

## BARK U Education Sheet: Introducing Your Dog to Visiting Children

### Why Proper Introductions Matter



Whether it's a playdate, family gathering, or a holiday visit, introducing your dog to visiting children can require planning. Dogs who are not used to visiting children benefit from planned introductions to help them learn how to behave around children and to make sure they are comfortable. Additionally, these planned introductions can help to teach children how to safely interact with new and unknown dogs. By managing the introduction, you can help set everyone up for success.

### Preparing for the Visit

Before the Children Arrive:

- 1. Set Up a Safe Zone for Your Dog:**
  - Create a quiet, dog-only area in your home where they can retreat if they feel overwhelmed.
  - Use a crate, room, or baby gate to give your dog a break when needed.
  - Let visiting children know that this space is off-limits.
- 2. Evaluate Your Dog's Comfort Level:**
  - For dogs new to the home, it is better to err on the side of caution and be watching for any signs of stress.
  - If your dog is nervous or anxious around kids, take extra precautions and consider limiting interactions.
- 3. Prepare Your Dog for Guests:**
  - Practice cues like "place," "stay," and "leave it" and "four on the floor" to help manage their behavior during the visit.
  - Ensure your dog gets a long walk or play session before guests arrive to release excess energy.
  - Prep some tasty enrichment items such as a Kong, West Paw Toppl and freeze them make it last longer.





- Have some high value treats readily available (cheese, hotdogs, peanut butter)

## The Introduction

### Step-by-Step Guide:

#### Start on Neutral Ground:

- Introduce your dog to the children outside or in a neutral area, like the yard or a large open space. Meeting outside can help reduce any territorial behavior and create a relaxed environment for both the dog and the children.

#### Keep Your Dog on a Leash:

- During the first meeting, keep your dog on a leash to maintain control. Let them approach the children at their own pace and as long as the child/children are comfortable.

#### Reward Calm Behavior:

- Praise and reward your dog for calm interactions, such as sitting or standing quietly near the children.

#### Monitor the Children's Behavior:

- Give the children something concrete to do. Quiet activities, like drawing or completing a puzzle can give them something to occupy their attention while you focus on your dog's response.
- If the children seem fidgety or are having difficulty containing their excitement, increase the dog's distance from them. Observe the dog's behavior and if they are displaying stress signals, it may be best to stop and create a new training plan.

#### Limit Interaction Time and Introduce a Safe Zone:

- Keep the initial introduction brief. After your dog is showing signs of being comfortable outdoors, guide them to a safe zone, such as a baby-gated area or their kennel, ensuring children cannot access the space but the dog is able to have a visual.
- Provide your dog with a frozen treat, such as a Kong or West Paw Toppl, to enjoy while in their safe zone.
- As your dog nears the end of their treat, transition them to a secure room where children cannot enter, allowing them to decompress and take a break.





## Managing Playtime

### Encourage Positive Play:

- **Structured Activities:** Guide the children in playing structured games like fetch to create positive interactions. For example, you can use a safe platform for the child to stand on, creating a safe distance between the dog and child. The adult can hand the toy to the child on the platform, allowing the child to throw the toy for the dog to fetch. When the dog returns with the toy, the adult takes it and repeats the process. Alternatively, you can have the child toss treats to the dog for engaging in calm behaviors like sit or down from the other side of a baby gate.
- **Supervise Closely:** Never leave your dog and children alone together, even if they seem comfortable.

### Watch for Signs of Stress:

- Look for calming signals like yawning, lip licking, or turning away, which indicate your dog is starting to feel uncomfortable.
- If your dog shows signs of stress, like growling, barking, or retreating, remove them from the situation and allow them to relax in their safe zone.
- Look out for the “kiss to dismiss.” Some dogs will lick at a face as an appeasement behavior to get more distance. This is often incorrectly interpreted as affectionate licking.

### Reinforce Calm Behavior:

- Reward your dog with treats or praise when they exhibit calm, polite behavior around the children.
- Make sure to also acknowledge the children and tell them what a good job they're doing at being polite around your dog.

## Teaching Children How to Interact with Dogs

### Reinforce Calm Behavior:

- Teach children to let the dog approach them instead of moving toward the dog.
- Explain that dogs don't understand hugs or rough play, such as wrestling, and may perceive them as threatening.

### Ask Before Petting:

- Encourage children to always ask for permission before petting a dog.





- Teach them to wait until the dog appears relaxed and comfortable before engaging.

#### **Calm and Gentle Interaction:**

- Use quiet voices and avoid running or making sudden movements around the dog.
- Demonstrate how to pet gently, avoiding sensitive areas like the face, tail, or paws.
- Instruct children to pet for two to three seconds and then take a break. If the dog moves away, the child should not attempt to follow the dog. If the dog leans in for more pets, they can keep doing two to three seconds and taking breaks.

#### **Respect Boundaries:**

- Remind children that if the dog moves away or seems uninterested, they should let the dog have space.

#### **Recommended Resource for Kids:**

*Doggie Language: A Dog Lover's Guide to Understanding Your Best Friend* by Lili Chin. This book is an excellent tool to help children understand canine body language and behavior.

### **Tips for Success**

- **Set Boundaries:** Use baby gates or playpens to manage interactions and give your dog time to decompress.
- **Keep Treats Handy:** Use treats to redirect or reward your dog for calm, positive behavior during interactions.
- **Know When to Stop:** If your dog seems uncomfortable or the children are not following instructions, separate them for everyone's safety.
- **Take Breaks:** It's okay to stop periodically and give your dog a chance to relax. Once they have had some time to relax, you can always try again if they seem comfortable and interested.

### **Ensuring a Positive Experience**

With preparation, supervision, and clear boundaries, your dog and visiting children can have a safe and enjoyable time together. Always prioritize your dog's comfort and well-being, and teach children how to respect and interact with your dog appropriately.



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If you notice signs of extreme fear or aggression in your dog, reach out to a certified professional trainer for help. Positive experiences now will help build a strong foundation for future interactions with children.



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