

5 WAYS YOU MAY BE PUTTING YOUR KIDS IN DANGER AROUND DOGS

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Could this be you?

Chances are, yes! ... And NOT because you're a bad parent, but because sadly, dogs are SO OFTEN misunderstood. While we're flooded with "training" tips for dogs - there's not much easily-accessible info on really seeing the world through their eyes.

So, in the spirit of 'when you know better... you do better' - don't feel bad reading this if you've made a few mistakes - with a couple of quick fixes you'll be right back on track.

Can you plead guilty to any of these?

TAKING PICTURES OF YOUR KID 'LOVING UP' YOUR DOG

Take a look at social media and it's clear that parents love pictures of their kids smooching pooches – but sadly, most dogs aren't big fans of being held that close. So asking your kid to 'trap' your dog in a hug, and then pose cheek-to-cheek, can be SUPER uncomfortable for your dog AND risky for your kid too. MAKE IT FUN FOR EVERYONE!

Teach your kids to show affection in a way that is more enjoyable for dogs too!

Try replacing hugs with ONE-handed petting (giving your pup the chance to duck out when they've had enough). And instead of face-to-face contact, show them HOW TO KISS A DOG SAFELY - The Family Dog way.

BUT...honestly, THE BEST kid/dog shots are the candid ones, when you capture a lovely moment that everyone's enjoying. So, if you've been asking your kids to hold your pup because they're a wiggle-butt (who can't sit still for a picture) – change tactics. Forget the static shot and set up a game for them to play together – even something as simple as your children blowing bubbles for your dog to chase.

LETTING YOUR KID FUSS WITH A DOG WHO'S 'BUSY'

For dogs (and humans too!) there are times when it's just NOT cool to be all up in each other's bizniz. When it comes to eating, chewing, sleeping, or being confined, like us, many dogs would appreciate 'a little space'.

Seriously, who DOES want someone up in their face when they're tucking into a sandwich or taking a nap? So, it's polite to be respectful, and just let dogs be – because, in these moments, even the sweetest pups may snap when interrupted one too many times. TEACH WHEN TO STAY AND WHEN TO WALK AWAY

Take the time to help your kids understand when it's safe to approach dogs, and when to give them the space they need. DOG STARS has ALL the info!

Always having a 'go-to' activity for your kids at these times is key. Whether it's grabbing a book, soccer ball or puzzle - make sure you have a plan to keep the kids entertained and out of your dog's zone (while

they're busy). This will ensure everyone's safety - not to mention, work wonders for building trust - and creating an AWESOME relationship.

TELLING YOUR KID *JUST* TO ASK THE OWNER...

Most parents are GREAT at reminding their kids to ask the owner of a dog they've not met before - but the problem is that, out of politeness, many dog owners will often say 'yes' regardless of whether their dog wants to be touched OR even likes children!

So reaching out to a cute pupper, who's either scared or not feeling super friendly, can be risky. ASK THE DOG

The good news is that most dogs will tell you themselves (with their body language) exactly how they feel about the idea. So ALWAYS make sure to ASK THEM before reaching out.

Remind your kids to FIRST ask the owner's permission, and then ALWAYS check with the DOG!

The best way is to PAT PET PAUSE

Have your kids WAIT 6 feet away and INVITE the dog over to them, by patting their leg. If the dog happily approaches, then game on! (Don't forget just one-handed petting!) If not – no worries. Just smile, thank the owner and then move on. There's plenty more fish in the sea - or pups in the park!

ALLOWING YOUR KID TO WALK THE DOG

It's always a fab idea to have children share the chores that come with having a dog – and taking your furry pal for a stroll around the neighborhood might seem like a great idea: you finish folding laundry while your kid's tiring out the dog AND making sure you don't come home to a smelly package on the floor later on. Win-win!

Except it's not.

Asking your child to be the guardian of your pup in public is just too much responsibility.

There are SOOOOO many crucial factors to consider before letting kids out ALONE together: the age, size, level of training and emotional maturity of BOTH your kid and dog, PLUS the route they'll be taking, are just some!

All it takes is one slip of the leash and your dog could be in the street, or a sudden encounter with a dog who doesn't like dogs and your kid/dog team could be in BIG trouble! GROWN UPS DO THE WALKING

The laundry will just have to wait. I know! Sorry.

Our benchmark is 14 years old for a TOTALLY SOLO walk (SORRY AGAIN!) - at that age, your teen should be mature enough to navigate a tricky situation. For more info, check out our SAFETY IN THE PARK poster.

But it's never too early to start training younger ones (and your dog!) in practice for them taking their virgin voyage together. If you have a backyard, start there. If not, stick to quieter areas and be sure to

use TWO leashes - a long (20ft) and short (4ft) one. Clip them both on your dog and let your kid take pride of place at the front with the shorter leash, and you, in back (with the long one), coaching!

On the plus side, there are still plenty of other dog chores to share with young kids - think preparing your dog's meals, stuffing food toys, scooping poop and playing safe kid/dog games etc.

TELLING YOUR KID TO GRAB THINGS FROM YOUR DOG

It seems harmless enough to make your dog give up stuff they shouldn't have, right? After all, they could totally destroy it or even really hurt themselves.

True, but it's HOW and WHO takes the object back that counts!

Families everywhere are accidentally training their dogs to 'guard' stolen goods by regularly snatching their prized possessions.

****BIG RED FLAG!**** Guarding is NOT GOOD!!!

Dogs who are worried about people taking something they want to keep hold of are way more likely to bite - and kids are often easy targets. TRADE UP!

The trick is to change your dog's emotion about spitting out that 'special' something.

You can teach your dog to LOVE giving things up, simply by ALWAYS offering them something EVEN BETTER in exchange or "trading up". You give me the bobble hat = I give you some chicken.

Everyone's a winner! No ruined hat. No huge vet bill to remove the bobble of said hat... AND (the best part!) a dog who'll be HAPPY to share. Over time, you'll see your pup rushing to bring you things, rather than running off with them.

****To be on the safe side, adults should handle the actual trade itself, but get the kids involved by empowering them to tattle on the dog when they have something they shouldn't! Find me a kid who doesn't love tattling ;)**