

Toddlers and young children do not always have the mental understanding or physical ability to be consistently gentle and often do all the wrong things around dogs. They grab, hug, hold, tug, pull, squeal, scream, waddle, run, wave their arms, fall down and cry. The movement and noise can be very attractive to a dog, and he may interpret it as an initiation to play. It can also frighten or confuse some dogs as the movement and noise is unpredictable.

All the touching, prodding and pulling can make dogs a little uncomfortable and force them to back away. Dogs have many ways to communicate to us that a situation is becoming uncomfortable. They will use a variety of signals in order to avoid confrontation. Children are not sophisticated enough to read often subtle body language and by ignoring them will often unintentionally push the dog to react.

With this in mind, it is very important that parents take the responsibility to educate their children on how to interact with their pet. It is their job to keep both the child and the dog “**S.A.F.E**”

SUPERVISE

It is very important that dogs and toddlers are never left unsupervised. Dogs and children can make mischief very quickly. Most of the problems that arise between dogs and children can be avoided through supervision.

ANTICIPATE

A dog has only a few ways of protesting. He can avoid the situation by moving away out of reach or hiding under something. He can also warn by growling, curling his lip or snapping without making contact. If a dog is retreating from a child, looks uncomfortable or exhibited warning signals, help the dog by removing him from the situation and giving him some time away from the child. By anticipating the problem before it happens you are reducing potential miscommunication between pet and child. Do not expect a dog to tolerate something that a person would not.

FAIR AND CONSISTENT

Be fair on your dog and on your child. If you tell your child to stop bothering the dog, make sure it happens. If the dog is playing too hard but your child is not encouraging it, give the dog some space and quiet time. Clear signals are very important when dealing with children and dogs. Be consistent and follow the rules of space and gentle interaction every time.

EDUCATE

This applies to both the dog and child. Teach your child that dogs should be treated with care. Do not allow teasing, hitting or other harassment. Encourage your child to behave calmly around your pet and not to “whip” up the situation. Involve your child in basic obedience training and teach him some very simple handling exercises. Train your dog to be gentle around your child. Basic manners are very important for all dogs. Exercises such as anti-jump, feedback on play biting and basic sits, stays and downs are important for any situation. 🐾

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to make Hong Kong a kinder environment for animals. Because we are not a Government Department and animal charities do not qualify for membership in the Community Chest, we must rely on YOU. Please consider all of the animals in need of food, shelter, and medical care and help us make a difference in their lives.

If you've found this material useful and would like more information, leave a donation, or sign-up as an SPCA member, please email BT@spca.org.hk, visit www.spca.org.hk, or contact us on 2232-5567.