

Animal Safety for Kids, Guidelines and Rules

Kids are naturally drawn to animals. In order to help make “man’s best friend” your child’s best friend, it is important to take into account the guidelines for the safety of your child around animals.

Having a pet can be a very positive and rewarding experience for a child. Children learn responsibility and compassion through caring for a pet, and gain a wonderful companion as well.

As a parent, you must be the one to decide the appropriate time to introduce a pet to the family based on your child’s age, behavior, maturity, and interest.

In making such a decision you will need to determine how much of the animal’s care you expect the child to be responsible for and/or how much you intend to be responsible for.



Recognizing your pets moods.

The most important lesson to teach your children is to always treat animals gently and with kindness. Animals that are in pain, are afraid, or feel threatened are most likely to bite or scratch to protect themselves.

Animals, like humans, have times they just want to be left alone. Help your child learn how to recognize your pets mood, and to give him/her some space when they would rather be left alone.

To ensure animal safety for kids teach your child never to pull an animal's ear, tail, or feet when playing and to not wrestle roughly with animals. Children should never restrain animals against their will.

Your pet is a family member!

Family pets adjust to children best when they are treated as part of the family. Dogs should never be left outdoors chained up - dogs that are permanently chained up are more aggressive and more likely to bite.

Spay or neuter your pets; pets that have been spayed or neutered are less likely to bite than pets that have not been “fixed.” Consider enrolling your dog in basic obedience classes – even a well-behaved dog can benefit from such instruction and it is a great bonding experience between pet and owner.

Keep your pet’s immunizations, preventative meds (heartworm), flea and tick treatment and check-ups current. It’s to the benefit of animal safety for kids to guard against disease.

Use a microchip and/or tag with up to date contact information so if your pet is ever lost, the odds of being found and returned home safely are greatly increased.

Animal safety tips for kids

- Avoid the face and head area when petting dogs and cats. Stroke along the neck, back, and sides. Cats, unlike dogs, may bite or scratch when rubbed on the belly.
- Leave animals alone when eating, sleeping, chewing on a toy, or caring for its babies.
- Pay attention to warning signs – an animal that is growling or hissing wants to be left alone!
- Explain to your child that animals may be startled by loud, high-pitched screams or noises and sudden movements.
- Never approach an animal you do not know. Animals in vehicles



and yards may behave aggressive and territorial and are likely to bite. Always ask permission from an animal's owner before approaching a friend, neighbor, or acquaintance's animal – even if you have played with the animal in the past.

- Never approach an animal that appears injured or sick.
- Never approach stray animals.
- Teach your child not to run when approached by a strange dog. Running may provoke the dog to chase and attack. Teach your child to act like a “tree” by standing still and staring straight ahead until the dog leaves or acting like a “rock” if sitting or knocked to the ground by curling up in a ball keeping his/her hands over his/her ears. If a dog attacks teach your child to throw something like a backpack or coat for the dog to bite.
- If your child is responsible for cleaning animal cages, litter boxes, or cleaning up the yard after a dog have him/her wear rubber gloves and always wash his/her hands when done.
- Keep food dishes and litter boxes out of reach of babies and toddlers.

Introducing your new baby to pets.

On the other hand, if in your particular situation you already have a dog or cat and are planning to introduce your new baby to the household, the following are some helpful tips to ensure animal safety for kids as well as a smooth transition period.

- Even before the baby arrives it is a good idea to let your pet smell blankets or clothing with baby powder or oil on them so that the pet becomes accustomed to the new smells. Likewise it is a good idea to play recordings of a baby crying several times and to run baby equipment, such as the swing, so that that pet becomes accustomed to the new sounds that the baby will bring to the home.
- It is a good idea to put a baby gate in the doorway to the baby's room to keep dogs out of the room, rather than closing the door. That way the dog can still keep family members in sight and will not feel as isolated.
- Never force interaction between your pet and the baby which could lead to anxiety or injury – you want your pet to view the interaction positively.
- Introduce the new baby slowly to dogs or cats.
- Consider taking your dog to obedience classes
- Do not allow pets to sleep with the baby
- Cats don't usually display jealousy towards a new baby, but may be attracted to the warmth of the baby's bed or bassinette.
- Life can be hectic with a newborn, but don't forget your pet. They will still need your time and attention to.

Your child's health and pets

Children under the age of five are more likely to contract diseases from animals than most other people.

This is largely due to that fact that young children are less likely to wash hands well and are more likely to put their hands or other potentially dirty objects in their mouths.

Children under the age of five should never be unsupervised when interacting with animals, their hands should be washed after contact with animals, and they should not be allowed to kiss pets.

Due to the increased risk of disease from certain animals, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) specifically recommend that infants and children under the age of five should avoid contact with the following animals: reptiles, amphibians, baby chicks, ducklings, and petting zoo animals.