue them to use or they can choose for themselves. Provide place(s) where they can settle and rest where your child cannot gain access. Use of barriers, baby gates or X-pens to set up dog or child-free zones to set up both for success. For everyone's safety, your dog should always be able to eat, drink and rest in peace.



# Differences in greeting rituals

Human greetings are very different from dog-to-dog greetings. Dogs generally greet on a curve and sniff each other, they may then move on to offering other social signals to instigate play or carry on their way. When people greet each other, whilst we can be quite formal with people we don't know, with those we are familiar with we can be exuberant, quite loud, and there is lots of smiling and hugging.



Young toddlers and children will greet dogs like they would a person unless taught otherwise. They may rush up to a dog, reach directly for them, and try to hug and kiss them, unintentionally crowding the dog. For a lot of dogs, this will not be seen by them as acceptable and they will then show signs of discomfort. Greetings with dogs need to be managed, teach them the:

## Do's and don'ts of greeting a dog

### The do's

- 🐾 Always be adult-directed
- 🐾 An adult between the dog and child
- 🐾 Approach at a steady pace
- 🐾 Stop with space between
- 🐾 Turn side on, call dog and pat leg
- 🐾 Dogs choice to come closer or be touched
- 🐾 One-handed touching
- 🐾 Count to three and stop, see if the dog asks for more

### The don'ts

- 🐾 Allow the child to go on their own
- 🐾 Rush at the dog
- 🐾 Squeal/squealing with excitement\*\*
- 🐾 Hand reaching out
- 🐾 Allow two-handed grabbing of the dog
- 🐾 Hug the dog
- 🐾 Kiss the dog
- 🐾 Allow the child to put their face right up the dog's face

**\*\* Squealing can be very frightening and startling to a dog, even one that has been used to children, as it is sudden, very loud, high pitched and unpredictable.**

# Drawing Attention to the Dog and Displays of Affection



Babies and young children are naturally interested in dogs. Quite often new parents will prompt and encourage this interest from very early on trying to promote and encourage a familial link between their new baby and the dog.

This usually involves rewarding any interest in the dog that their young baby has e.g. 'ooh are you looking at Fido, aren't you clever!' and encouraging them to touch or stroke dogs. This will make an early brain

connection 'that dogs are there for touching', often leading to the child becoming fixated on the dog and once they are mobile making a beeline for them. To avoid this, when your baby starts to notice the dog you can acknowledge that they have noticed the dog 'Yes that's Fido' but move their attention onto something else - be more interesting than the dog.

Hugging and kissing are not part of a dog's natural communication repertoire, whilst they may tolerate it from a trusted person with whom they share a familial bond, this is often not the case with children. The child will be less familiar and lack the ability to read how the dog is feeling. Children are more impulsive and therefore less predictable for the dog, which along with less spatial awareness can lead to problems and miscommunication.

If your infant sees you regularly hug and kiss your dog, then they will want to do the same, especially when they are younger. Make sure the behaviours that your child is seeing are the ones you want them to do. You can always give your dog a hug and kiss (provided they consent) once your child is safely tucked up in bed.



We also need to manage our expectations of what the child can understand from a developmental standpoint. Often you can hear people asking and expecting a toddler or a young child to be 'gentle' or to be calm around the dog, but the child is not at the stage where they have the motor skills or are ready to understand those concepts. This leaves people frustrated and the dog anxious.

Think about simpler concepts that you can rehearse instead. E.g. if your child is crawling in the general direction of the dog, you could stop them and say 'Look Fido is resting, when Fido is resting we move around him. Let's move around him.' Show the child an example of what you mean, aim for leaving a 3 - 4 foot buffer around the dog to allow for room if the child was to fall or the dog moved a bit. When they have done it tell them 'You did it, you walked around the dog. Fido feels safe when you walk around him'. Modelling simple concepts like this for your young child with lots of praise will help them learn how to move around the dog safely.



## How the Baby's Development Impacts Your Dog

In the first few years of a baby's life, they change incredibly fast. They go from being a helpless babe in arms to fully walking, talking and doing all sorts of things. The parenting challenge is always evolving. For our dogs it is also very challenging, as the baby is constantly changing appearance and ability; a newborn baby looks nothing like a five year old child.



Below are some key changes to consider through the first couple of years.

**Newborn 0 - 3 months**



Big life changes for everyone, including the dog.

New babies are exhausting. Tired parents may not be able to give the dog the attention it is used to.

Newborn babies cry unexpectedly and they startle. Sometimes dogs can find this stressful.

Infants have a grabbing reflex and they grasp voluntarily - watch out for dogs' ears, fur and tails.

**3 - 6 months**



Babies' sight and observation improve, they become more aware of the dog.

Babies start to reach for things, this could include your dog or their toys.

Babies start to sit up and stare at things, including the dog, which some may find worrying.



**6 - 9 months**



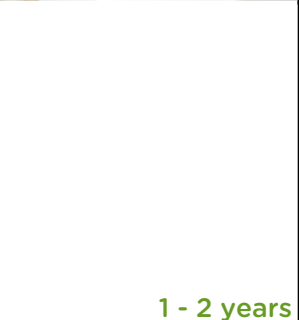
Babies become more active, and there is food!

Babies start eating solids = lots of mess and baby becomes 'delicious'!

Babies start to roll over and crawl. This could be towards the dog, their bed, toys, or food.

Babies may start to pull up to stand, may crowd the dog, or even grab at them to help them stand up.

**9 - 12 months**



Babies love to imitate us, try not to hug and kiss the dog in front of them.

Babies are starting to understand language and are watching how you treat your dog.

Faster babies may approach a sleeping dog.

Babies may be starting to walk, and falling is loud, which can be stressful for dogs.



Becoming more independent and adventurous - babies can view dogs as playmates at this age and need supervision

Reward the dog for good choices around the toddler such as being calm or choosing to settle elsewhere.

Toddlers can follow simple directions - it is a good time to involve them in some simple training games.







Dogs are very good at studying our body language (we are not), they rely on observation and predictability of what is going to happen in their environment and how people are going to interact. Adults and older children are mostly fairly predictable in their behaviour whilst babies and younger children are not. Young children and babies walk unbalanced, fall unexpectedly and may lunge, grab and pull suddenly at things. Their moods are very unpredictable and they can have sudden loud vocalisations that dogs find startling.

## Parent-guided Touch

We tend to think that stroking and petting a dog will foster a good relationship. However, a toddler or baby freely touching a dog is often not enjoyable for the dog and can be dangerous. Babies and toddlers do not need to be touching a dog, but it is inevitable that if they live together they will at some point.

At the appropriate time, the best way to introduce this is by parent-guided touch. The parent's hand is holding and guiding the toddler's hand. Touch should be one hand only, with the parent holding and guiding the hand, so that no gripping and pulling with the fingers can happen. It will take time for a child to master this concept interactions should always be supervised and managed.



## Useful external resources

Please note: Our expert Aftercare Team have researched the links on this page to provide you with as much support as possible. However, Canine Partners is not affiliated with the websites or associated companies.



Family Paws Education has a lovely section in free-to-print resources that you can use with children to educate them on canine body language.

[familypaws.com](https://familypaws.com)



Dogs and Babies Learning has a great blog with articles on keeping babies and dogs safe.

[dogsandbabieslearning.com](https://dogsandbabieslearning.com)



RSPCA Children and dogs advice

[rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/company/children](https://rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/company/children)



Pooch Parenting has some useful info-graphics that you can talk through with a child.

[poochparenting.net/kids-and-dogs-keeping-the-peace](https://poochparenting.net/kids-and-dogs-keeping-the-peace)

