



Dogs and children:

**Living happily
together
grown-ups' guide**

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. What is close supervision?	5
3. Understanding your dog	7
4. Unsafe behaviours around dogs	22
5. Understanding more about close supervision	30
6. Extra ways to set your family up for success	34
7. Examples of close supervision in action	42
8. Simple ways to get started with close supervision	49

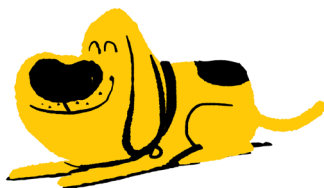
Introduction

When we bring a dog into our home, we all dream of living a life together where we all feel safe, happy and understood. That's why we have put this manual together to help you, your children, and your pooch build the safe and loving relationships you all dream of!

Step 1: First we will look at how dogs experience our human world, and how you can learn to speak dog by **understanding dog body language**.

Step 2: Then we will teach you how to **spot common risky behaviours** that might worry dogs and often precede bites.

Step 3: Experts agree that most dog bites are preventable, and a great way to prevent dog bites to children is by closely supervising when children and dogs are together. We will show you exactly **what close supervision is**.





Step 4: We have loads of top tips, tricks and techniques that help **set your family up for success** (both two and four legged members) to have a safe and happy life together.

Step 5: If you'd like to see how close supervision applies to common child and dog situations, we've got you covered, we'll show you **close supervision in action** in common family scenarios.

Step 6: After so much important information, where do you start? Don't worry we've got that covered too! We know change can be daunting, so we've created a list of key **starting points** to help you get the ball rolling and support you in forming life-long habits one step at a time.

What is close supervision?

Though we will cover **close supervision** in more detail later on, here is a brief summary that you can keep in mind as you read the next two sections.

The ‘three pillars’ of **close supervision** are – stay close, step in, separate.

1. Stay close

Watch, listen, and remain close during child-dog interactions. It’s important to do all of these as each one alone is unlikely to be sufficient.



2. Step in

Intervene when either the child or dog looks uncomfortable or acts in an unsafe way. You can use a 'Stop, Space, Separate' approach - **stop** any unsafe behaviour from either the child or dog, create **space** or physically **separate** the child and dog in a calm and gentle way.



3. Separate

Separate the child and dog if you are likely to be preoccupied or distracted.

Encourage the child and dog to go in separate rooms, take the child or dog with you, or use a physical barrier such as a baby gate.

Understanding your dog

Dogs are social and sentient

Dogs are a highly social species with the ability to gauge how other dogs are feeling, and to change their behaviour accordingly to help form successful relationships. Dogs are also **sentient beings**, and so can experience emotions such as joy, frustration, fear, panic, curiosity, as well as pain (both physical and emotional).

Like us humans, dogs are at their best when they feel safe, happy and understood. The more we can understand what influences our dogs' emotions and behaviour, and how they communicate with us, the happier and safer our lives will be with our four-legged family members.

