



## Sharing your home with dogs and children.

Whilst dogs and children can have super relationships, it can also be fraught with safety issues often as a result of miscommunication between species. If you have children and share your home with a dog, or dogs, the following list is the Dog Safety Education Executive guide to creating, and maintaining, harmony.

We all hear, far too often, of placid and friendly dogs who bite when pushed too far by the resident, or a visiting, child; this is our way of helping you preventing this from happening in your family.

1. ***Remember it's a dog!*** Dogs are intrinsically social predators and can only behave like dogs, so the kindest thing you can do is to treat them like a dog, not another child.
2. ***Fun & Games:*** You and the children should spend quality time with the dog on a daily basis. Playing games, teaching the dog new activities or exercises, you must be the conduit in these sessions, teaching both the child and the dog the rules of the game. Dog toys should be removed from the house, particularly when you have young children (toddling crawling) so that the dog learns that objects found on the floor in the home are not his and there is no conflict in this regard.
3. ***Exercise*** is vital on at least a daily basis – your dog should experience new locations daily and have control whilst out walking, periods of free running and periods of lead walking under your control are the minimum. Children should be involved in the exercise regime wherever possible, but of course should always be in parental company when doing so.
4. ***Familiarity breeds contempt:*** Your dog should most certainly not be in constant company with you and the children. Psychologically the space is helpful for the dog and from a safety aspect enables you to relax without worrying. At least a couple of hours per day the dog should be in a room away from you and the children. So when you are in the lounge for example in the evening, your dog can spend time alone in the kitchen or in the fresh air of the garden and be in your company only when you are fully focussed.
5. ***Your own space:*** We all need our own time and space. Your dog should learn that he does not have the right to access your personal space and time for rest, nor that of the children. Your dog should have a suitable place that he sleeps, in the kitchen is the most common place and that his access to upstairs areas is forbidden. When children get up during the night for a drink or whatever, the dog is not disturbed.
6. ***Space Invaders:*** It is of equal importance that your dog learns not to invade your child's space and that your child learns not to invade your dogs space. A dogs bed, food bowl et al should not be approached by a child.
7. ***Food is Primary:*** Feed your dog the best, most natural and species appropriate diet that you possibly can. Food is immensely powerful; when you chuck it in a bowl once a day, it doesn't seem so, but link that food to certain areas that you wish to improve upon. It is very useful under the guidance of your dog trainer or behaviour practitioner that Children are involved in feeding routines. However, you do need to consult with a dog behaviour expert and not cherry pick information found on the internet.



8. **Status brings privileges:** You and your children can sit on the sofa, your dog should not. Facial bites on children are too common and the dogs elevated position on the chair and psychological status is unsafe.
9. **Don't be complacent:** It is all too easy to forget that your dog is a dog, with the communication systems of a canine – not a fluffy little person. Safety has to be the order of the day regardless of the age of your dog or child.
10. **Hello and Goodbye:** Being a parent of a child of a certain age, means naturally children of a similar age visiting your home. Some may be au fait with dogs, others not. After the initial greeting, the dog should be kept with you or away from the children in order for all to be able to relax. Even the most placid and good natured dogs have a limit.
11. **Be consistent:** Canine leaders are black and white, there is no vagueness – the rules are always the same, they do not change at the weekend or at Christmas, they are ever unchanging. We as people seem to have a little problem with being consistent, but to lead a canine, this is not optional; if your dog (or your child, for that matter) can get away with something one in twenty times, he may continue to try.
12. **Mental Stimulation:** Dogs don't have much to do all day; they don't pick the kids up from school, cook dinner, go to work, answer the phone, sit on the play-station or watch TV – they just watch you and take their cues from that! Give them some focus, tire them out – tired dogs are good dogs. Be creative with exercise and feeding routines; why feed them in two seconds when you could prolong it for an hour?
13. **Stay Calm:** Animated screaming and playing, whilst completely natural for children, is natural for dogs for a completely different reason. Of course, let your children be children, but when the dog is present, ensure the children are calm, stay walking and stay confident.
14. **Stay present:** Never leave your child alone with your dog – make sure everyone knows the rules.
15. **Stay real:** Whilst we may all like to think of our dogs as extended family members who understand our social code and love us unconditionally – remember, they are dogs and their intrinsic reactions will always be quicker than your counter reactions.
16. **Get help:** The UK has a wealth of remarkable dog trainers and behaviourists. Seek help and advice – prevention is always better than cure.



The Canine & Feline Behaviour Association is the very best place to start. [www.cfba.co.uk](http://www.cfba.co.uk)