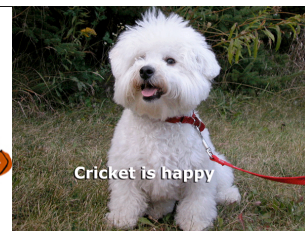


# doggone safe



**A non-profit organization dedicated to Dog Bite Prevention**

[Download a 3.5 minute slide show and learn to Speak Dog](#)

## Your dog may be trying to tell you something - are you listening?

**NEW!** Learn more with our on-line course: [download the free demo](#) of our on-line course about basic dog body language or [sign up for the full course](#) for \$30.

### What every parent needs to know

Dog behavior is complex and the signals that dogs send are often subtle. The following is not intended to be a treatise on dog behavior. It is intended to alert parents to situations that could compromise child safety around dogs. Parents seeing potential danger signs in their dog's behavior are encouraged to err on the side of caution and implement dog bite prevention measures (increase supervision and use physical barriers when supervision is not possible) until it can be determined whether the dog is actually a danger to the children and if so, until the problem is resolved through consultation with the appropriate professional. Many dog bites could be prevented if parents and children were aware of the subtle communication signs that dogs send. A dog may warn that it wants to be left alone by leaving the room, showing a half moon eye (see below), yawning or licking its chops when the kids are bothering it for weeks, months or even years before finally getting to the point that it feels it has no choice but to bite. Parents often tell us that the dog bit without warning, but there is always a warning. Many people simply do not recognize the warning signs, even though the dog has been exhibiting these for weeks, months or even years.

This page covers several topics that are critically important for parents:

[Learn to Speak Dog](#) - learn about the subtle communication signals that dogs send to tell us they are uncomfortable

[Growing Up](#) - the dog's attitude toward the children can change as they grow up and as the dog grows older

[Growling at the Kids](#) - never punish your dog for growling at the kids (strange but true)

Many of the links on this page come from the blog posted by dog behaviour consultant Jennifer Shryock. You can visit Jennifer's blog to see what is new or to explore previous posts at <http://familypaws.blogspot.com/>. All the topics at this blog are related to improving the dog/child relationship. We highly recommend a visit!

Kids can learn more at our website: [www.be-a-tree.com](http://www.be-a-tree.com)

Expectant parents can learn more at: [www.doggonesafe.com/baby\\_coming.htm](http://www.doggonesafe.com/baby_coming.htm)

### Learn to Speak Dog

Learn to Speak Dog and teach your kids too. Doggone Safe has a wonderful calendar that shows comparative pictures so that you can see different expressions in the same dog. There are 13 different dogs showing how they tell us they are happy and how they tell us to stay away. You can look at all the pictures and learn a lot about how to speak dog by noting the differences. [Click here](#) to see the pictures

(the calendar is out of stock, but you can look at the photos).

Download our [Dog Body Language Postcard](#) - that teaches kids and parents the basics about dog language.

You can order these in a smaller size (5.5 x 4.25 inches) from our [store](#) for 15 cents each plus shipping

[Watch a video](#) and see if you can see the warning sign.

[Download a 3.5 minute video](#) slide show that shows different types of body language and gives interpretation. The video also has a movie showing why we shouldn't tease a tied dog and what to do if a pack of dogs comes barking at you. (This video is available in high resolution format as a bonus track on the [Clicker Puppy DVD](#))

Learn more with our on-line course: [download the free demo](#) of our on-line course about basic dog body language or [sign up for the full course](#) for \$30.

The [Doggone Crazy! board game](#) provides a fun and interactive way for the whole family to learn about dog body language and how to act safely around dogs. Buy it at the [Doggone Safe store](#) and support the work of Doggone Safe.

### [Signs of anxiety](#)

### [Signs of arousal](#)

### [Signs of a happy dog](#)

### [Signs of aggression](#)

### [Signs of imminent bite](#)

**Signs of anxiety** that indicate your dog is uncomfortable with the current situation that indicate the need for intervention to prevent the dog from being pushed to the point of biting and to make sure your canine friend is happy and not being made to feel anxious:

- one paw raised - very cute - but the dog is not happy and does not want to be petted or bothered



- half moon eye - dog just wants to be left alone - watch for this one when kids are mauling the dog



- any out-of-context behaviour (intervene if these happen during interactions with children - the dog has had enough) - such as:
  - yawning when not tired
  - licking chops without the presence of food - [watch a video](#) that shows why this is important
  - sudden scratching when not itchy
  - sudden biting at paws or other body part
  - sudden sniffing the ground or other object
  - wet dog shake when not wet or dirty
- dog gets up and leaves an uncomfortable situation (he may bite rather than leaving one of these days)
- turning head away
- dog rolls over on back in submissive way (please don't hurt me!)
- tail between legs
- tail low and only the end is wagging
- tail between legs and wagging
- ears sideways for erect eared dog
- ears back and very rapid panting
- barking and retreating
- hiding behind person or object
- tail down or straight for curly-tailed dog (husky, malamute, pug, chow chow, spitz-type dogs etc.)
- dog goes into another room away from you and urinates or defecates (see list of organizations below for help in this situation)

All dogs should have a safe place, such as a crate or mat that they can go to when they want to be left alone. All family members and guests should be taught not to bother the dog when he is in his safe place.