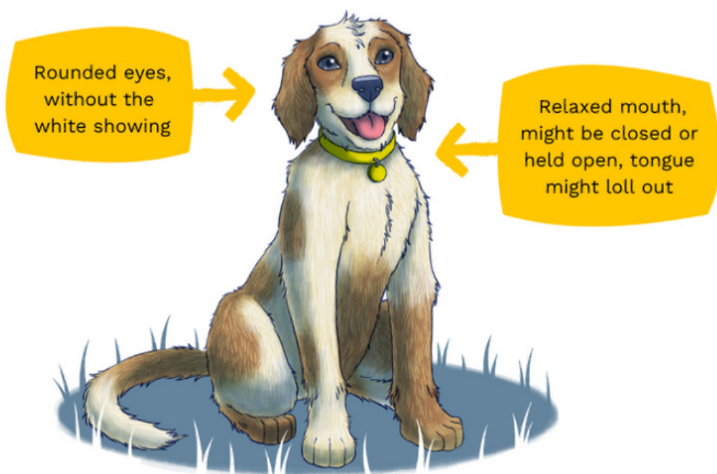
How dogs communicate

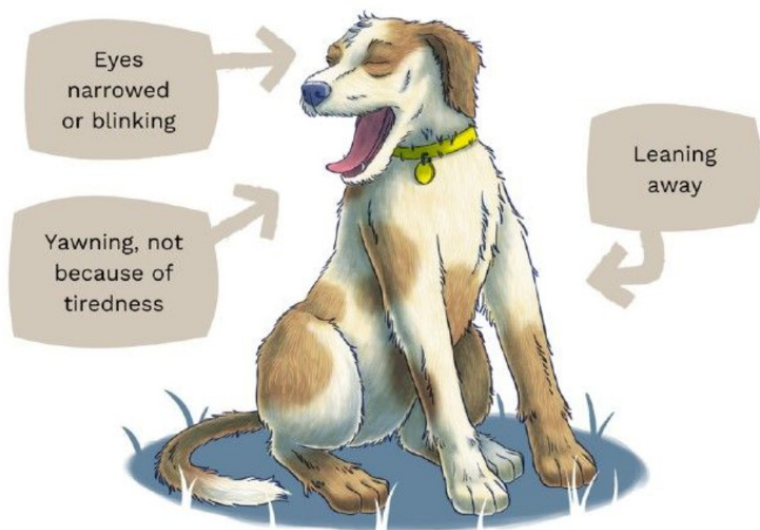
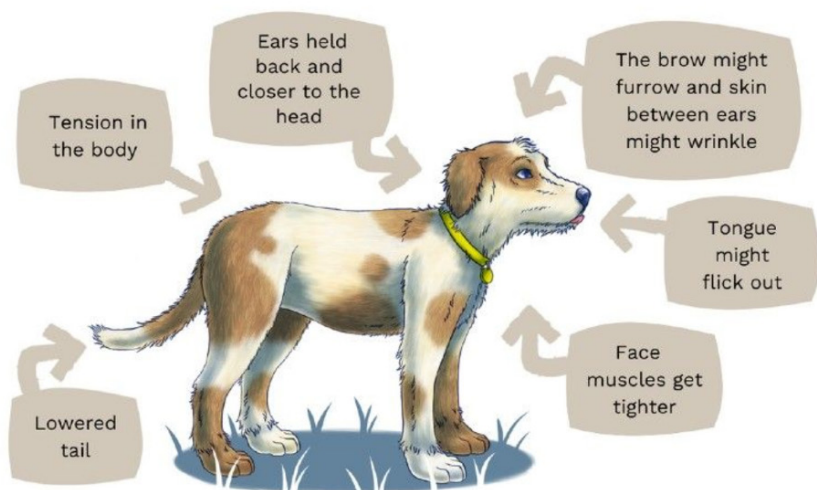
Dogs can't speak to us to let us know how they feel. They can, however, tell us through their **body language and behaviour**. Dogs use a wide range of

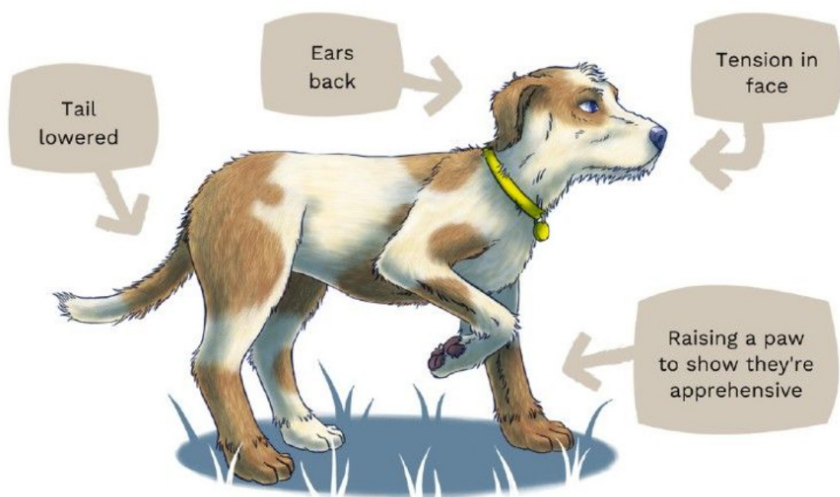
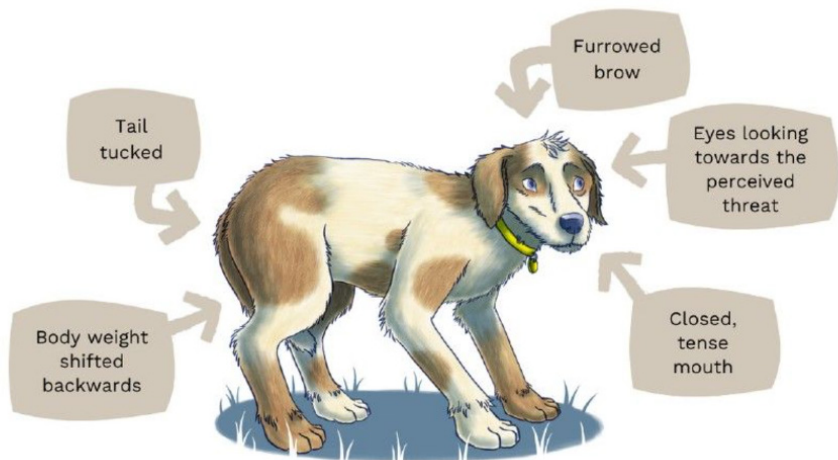
vocalisations, facial and body signals to display how they are feeling. Dogs can feel worried, unsettled, or the need for some quiet time just like us. An important way they cope with this is to create **space** - dogs will often try to move away from a thing or situation that is worrying them, they may also use their body language to indicate to us that they need space too.

