
STAYING SAFE
AROUND DOGS
Animal Muse
Cat Malkin, MA
Humane Educator • Animal Communicator
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Staying Safe Around Dogs

Dogs are an important part of many families and communities. While most dogs are friendly, it's important for children and adults to learn how to safely and respectfully interact with them to prevent dog bites or other injuries.

As a Humane Educator for over 30 years, I have taught dog bite prevention programs in classrooms throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

I've seen firsthand how understanding dog behavior and body language helps protect both people and dogs.

This guide offers simple tips for safer interactions with dogs including:

- Understanding dog body language
- Helpful tips to stay safe
- 5 Ways to Stay Safe Around Dogs
- "Be A Tree" is an easy-to-remember safety tool for children

Learning how dogs communicate helps create safer, more compassionate relationships for everyone.

Not everyone has to love dogs, but no one should live in fear of dogs.

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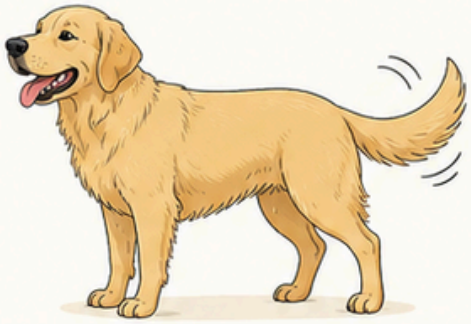
Understanding DOG BODY LANGUAGE

Dogs communicate with their whole body.
Learning the signs helps keep both people and dogs safe and happy.

RELAXED, HAPPY & COMFORTABLE

- Soft eyes
- Relaxed mouth (may be open, like a smile)
- Loose body
- Neutral tail wag

What it means:
I feel safe and comfortable.



Example:
A happy dog approaching you with a wiggly body and relaxed tail.

UNSURE, NERVOUS OR STRESSED

- Whale eye (showing the whites of their eyes)
- Ears back or to the side
- Tucked tail
- Lip licking, yawning, or turning head away
- Crouched or leaning away

What it means:
I feel worried or uncomfortable.



Example:
A nervous dog feeling unsure.
I need space.

OVERWHELMED, AFRAID OR ANGRY

- Wide eyes
- Ears pinned back
- Stiff body
- Tail tucked or held high and stiff
- Growling, showing teeth, or snapping

What it means:
I feel scared and need distance.



Example:
An overwhelmed dog who feels scared.
I need distance right away.

HELPFUL TIPS

BE KIND
Always be gentle and respectful around dogs.

ASK FIRST
Always ask the dog's person before petting a dog.

GIVE SPACE
If a dog looks worried or uncomfortable, move away slowly.

LOOK & LEARN
Notice the dog's body language. It tells you how they feel.

SAFETY FIRST
Your safety and the dog's safety are always the most important.

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5 Ways to Stay Safe Around Dogs

Smart choices keep you and dogs happy and safe!

1 Ask Before Approaching a Dog

Always ask the dog's person before approaching or petting. Not every dog wants to say hello.



2 Let the Dog Sniff You Before Touching

Dogs use their sense of smell to learn about you and feel more comfortable.



3 Never Reach Over or Stare at a Dog

Reaching over a dog's head or staring can feel scary or threatening. Pet the side of the neck, shoulder, or chest if the dog seems relaxed.



4 Never Force Interactions

If a dog moves away, hides, growls, or seems uncomfortable, respect their space. Let them choose.



5 Safety Matters More Than Being Polite

You don't have to pet every dog or stay in a situation that feels unsafe. Trust your instincts and keep yourself and dogs safe.



Be kind.
Be calm.
Be safe.

You and dogs deserve it.

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How to Stay Safe Around Dogs



Stand Like A Tree

1. **STAND STILL LIKE A TREE:** Plant your feet. Don't run. Don't yell. Be quiet.
2. **KEEP HANDS BY YOUR SIDE:** Don't wave or offer your hands to the dog.
3. **LOOK AT YOUR FEET:** This helps you avoid eye contact, which can feel threatening to a dog.
4. **BE BORING:** Stay quiet and still until the dog loses interest and walks away.

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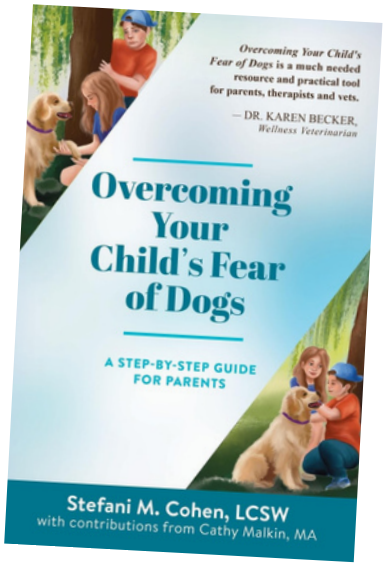
Feeling Safe Around Dogs



Overcoming Your Child's Fear of Dogs

Co-authored by Stefani Cohen and Cat Malkin

This compassionate guide helps people of all ages better understand dogs, canine body language, and behavior so they can feel safer, more confident, and more comfortable around dogs.

Perfect for:

- Children and adults who feel nervous or fearful around dogs
- Dog parents and guardians
- Parents, caregivers, dog trainers, and educators
- Families welcoming a new dog
- Anyone wanting to better understand dog behavior and communication

Learning about dogs helps create safer, more compassionate relationships for both people and dogs.

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