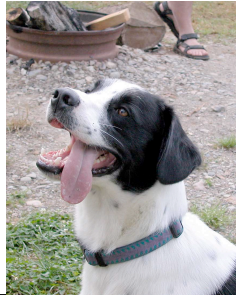
**Signs of arousal** that indicate your dog is interested in something, or trying to decide on a course of action and is not receptive to attention (such as petting from a child) include:

- ears forward
- mouth closed
- eyes intense
- body rolled forward
- body tense
- tail high (may or may not be wagging)
- slow deliberate tail wag



**Signs of a happy dog** that is receptive to attention or wants to play:

- panting, relaxed, happy expression
- body position relaxed
- lying with one paw tucked under
- enthusiastic tail wag
- tail thumping on floor
- play bow (front end down; rear end up; tail wagging)



**Signs of aggression** directed toward you or another person that indicate the need for professional help include the following:

- growl
- guarding (dog's own possessions or resting area; favourite human's possessions) against family members or guests - this is a **very dangerous** situation - **children are in immediate danger** since they could inadvertently come between dog and a guarded area or object (dog may be continually expanding his guarded area or repertoire of guarded objects unbeknownst to you) - [click here to find help](#)
- snap and miss (the miss was intentional and the dog may not miss the next time)
- snarl
- aggressive barking which is not stopped by your command for quiet
- lunging on or off the leash, with barking or growling
- bite (other than playful puppy nipping by a puppy)
- dog raises tail when you or child approach (may not apply to breeds with naturally raised or curled tails - e.g. pug, husky, spitz-type breeds etc.)
- [dog urinates intentionally in the house](#) or on your possessions **in your presence or in the presence of children or guests** and shows other signs of pushy or aggressive behavior

If your dog has ever shown these signs, or you have that feeling in the back of your mind that your dog is likely to bite someone, then you should get help from a professional.

### [Lists of Professionals that May Be Able to Help](#)

**Signs of imminent bite** - cease all interaction with dog, look away and give dog the opportunity to leave, do not approach, do not make eye contact, do not talk to the dog. If you are touching the dog, stop and move your hands slowly away. If you are taking something from the dog, let go of it. If you are bending over the dog, slowly straighten up and look away.

- dog freezes - becomes suddenly stiff
- dog stands with front legs splayed, head low, looking at you
- dog curls lip to show teeth

**See more photos and explanations of dog body language...** [Doggone Safe Calendar](#)

**House-soiling problems** - maybe the dog just doesn't understand where to go to the washroom - or maybe the dog is communicating with you. There can be many reasons for a dog to urinate in the house - a visit to the veterinarian will allow you to determine if there is a medical problem. Read an article by [Dr. Suzanne Hetts](#) about potential reasons for house soiling and some possible solutions ([May 9th Issue of Pet Behavior One Piece at a Time Newsletter](#)).

- In some cases, the dog may be trying to exert control by urinating in your presence. An adult dog (male or female) that intentionally urinates in your house in your presence (or in the presence of guests or children) or on your belongings (in your presence), or on a person or another animal may be sending a message. If the dog also shows signs of pushy or aggressive behavior towards family members or visitors then the dog could be **very dangerous** and there is a risk that this dog could bite anyone who does anything the dog considers insubordinate. Guests, and children (even your own children) could be at risk. Professional help is needed immediately to determine whether there is a bite risk and if possible solve the problem. **This may not be a house soiling problem, this may be an [aggression](#) problem.** [Click here to find help.](#)

## Growing up

As children grow, the attitude of the dog may change. Behavior that the dog tolerated from a baby may no longer be tolerated once the baby starts to crawl or walk. An older dog may be less tolerant than he was when he was younger. If you have ever heard yourself say..."My dog is good with the [baby, child, kids], she lets them climb all over her, lie on her and pull her fur. She has never even growled. She would never bite a child", then you are allowing situations to occur that could easily lead to a bite situation. Dogs do not like being treated this way by children. They may tolerate it, but they don't enjoy it. No dog can or should be expected to tolerate repeated rough or inconsiderate handling by children. It is possible to condition dogs to the types of things that children may do, but even a dog that is conditioned to children should not be left unsupervised with them and should have a safe place from which he can retreat from the children.