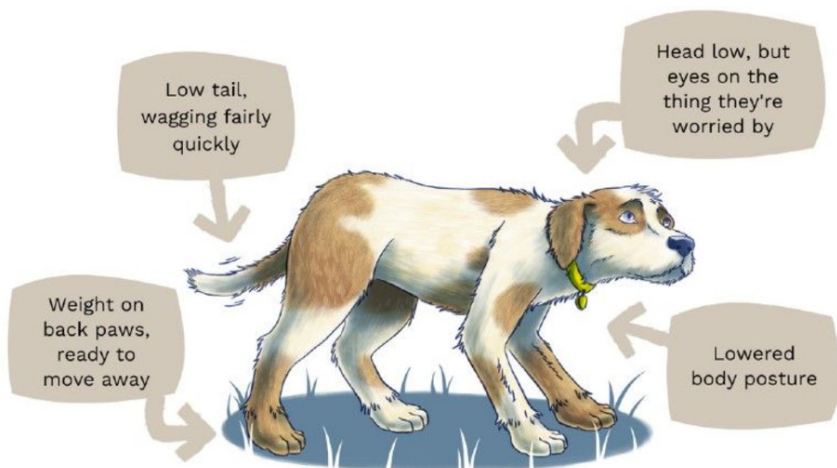
Dog body language examples

Take a look at these body language images, and you can see how much our dogs' ears, eyes, tails and mouths can vary, not to mention their posture and facial expressions. Scroll down to learn how your dog communicates with you!









Learn more about **understanding dog body language**.

Context of body language is important

These facial and body signals can give us lots of information on how the dog may be feeling, however, it is important to look at this in the context of the situation the dog is in. For example, if the dog is on their bed alone and is just waking up, they may yawn (a common signal that a dog may be worried), this is more likely to mean they are sleepy rather than worried.

Dogs look to diffuse conflict first

Dogs are social animals and want to protect relationships, and their safety, by avoiding conflict where they can. For dogs to feel safe it is important they have **choice** to easily move away if they want to.

Creating **space** is a way dogs can calmly diffuse a situation where they might be starting to feel worried or concerned. Dogs will also look to communicate and diffuse conflict with subtle body language signals that indicate they are not feeling comfortable.





Dogs seemingly tolerate a lot

People often think that a dog isn't unhappy with something unless they are growling, barking or biting. Remember we said that dogs are conflict diffusers? This means they will avoid showing these more obvious signals of unhappiness until there is no other choice, and often they will seemingly tolerate things they dislike by not using these overt signs. Watching their body language more closely can help us see when our dog is trying to 'quietly' tell us that they are unhappy (something we previously might have missed and assumed they were enjoying themselves).

Dogs repeat what works for them

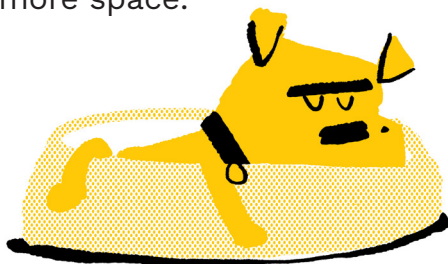
Dogs tend to repeat behaviour that works well for them, and this is one reason why responding to your dog's behaviour and subtle body language is so important. If you react to subtle body language when your dog is worried, unsettled or scared, by moving away and giving them space, then they're more likely to communicate in this way next time because it was successful.

If we don't recognise or react to these subtle signals, a dog may feel the need to use more obvious communication signs, like baring their teeth or growling in an attempt to help them feel safe by making you move away. They can then learn this is how they need to communicate in the future to be understood.

Recognising and reacting to our dog's subtle signals, helps them avoid the need to communicate in more obvious ways.

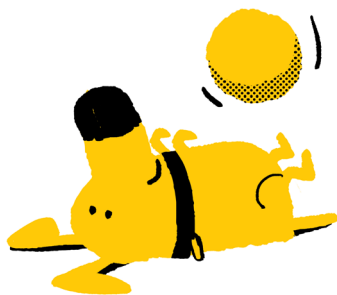
Dogs like space

Giving a dog space when they are eating, sleeping, or have something they value (like a toy or a chew) – as well as when they ask for it using their body language – is a perfect way to show you love them. Invading a dog's personal space can increase the risk of them feeling threatened or worried – this is particularly true during these times when dogs naturally require more space.



MythBusters – Helping your dog feel comfortable when you are near to them when they have valuable things is important. However, there are some outdated ideas of how to do this. One such idea is that you need to put your hand in your dog's food or stroke your dog while they are eating to get them used to it. Unfortunately, this often has the opposite effect, as dogs prefer space at these times, and can feel worried with people being too close or touching them. A better approach is to encourage your dog to associate you being nearby with positive things, rather than disturbing with them while they are eating or taking something valuable away from them.

Learn how to **prevent your dog from resource guarding**.



Dogs like choice

Giving dogs **choice** to move away freely from interactions is a great way to ensure they are enjoying themselves. Try to be aware of things you may do accidentally that might remove your dog's **choice** to move away (i.e. leaning over them, or approaching them in a crate/small space).

MythBusters - There are training methods based on outdated theories of dog behaviour that can encourage owners to use techniques that can be threatening, worrying, scary and painful for dogs. These approaches often ignore the very body language signals we would recommend you **recognise** and **react** to in a more proactive and compassionate way.

The outdated and debunked dominance theory says that dogs want to gain a higher social status relative to other dogs or people - research now shows that this is incorrect. Instead, they can learn how another dog is feeling by reading their body language and changing their own behaviour in response, often with diffusing conflict and maintaining relationships as a priority.

