

What does fear of children mean?

It means that your dog may look away, put his tail down, hide, cower or even tremble when he sees children (generally, any child under 12 years old, though it depends on the dog). Some dogs may show teeth, growl or bark. If the child reaches out to pet them, they may snap or nip. Unfortunately, dogs are not naturally great with children, and children are not naturally great with dogs. The truth is that dogs and children require adult supervision for the safety and comfort of both the dog and the child. To your dog, children are completely different than adults – children move faster, talk louder, giggle uncontrollably, touch them without asking and are more likely to raise their arms above their heads and/or jump around.

How could this happen? It is likely that your dog is afraid of children because he was not properly socialized to them during puppyhood. See below for ways to start improving your dog's fear.

Should I invite over a lot of nice children to socialize my dog?

- **No!** His socialization window is closed. Much like humans are more receptive to new things when they are children, dogs are more receptive to new things when they are puppies. Imagine something you are afraid of. Heights? Snakes? Whatever it is, could you overcome your fear by skydiving or being thrown into a snake pit? Ingrained fears require professional help to overcome.

What should I do?

- **Be your dog's advocate.** Stay observant, and if you are noticing your dog giving signals of being uncomfortable (tense, closed mouth, tongue flicks, trembling, etc.), prepare to say "no" if children approach and/or ask to pet him. If children approach without asking, be prepared to step in front of your dog and prevent contact.
- **Have a plan for your dog.** If you have children visiting your home, have a plan for your dog. If he is dog-social, take him to doggie daycare for the day. Hire a pet-sitter who will keep him at their house, or ask a neighbor (without kids) to watch him. If children are only visiting for a few hours or less, put your dog in a crate in a separate room with a frozen KONG or other food toy to keep him occupied – but be sure the children are not able to access the room.
- **Have a plan for your children.** Knowing that children can easily forget instructions, arrange your home in the most successful way – for example, setting up baby gates to allow for a "kid-free" zone for your dog. Teach your child(ren) how to best greet a dog (ask your Adoption Counselor what that looks like!), and help them practice by tossing treats to your dog (from a safe distance).

How can I teach my dog to like children?

- **Ask kids to toss your dog treats.** Be sure that the treats are tossed from a distance where both dog and child are comfortable and safe.
- **Hire a professional.** A Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (<https://www.animalbehaviorsociety.org/web/applied-behavior-caab-directory.php>) or qualified Certified Professional Dog Trainer (<http://www.ccpdt.org/>) can help you improve or eliminate your dog's fear of children through a desensitization and counter conditioning protocol.