It is important for children to learn to treat the dog with kindness and to learn to respect the dog's wishes when it comes to dog/child interactions. Children can learn to read the dog's body language and know when the dog does and does not want to interact. [Click here](#) to see a series of photos with explanations from dog behaviour consultant Jennifer Shryock that show very subtle, yet clear communication from a dog that does not want to interact with a particular child at this moment.

Doggone Safe recommends [clicker training](#) as the best way for kids to get involved with training the family dog. This is a hands-off method of training that builds and bond of love and respect between child and dog and helps the child learn to empathize with the dog.

A great way for kids to determine whether the dog is enjoying their petting is to ask the dog if he wants more. Simply stop petting and see whether the dog shows that he wants more or whether he gets up and leaves. [Click here](#) to see a video that shows how to ask if a dog wants more and to see how a dog shows that he does or does not want more petting from the child.

Now that you have learned about dog body language, take a look at some videos at the links listed below. Look for the signs that we talked about above. Some of the things that you may have thought were cute or funny in the past, you may now find frightening. If some of the video links don't work, you can find lots of cute and scary videos on You Tube that show dangerous interactions between children and dogs. Just search You Tube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) for the key words dog and baby.

Click on the links below to watch some videos that show exceptionally tolerant dogs that are being expected to put up with too much from the kids. These dogs may continue to tolerate this unwanted attention, they may not. They should not be expected to. The owners of these dogs love their dogs and their kids, the just don't recognize the subtle signals that the dogs are sending to tell that they are not enjoying the interaction.

[Baby playing with dog](#) - video

[Why dogs get fed up](#) - video

[Dog's reaction to the baby changes when the baby learns to crawl](#) - video

These dogs may at some point decide that they have had enough and they may reprimand the children the way they would a puppy that was bothering them. This does not mean that the dog does not like the child, he just does not like what the child is doing. If pushed far enough any dog (even yours) could get to the point of using his teeth to get his message across when all other warnings have failed. Watch this video that shows an adult female dog reprimanding a puppy. This was a normal, appropriate response to a puppy moving in on an adult dog's treats and the puppy was not hurt. Had this been a child, this type of reaction could have caused a nasty bite, since children do not have all that fur to protect them. This is the type of situation that could arise if the children are permitted to pester the dog relentlessly until the dog reaches the breaking point. Note the speed of the dog. No parent could possibly be fast enough to stop this no matter how close the supervision. It is best to prevent the situation from arising in the first place.

[Poodle reprimands puppy](#) - video

Here are videos that show games that seem fun for the moment, but could turn dangerous if the dog gets too worked up. This type of play stimulates predatory behaviour in the dog. When dogs are in prey mode, instinct drives them to chase, grab, kill and eat. It is extremely dangerous for children to be around predatory dogs and for children to squeal and run and act like prey. These games do not

promote the type of calm, respectful relationship that parents should strive for between child and dog:

[Not so funny game to play with the baby](#) - video

[A very dangerous game](#) - video

## Growling at the Kids

Never punish your dog for growling at your child. This may seem counter-intuitive and may even go against the advice of your dog trainer or dog trainers you have seen on TV. If your dog growls at your child he is sending a clear warning that he is very uncomfortable with the actions or proximity of the child. Be grateful that your dog chose to warn with a growl rather than going straight to a bite. If you punish the growling, you may inhibit the warning growl the next time and the dog may bite without growling first. Punishment or scolding will not make the dog feel better about the child, in fact he may even feel more anxious and be even more likely to bite in the future, especially if you are not there to control the situation. If your child cannot follow directions and/or has got into the habit of being rough with the dog, then the dog and child should be separated until the child has learned to treat the dog with kindness and respect. Seek the advice of a dog behaviour specialist who will use positive reinforcement to help teach the dog to change his attitude and to enjoy the company of the child. Do not assume that the dog will not bite because he hasn't yet. As dogs get older they can become less tolerant. As children get older the dog can become less tolerant of rough treatment. How tragic if your last memory of a faithful long time family member is of a bite to your child.


Read this true story about a family who trusted the dog too much and were not aware that the dog was feeling anxious around the child: [The Truth About Kids and Dogs](#) download [PDF Version](#)

Doggone Safe recommends the book, "**Living With Kids and Dogs... without losing your mind**" by Colleen Pelar for all parents with a dog in the family or who are thinking about adding a dog to the family. [Preview and buy it by clicking here.](#)

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**Source:** Doggone Safe!™ A non-profit organization dedicated to dog bite prevention. Contact us at [doggonesafeinfo@doggonesafe.com](mailto:doggonesafeinfo@doggonesafe.com)

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