Find out more about why using dominance as the basis for the relationship with your dog is problematic [here](#).

Reward based methods

Our behaviour can have a significantly positive affect on our dogs. Using praise, treats, toys and play as rewards for behaviour we want our dogs to repeat is the most effective and kindest way for dogs to learn. That's why we recommend reward-based methods, and understanding our dogs better, as the best way to achieve lasting change. Reward based methods are proven to be the most effective method for changing your dog's behaviour too!

Find your nearest [Dog School training classes](#).

Dogs like time

Life can be exciting, worrying and scary for our dogs and they often need time to feel calm in new or exciting situations, be it a visitor to the house, a trip somewhere new, or following a visit from the postman.

Give your dog **time** to get accustomed to new things or to recover from big events (or a succession of smaller ones) to help them feel calmer, more relaxed and to be at their best. Giving your dog **time** to rest, relax or take part in their favourite calming activity (like enrichment that encourages sniffing, licking or chewing), can also help to prevent trigger stacking.





Do you know about trigger stacking?

Trigger-stacking can occur with all animals, including dogs, when separate situations that a dog experiences – good or bad – happen one after the other, without time for the dog to calm down and relax in between.



This means that excitement or anxiety stacks up, building the dog's level of arousal or alertness until suddenly they become overwhelmed, causing them to react. If a dog is trigger-stacked, something they could normally tolerate on a calmer day, might cause them to react in an unexpected or uncharacteristic way. Using your knowledge of your dog's body language to **recognise** and **react** to signs of emotional and physical stress allows you to help give them **time** and **space** to recover.

It's also helpful to keep in mind that they may be more sensitive in the subsequent hours, meaning your dog might need more **time** to recover from a stressful experience. You might also notice changes in your dog's behaviour such as them not being as attentive to your family or appearing clingier and seeking reassurance.

What else can impact our dog's behaviour

Basic needs

For dogs to be at their best physically and emotionally it is important that their basic needs are met. This includes obvious things like food, water and appropriate exercise. But crucially, they also need sufficient mental stimulation, quality sleep and a quiet space to rest undisturbed whenever they need. We know from our own experience if we lose out on rest, are under stimulated, or can't escape a busy or loud environment when we need some quiet time, this can really impact how we feel and behave too. Providing your dog with these important needs helps to avoid stress that can occur when these needs aren't met.

Each dog is an individual

Each dog is an individual and will therefore have different preferences, likes, and dislikes depending on their personality and previous experience – this could include enjoying a certain play style, differences in the type and amount of dog or human company they prefer, and how they prefer to spend time with us.

You can find **10 ways to keep your dog happy.**

Pain and illness

Like humans, a dog's behaviour can be affected when they are feeling unwell or in pain. This can be harder to spot in dogs who don't always show as many obvious signs they are in physical discomfort.

Your dog's age can also impact their behaviour in a similar way. As dogs get older, they may prefer more space, be more easily startled, or may feel more vulnerable if they don't feel they can escape danger as easily as they could as a younger dog. If through pain, illness or age a dog feels they can't move away effectively and painlessly when worried, they may resort to more obvious signals of unhappiness.

Seek advice from your vet if you have any concerns around your dog and child interacting. They'll check your dog is in good health and can refer you to a qualified behaviourist for tailored support. By recognising the signs early, and seeking professional help as soon as possible, you can prevent escalation, keeping everyone safe.

4

Unsafe behaviour around dogs

Like some adults, children often see dogs much like they do humans. In other words, they attach human characteristics to a dog, and might believe, for instance, that a dog will enjoy something just because we, as humans, do. Children can often be more excitable, noisier and less aware of dog's personal space. Although this is all done without ill intentions, understanding what behaviour can put children more at risk of being bitten is crucial.

Although dogs are often well-loved members of the family, there are important differences in how they experience the world compared to humans. This means that some things we do to, or around, our dogs might make them feel worried or frustrated without us intending this at all.

Common behaviours often seen before bites - 'risky behaviours'

There are many behaviours that children (and adults) perform that research indicates often come before a dog bite. Although many of these behaviours are intended by your child to be kind and loving, they can be **frightening or worrying** for your dog.

Invading personal space at key times

Dogs like to have space when they are eating, drinking, sleeping, resting and when they have something that they really value – like a chew or a toy. Approaching, stroking, or disturbing your dog at these times could make them feel startled, worried or frustrated. This can then lead to dogs showing more obvious signs that they aren't happy including, growls and bites.

Hugging

As humans, hugging is a very natural way to show someone that we love or care for them. For this reason, children often choose to hug dogs as a way to show their affection. Unlike most humans, however, dogs often find hugs worrying and restrictive.



Dogs don't enjoy being restricted or confined and don't experience hugs in the way that humans do. Snuggling is what we call it when you allow your dog to approach you and 'snuggle' in - you can stroke them if they enjoy it but avoid wrapping arms around them, picking them up, or laying on top of them. This is very different to restrictive hugging and is a much safer and mutually enjoyable way for dogs to receive human affection.

