



Fear of Children

It's not uncommon for dogs to start acting uncomfortable while in the presence of children of various ages. Some dogs feel uncomfortable when babies learn how to roll over and crawl, while others find toddlers' erratic walking, tumbling to the ground, and loud flailing tantrums to be terrifying. For other dogs, it's just a matter of a child being at the exact same eye level as them to cause them distress and feel threatened. Here are some links and tips for how to manage a dog that may bite children out of fear or seems to dislike or avoid children:

- It's always important to supervise your children while they interact with the dog. If you're not there to supervise, then the dog may need to be on the other side of a baby gate, crated, or in a different room. Also keeping a leash tied to your belt loop so that your dog is always by your side will ensure you have control over where the dog is in reference to you and your children.
- Help form a positive relationship between your dog and your children by allowing your kids to toss him treats, practice his obedience, or feed him his meals (also while you are always present). Encourage them to play quieter/calmer games, such as have your kids toss them toys or all take the dog for a walk outside as a family, and once they are more comfortable together, you can supervise chase games in the backyard. If your dog ever becomes overwhelmed and starts to cower, tuck its tail, shake, lip lick, turn its head away, whale eye/bug eye, or growl, then stop the interaction immediately and remove your children from the environment so your dog can cool down and relax. If it's easier to remove your dog instead, make sure you give them a treat when putting them in a crate or a separate room so they do not think they are being punished for communicating that they were uncomfortable with the children and so they don't form a negative association with the children. You will not be accidentally reinforcing the growling or cowering.
- Give your dog one-on-one training time just with an adult so you can form a strong relationship with your dog and so you teach your dog to look to you for direction instead of letting them think they can take charge of situations. Behaviors that come in handy include: Sit, Stay, Come, Off, Down, and Look.
- "Look" or "Look at me" is an important but often underappreciated trained behavior to teach your dog. By teaching your dog to calmly look at you, you can redirect their attention back on to you when they are getting flustered or distracted, and then you can call them to you away from the kids if you feel like your dog is becoming overwhelmed.
- Teach your dog to "go to your place/bed/mat/pillow/kennel/crate/etc" so that, should your dog start to look overwhelmed by your child, you can send them to a safe, quiet area away from the kids to relax. Start by locating an area out of highly trafficked areas such as the corner of a room, under an end table or desk, behind furniture, or in a crate, and then make that area comfortable for your dog by placing a bed there. Once you've set the area up, practice walking your dog over there and only rewarding them while they are standing, sitting, or lying on the bed. Once they do that, reliably start associating a cue with the behavior, such as pointing in the direction of the bed and saying "go to your place" and reward immediately when they get there. Then you can begin using that behavior when your animal appears stressed.

- Teach your kids how to appropriately approach and pet a dog. Running up and leaning over a dog to pet it or trying to hug a dog, though very natural for a child, is a threatening and antagonistic behavior for almost all animals (cats and dogs alike). Help prevent the chances that your child is bitten by a dog or cat by teaching them to approach a dog slowly, turn sideways, kneel down, and then let the animal decide to approach and sniff them first before even attempting to touch it or have your child sit in your lap and call the animal and let the animal choose whether it wants to approach.
- If you have a newly adopted dog that doesn't seem to be doing well with your kids, keep them separate for most of the day except for brief, 20-minute, supervised interactions so your new dog doesn't become overwhelmed; then, gradually increase the time that your new dog spends with your kids depending on how the dog is doing behaviorally. It may take some time for a dog to warm up to new children. It's also not uncommon to have a dog that was fine with an infant but then starts to behave differently with a toddler that is crawling, climbing, and stumbling unpredictably all over the common areas of the house.
- Consider taking a class that helps prepare parents and their pets for the arrival of their new bundle of joy with Family Paws Parent Education. They offer two classes: Dogs & Storks and Dogs & Toddlers.
- If you can't trust your dog with kids, you may need to surrender him or her to a shelter or try to rehome your dog with other friends or family that do not have young children. You could also try to teach your dog to wear a basket muzzle (which still allows a dog to pant and drink water) while you are home to supervise your dog but can rest assured that they can't bite anyone. Never leave a dog muzzled for long periods of time or leave them alone while muzzled should they chew on it or get it caught on something.

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

Written by the Wayside Waifs Animal Behavior Team
 © 2015 Copyright Wayside Waifs, Inc. All rights reserved.

Below are some helpful links to handouts and videos with even more info about how to deal with dogs and children:

www.familypaws.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjCcVXGFvTs>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/canine-body-language>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/dog-bite-prevention>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/introducing-your-dog-your-new-baby>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/preparing-your-dog-new-baby>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/preparing-your-dog-life-toddler>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-how-behave-around-children>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/fear-children>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/desensitization-and-counterconditioning>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-wear-muzzle>

<http://info.drSophiaYin.com/Portals/13722/docs/SY18x24GreetPostersm.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrQ1KO4j2bc>

<http://www.lolathepitty.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/How-not-to-interact-poster-Proof3.png>

<http://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs>