

KIDS AND DOGS



Dogs can be wonderful companions for children, offering friendship, responsibility, and plenty of fun.

Growing up with a dog helps children develop compassion, empathy, and respect for living things. Having a family pet can also teach kids valuable lessons about caring for others. However, it's important to recognise that dogs and children communicate differently, and misunderstandings can happen in an instant.

A recent study found that incidents involving the family dog were the most common reasons children were admitted to hospital for dog bites. As a parent or caregiver, it's important to invest time into learning to speak dog so that you can help both your two and four legged family members stay safe.

Warning signs

Dogs communicate using subtle body language signs that show us how they're feeling. Pay close attention to your dog when they're near children and keep an eye out for signs that show that they might be uncomfortable or ready to move away.

Common signs of stress in dogs:

- Lip licking
- Whites of the eyes showing
- Looking away or trying to move away
- A tucked tail
- Holding ears back



Top tips for safe interactions between children and the family dog

- Actively supervise children and pay attention to your dog's body language.
- Look for signs your dog is enjoying the interaction such as moving closer for more pats.
- If you aren't able to give your full attention separate children and dogs using baby gates.
- Avoid hugs – hugging is a human behaviour and is stressful for dogs. Teach children to blow kisses or wave hello instead.
- Teach children to leave the dog alone when sleeping or eating.
- Show older children how to interact by teaching tricks and rewarding the dog with treats.