It is always important that dogs are given the choice to move away should they want to. When dogs do not have this choice, they may feel limited in how they can express their feelings of discomfort and may feel that more obvious signals, such as growling and biting, are their only option.

Putting faces close to each other

Lovingly looking into our dog's eyes or wanting to be close to their face to show affection is a very natural, and often rewarding, human behaviour. However, leaning over a dog or putting your face close to theirs can make them feel worried and restricted. Eye contact with dogs from other dogs can also be a very confrontational behaviour, which can be equally intimidating and threatening from humans (despite our intentions to achieve the opposite).





Kissing

Kissing dogs often occurs alongside hugging them and is a very human way to show love. However, this can result in our faces being very close to theirs; this again can make them feel worried, restricted and lacking choice to move away. You could instead teach your child to blow your dog a kiss from a distance as alternative to showing affection to your pooch.

Preventing a dog from moving away freely

We've already explained how moving away is an important choice for dogs to have in order to feel comfortable and diffuse situations calmly. Preventing your dog from moving away can happen accidentally, such as by approaching a dog in their crate where they have no way of escaping, or hugging, lying on, or leaning over them. Always consider 'can my dog move away easily and simply' when you are interacting with your dog or watching child and dog interactions.



Causing discomfort or pain

It goes without saying that we don't like being poked, prodded or pulled. Dogs, like us, don't enjoy these things either. Through being curious, or trying to connect with a dog, children may sometimes pull a dog's ears or tail, or touch their paws, lips and other areas. They may even try and sit on or ride a dog. All of these can be painful, worrying and cause discomfort, leaving dogs with little space or choice to move away. These are key behaviours to always discourage children from doing.

Using physical force to move your dog can also be worrying or frustrating for them – this might include picking them up, pushing them off of a sofa, or manoeuvring them by their collar. Using reward-based methods instead helps you to safely and kindly encourage your dog from one place to another at home without having to use physical force – ideal for calmly separating your child and dog when needed.

Dog School classes can show you reward based ways to move your dog in a 'hands off' way.

Noisy, fast-moving or unpredictable actions

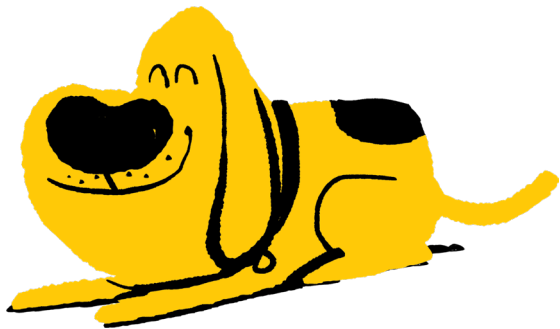
Everyday child activity can be overwhelming for our dogs. From shouting at a computer game as your dog lies asleep nearby, to running around playing an energetic game in the same room as your dog, to outbursts that can often be a part of day-to-day life – loud, sudden and unpredictable moments can leave our dogs feeling startled, worried and unsafe.

Positive alternatives

Helping your child understand that your dog experiences the world differently and likes to be shown love in different ways to people will help them understand why the above behaviours are ones we should avoid to ensure a safe and happy relationship with our pooch.

It is best for all of us to show our dogs we love them in ways that make sense to them. Here's some suggestions of positive interactions to start, encourage and reward.

Rather than telling your child to 'not' do something (i.e., 'don't hug the dog') providing them with **something they can do** is often easier for them to follow. For instance, 'Instead of hugging Buster like that, why don't you sit next to him on the sofa and see if he wants to snuggle close by instead'.



Activities for children and dogs

These should be closely supervised by an adult

Build a doggy den



Play find the treats!

Practise
reward-based
training



Bake tasty treats

Make a
boredom
box



You can also find lots of great [ideas for enrichment for your dog on our website.](#)

