

# Be safe with dogs

A guide for families

The charity dedicated to  
helping sick, injured and  
homeless pets since 1897.



**BLUE** FOR  
PETS  
**CROSS**

# Be safe with dogs

There are over seven million dogs in the UK and many of them are bought for companionship and as family pets. It is important that children understand how to behave around the dogs in their homes and in their community so they can enjoy their company and remain safe.

## Benefits of having a dog

There are many benefits of having a dog in the family:

- Children with pets have better self-esteem, empathy and social skills
- They provide loyalty
- There is a reduction of incidence of allergies and asthma when the baby has a cat or dog in the home in their first year of life. The children should also have a better immune system.
- Walking your dog and caring for it brings an increase in exercise

- Petting a dog or cat can reduce anxiety and owning a pet can aid relaxation. Dog owners tend to have lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. They also suffer fewer medical problems generally.
- Children can learn about responsibility, compassion and respect for another living thing

However, we often hear in the media of children getting bitten by dogs. We have put together this booklet to help you to understand more about dog behaviour and how to teach your children to stay safe around dogs.

## The reasons dogs bite:

- They are protecting themselves or their property
- They may be in pain
- They may feel trapped
- They may have been surprised by your actions
- They may be very excited



## Of the people who get bitten:

- 70 per cent of dog bites happen in the home
- 80 per cent are bitten by dogs that they regularly meet. With children, this is probably because they are overfamiliar with the dog and don't stick to the house rules on how to behave around dogs.
- Remember that even the mildest dog may bite in a given situation so it is important for the children to 'think dog'

## Dog body language – read the signs

These illustrations will help you to understand what the dog is trying to tell you:

- Happy to meet you
- I'm not sure about you yet (please keep away)
- Go away

As a general rule never approach a dog that has a stiff body posture. Relaxed dogs are safer.

If a dog walks away or backs away from you, it does not want you close.

## Go away



This dog is afraid. He cowers away and may hide under furniture. Ears flat back. He may show his teeth, snarl or growl.



This dog is bold and stands his ground. The hair on his back is raised and his body is tense.



This dog feels vulnerable and wants you to keep away. He will move further from you and then roll on his back. If you move closer he may bite to drive you away.

## I'm not sure about you yet



This dog moves slowly and he has his head lowered. He raises his paw and may lick his lips to show he is a little uncertain.



This dog moves away from you with his head below the line of his shoulders. His tail is tucked away and he may glance over his shoulder showing the white of his eye.



Again his head is lowered and his tail is tucked away. He looks at you sideways and may yawn to show he is not certain.

## Seeing the world from the dog's viewpoint

Some of the things that a child might want to do with a dog may be seen as a threat even if the child is trying to be friendly.



## Consider the following situations:

- The child wants to cuddle the cute dog with the big wide eyes
- The child wants to take the dog's toy away from it so they can play a game
- The child wants to get into the bed with the dog
- The child goes to comfort the dog that is hiding under the table



## Happy to meet you



He has a relaxed body, ears forward or relaxed and a hanging tongue. His tail and body are wagging.



His play bow is inviting you to play. His front legs are straight forward with the back end raised. Tail high and wagging. He may bark to get your attention.



Tail wagging. His face is interested and alert. He has a relaxed jaw with hanging tongue.



## Rules when we are out and about

- Always ask before approaching any dog. Ask the owner where on the body to stroke the dog.
- Never touch a dog that is left alone outside a shop or similar situation
- Don't enter a garden if a dog is loose, even if you know it
- Never run or shout around a dog. Always walk past calmly
- Do not hug a dog. How would you feel if a stranger hugged you?

## So how should we behave around dogs?

Always be calm, quiet and move slowly around pets.

### When meeting a dog:

- Ask the owner if it is OK to stroke the dog
- Let the dog sniff your hand, don't move your hand towards the dog
- If the dog seems happy with this, stroke the dog on the shoulder or chest

### If a strange dog runs up to you or if the dog you are visiting is very excited to see you:

- Stand still
- Make no noise
- Drop food or toys you are carrying away from you
- Fold your arms
- Look away from the dog
- Move away slowly. Never run.

This will make you very boring to the dog and help him to calm down

### If you are knocked to the ground:

- Roll up into a ball with your face to the ground
- Make no sound
- Cover your face with your hands

### Establish house rules:

The aim of these rules is to keep children safe. It is important that all members of the household and all visitors stick to these rules.

Children need to be supervised when they are around dogs.

### To stay safe they should not approach when the dog:

- is eating
- has a toy
- has puppies
- is sleeping
- is in bed or under a chair or table
- is sick or injured
- is trying to move away

### Have clear rules about where dogs are allowed.

- Every member of the household should train, groom and feed your dog

- Do not allow chase games or wrestling games between children and your dog. Your dog may become too excited and hurt someone.
- Never sneak up and surprise a dog
- Do not allow anyone to tease a dog
- Never hit or hurt a dog
- Never allow the dog to mouth your skin or clothes. Your dog must never think that it is OK to touch your skin or clothes with his teeth.

### Other Blue Cross leaflets that you may find useful

- Choosing the right dog (D1)
- Training your dog (D16)
- Introducing your dog to the family (D18)
- How to play with your dog (D23)
- Your dog and your baby (D25)



# Happy, healthy pets

**Blue Cross** advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)

**Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:**

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
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## Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

## How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

**Please call us on 0845 370 1027 or visit [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)**



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