Understanding more about close supervision

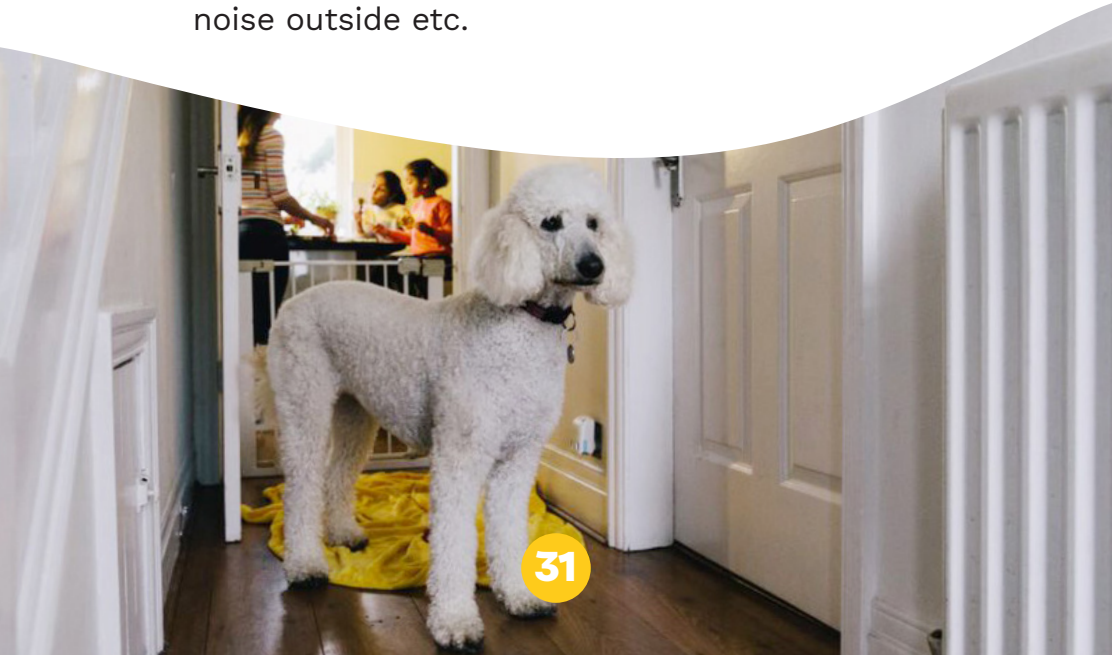
The three pillars of **close supervision** are what we recommend to ensure that when dogs and children are together, they both stay happy and safe. They can be easily remembered as – stay close, step-in, separate.

1. Stay close

Watch, listen, and remain close during child-dog interactions. It's important to do all of these as each one alone is unlikely to be sufficient. Simply being in the same room, regularly or occasionally monitoring, or just knowing the location of both child and dog is not likely to be enough.

Paying close attention to your **child's behaviour** and your **dog's body language** helps you recognise whether the interaction is safe, or not.

- 1) If your child and dog both look relaxed then this is a great time to praise your child for behaving in a way that your dog appreciates. Recognising and reinforcing appropriate behaviour is a great way to encourage safe habits.
- 2) If your child is performing, or may be about to perform, a risky behaviour then you should intervene as soon as possible.
- 3) If your dog is communicating that they may be concerned or worried, then consider what might be causing that – i.e. the child's behaviour, a loud noise outside etc.



2. Step in

Intervene when either the child or dog looks uncomfortable or acts in an unsafe way. You can use a 'Stop, Space, Separate' approach - **stop** the child's unsafe behaviour, create **space** or physically **separate** the child and dog in a calm and gentle way.

Once you spot a situation arising or about to arise, you can intervene to keep everyone happy and safe.

- 1) Stop** - You can ask your child to stop the behaviour that you think is worrying your dog or redirect their behaviour to something else. i.e. you could ask them to try and be quieter when they are playing a computer game if their shouting could be worrying your dog
- 2) Space** - You can help your child to give your dog some space. i.e. you could ask your child to sit and play their video game on the opposite end of the sofa to your dog, if you feel they may disturb them by being too close
- 3) Separate** - You could also encourage your dog into a place they enjoy, with something nice to do, or ask your child to i.e. play a noisy game in another room.

3. Separate

Separate the child and dog if you are likely to be preoccupied or distracted. Encourage the child and dog to go in separate rooms, take the child or dog with you, or use a physical barrier such as a baby gate.

Supervising interactions is so important that if you are going to be distracted or need to move away from where your child and dog are interacting, they shouldn't be left unattended or unsupervised. There are some simple options to separate dog and child at times like this.

1) Take your child with you - When leaving the room simply ask your child to come with you and do what they are doing as you do your chores, cook dinner etc.

2) Take your dog with you - Alternatively you could call your dog to you and take them with you when you need to do chores, some work, put the washing out.

3) Keep together but keep both occupied safely - If you are staying in the same room, but will be distracted you could encourage one of your child or dog to be closer to you – for example you could ask your child to sit at the breakfast bar as you prepare dinner, and your dog can stay on their bed in the kitchen.

Extra ways to set your family up for **success**

Alongside using close supervision, there are a host of top tips that you can follow to ensure you, your children and your dog are as happy, safe and understood as possible!

Create a doggy den

As bites can occur around key times when dogs don't like to be disturbed, such as when they are sleeping or resting, you can create a space for your dog to sleep or rest where they will not be bothered. This might be a purpose built 'Doggy Den' or simply a cosy bed or blanket in a spot where they like to rest. This should be in a place they enjoy and are least likely to be disturbed. Make sure all family members, especially children, know where the Doggy Den is, and to leave your pooch alone when they're in it.



Build a doggy den

Find out **how to make a doggy den.**



Being a role model for your children

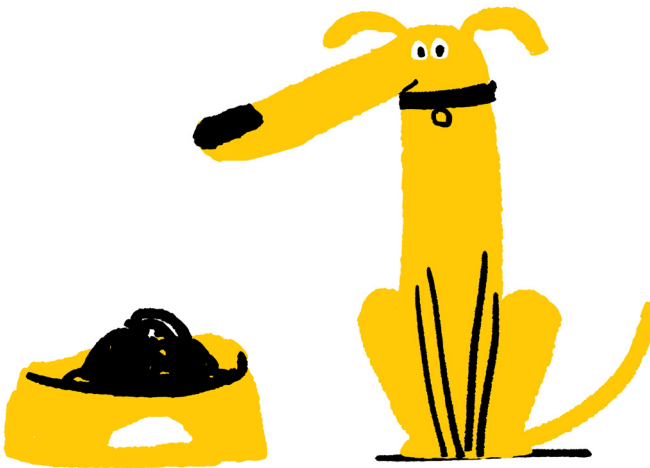
One great way to teach our children how to show love to dogs in the right way is by performing those behaviours ourselves! Parents and carers are crucial role models and children will copy what you do in lots of situations. So, the more you can demonstrate these appropriate behaviours, the more likely your child is to follow your example, and encourage visiting adults to do the same too!

Involve your children

This might include explaining to children how dogs are different to us and how we can show we love them in different ways, and facilitate more positive, safe and kind ways to show them love.

Specific eating place

Eating is also a time where dogs like to be left alone. As above, you may choose to create a quiet spot (i.e., in the utility room or quiet area of the kitchen) where your dog can eat their meals in peace. Telling your children to give your dog space whilst they are eating will help make mealtimes predictable and calm for your pooch.



Making separation easy

1) **Baby gates** can be a great tool to use to easily create a safe barrier between your child and dog whilst you are not present or are distracted by another task.

2) **Play pens** are another great tool. Much like a baby gate, they can be used to section off areas of the room or home to provide either you child or dog with a safe, separate, space to enjoy an activity. They can also be helpful for more open plan living spaces.

3) **Crates** when dogs are comfortable being in them and see them as safe places, where they can gain space when they want it, can be useful in helping to keep your dog safely separated.

If separating your dog using a crate, play pen, baby gate or behind a closed door, you need to help them to feel comfortable with this as many dogs can find separation difficult without support. Build up the time your dog spends in the crate or play pen gradually and help them associate it with good things happening. Never use a crate or play pen to punish your dog.

You can find out more about **crate training your dog**.

Did you know?

Dogs Trust offers a free webinar about helping your dog to feel comfortable when left alone. This is helpful for when you need to go out for a while, but also helps them learn that being in a different room from the family is nothing to worry about either!

Sign up to our **free happy dog, happy home webinar today.**

Dog training

Reward based training is the perfect way to help teach your dog some polite and useful habits that will help them settle into family life.

- 1) Training your dog to **settle by themselves** will help them to be more comfortable and confident when separation is needed. This can also encourage them to engage in calm behaviours more often without being asked.
- 2) To help separate your child and dog more easily, teaching your dog to **come back when called** is really important. You can practise calling your dog and rewarding them with a treat around the house a few times a day to turn this into a reliable habit.
- 3) **On/off cues** are also a great method for helping your dog gain the space they need should an interaction start to become unsafe, or they start to feel uncomfortable. It's helpful to teach an on/off cue so you can ask your dog to get down, for example off the sofa, without physically handling them, or being right next to them. To make sure this behaviour is repeated make sure to reward them for doing as asked.

You learn how to train your dog with the most up to date methods at **Dog School**.

Keep treats close by

Keeping treats handy (but out of the reach of both the child and dog) in each room where you supervise your dog and child together can be useful. These treats can be a quick, safe and kind way to encourage your dog to leave the room or space where your child is, should you need to. Having treats in pots in several rooms is a great strategy to continue your dog training around the house too. This way, there is always a reward nearby to reinforce your dog for behaviour you want them to repeat.

Routines

Daily routines can be a valuable way to embed safe behaviours into your everyday practises. You may, for instance, choose to always ask your dog to go in their crate or behind a baby gate during mealtimes because you know you are likely to be distracted with cooking, eating and clearing away. If this routine is repeated enough, both your dog and your child will soon learn that this is what happens during mealtimes. Dogs, like children, can also find routines to be reassuring meaning they are much more likely to be calm and relaxed when actions (such as routine separation) are expected rather than unpredictable.

Seek training and behaviour support

Dogs Trust has a behaviour support line that you can call free of charge for advice about any training or behaviour support you need.

FREE behaviour support line.

If you are concerned about your dog's behaviour, we can also help you find a reward-based trainer or behaviourist to help you and your pooch.

Learn **how to find a trainer or behaviourist.**



Examples of close supervision in action

Below are some common scenarios you may witness in your own home involving your child and dog. If you want to test yourself, read the scenario first before looking how to apply the three pillars of close supervision!

Scenario 1:

Your child is on the sofa watching tv and your dog is snuggled up next to them.

Action: Stay close - watch, listen and remain close -

Remain present in the room at all times to ensure both your dog and child are relaxed and the interaction continues to be safe and rewarding for both.



This is a lovely opportunity for your child and dog to bond. If your dog is choosing to remain close to them, it is likely that both parties are happy and comfortable. The crucial ingredient that makes this scenario safe is that your dog has **chosen** to be near your child. Also, the benefit of a snuggle (rather than a hug) means that the dog or child always has the choice to move away if they want to without disturbing one another. Don't forget to praise your child for their great behaviour too.

Scenario 2:

You need to go into a different room to do laundry and this would leave your child and dog alone together in the living room.



Action: Separate – There are three options here:

1. You could encourage your dog to come with you and settle in the room you need to be in.
2. You could encourage your child to join you, or;
3. You may choose to use a physical barrier (i.e., a baby gate) so that the child and dog are not left together unsupervised.

Though the child and dog may seem relaxed and happy, remember that, without supervision, this can change very quickly. Unfortunately, when bites to a child do occur, it is often from their own dog or a dog who is known to them and often happens when the child and dog are left unsupervised.

Scenario 3:

Your child is playing a noisy game close to your dog, and you recognise your dog is uncomfortable.



Action: Intervene (but not necessarily separate) – Sometimes, separation isn't needed, and simply redirecting your child's behaviour is enough. That may be as simple as asking your child to play a little more quietly and explaining to them that the game they are playing is a little loud for your dog and dogs can often become worried by lots of noise.

It is important to distinguish that, though sometimes intervening and separation may come hand in hand, sometimes something as small as asking your child just take a few steps back, or be a little quieter, might be enough to ease any discomfort.

Scenario 4:

Your child and dog are next to one another on the sofa and your child chooses to rest their head on the dog.



Action: Intervene and

provide slight separation – Here, you could stop your child from resting on the dog as this can be worrying and may restrict their ability and **choice** to move away. Instead of fully separating your child and dog, however, it may simply be enough to ask your child to not rest their head on the dog and perhaps sit a little further away. This will, hopefully, give your dog enough space to continue feeling relaxed and also be able to move away should they chose to.

As dogs usually seek to diffuse situations without conflict by requesting or making space, giving them **choice** is always important. Dogs should always be given the option to move away and create **space** themselves should they want it.

Scenario 5:

Your child is excitedly giving your dog a stroke but may, unintentionally, be doing so roughly. You recognise your dog is uncomfortable and is yawning and licking their lips.



Action: Full separation needed – in this instance full separation may be needed as your dog is showing a signal that they are uncomfortable. If your child is unable to stop their actions and give the dog some space the situation could escalate and become unsafe. Separating your child and dog for a while will ensure your dog isn't worried by your child's behaviour and will allow your child to calm down with another activity.

Full separation in this case provides your dog the **time** to calm down and means your child will not be able to re-approach the dog which, at the time, may cause them worry. Importantly, it also keeps both parties safe. When you reintroduce them, allow your dog to approach your child in their own time, and praise and reward both to make spending time together positive and calm.

In addition to the scenarios above it is a good idea to think about situations that have not been mentioned which happen in your home and how you might go about using close supervision at those times. Thinking about this in advance means that, if it happens, you already have a good idea of how close supervision can be used and action that can be taken quickly where necessary.



Simple ways to **get started** with close supervision

We understand that close supervision can seem like a daunting task. Luckily, there are lots of simple, easy to implement, strategies to help you incorporate the three pillars of close supervision into your daily routines. Take a look below and perhaps pick one or two tips to get you started!

Aim for better, not perfection

Aiming for perfection immediately isn't always realistic and can put pressure on you in such a way that you might abandon trying altogether. Sometimes just aiming for small improvements and changes is a much more helpful starting point. Change can take time, especially if we intend to stick to those changes long term, so give yourself permission to start with aiming for 'better' rather than 'perfect'.

Action plan

We've designed an Action Plan to help you consider common supervision scenarios, key barriers to being able to closely supervise and how you can overcome them.

Download the Action Plan.

Create a star chart

Creating a reward chart for your child can help track and reward their kind, considerate and safe behaviour with your dog. This might be your child letting your dog eat undisturbed, noticing they are being a bit loud and quieting down when your dog looks worried, or choosing to snuggle rather than hug.

You might even choose to have a reward for you all

after a certain number of stars – perhaps your child could choose a new toy for your dog, bake them some special biscuits with your help, or prepare them an extra special enrichment box!

Find out **how to make an enrichment box**.

I spy...

When you are at home, in the garden, or on a walk – why not play a 2-minute game of “I spy” with your child. Watch your dog for a minute or two and see what body language you can both spot. Paying particular attention to their ears, tail, face and body posture talk about how your dog might be feeling with your child and why that might be. (You can also play this with other adults, or by yourself!)

Recognise and react

As a family, make a habit of observing your dog's body language as they go about their daily lives and see what you can learn about their likes and dislikes. Remember the more we **recognise** and **react** to subtle signs of body language from our dog, the less they will feel the need to respond in more obvious ways such as growling or snarling. You could make a star chart for your child and add a star each time they notice your dog's body language! It's really helpful for adults to recognise their dogs body language more often too!

Doggy den

Creating a doggy den in a quiet place can be a great start to help your child learn your dog has a place they go where we never disturb them.

Pick a routine to start

Start with a key time of your day when you want to use close supervision first. Perhaps its breakfast, or preparing dinner, or getting the kids ready for school. Decide what your plan will be for supervising, intervening and separating and make that your focus for the week.

A dog is for life®

dogstrust.org.uk

© Dogs Trust 2023. Registered Charity Numbers: 227523 & SC037843