

GDA eBook Series



## **Kids & Dogs - The Early Years**

A Good Dog Academy Guide to Safety, Management and Relationship Building in a home with kids under 3

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**Good Dog**  
Academy

## About Good Dog Academy

Welcome to Good Dog Academy, where we believe that positive reinforcement is the key to a happy, well-adjusted dog.

In this eBook, we'll guide you through a few safety and training considerations with dogs and young kids using positive methods. Our goal is a safe and stress free home for everyone in the family.

## 'Positive reinforcement is the cornerstone of our training philosophy'

We believe that rewarding good behaviour leads to more of it. By understanding this powerful tool, you'll develop a closer bond with your dog and build a foundation of trust and respect.

### How this eBook will Help You

In this comprehensive guide, we'll provide you with tips and techniques to increase safety in the home. We will also discuss how to build trust and create lasting relationships between dogs and kids.

We will help you understand your unique dog, identify safety concerns in your home and even go through some stroller tips. You'll find step-by-step instructions, training games and valuable insights.

**Let's get started!**

# 1



## Baby & Toddler Safety

Babies change rapidly during the first couple years. This can be really challenging for your dog. Adding predictability to your dog's day can make a huge difference in increasing their feelings of safety. It also builds trust.

Let's go through a few ways to increase safety in your home.

### Always ACTIVELY supervise

Active supervision means you are in between your dog and baby with no distractions. Your cell phone, computer, favourite tv show, a knock at the door or even extreme fatigue can compromise your ability to proactively supervise. This is when we miss things and accidents can happen. If we can't be actively supervising, be pro-active and remove the dog to a safe space.

### Use Safe Separation

When you can't actively supervise, use safe separation. This can look like a gate, crate or tether that keeps your dog from accessing the baby (or vice versa). Your dog needs to be conditioned to like this space before you use it in your day to day life.

### Reward all Calm Behaviour

You need to show your dog what you DO want them to do. By praising and rewarding calm behaviour around your baby or toddler, you will likely see that behaviour repeated. Our dogs are constantly learning what works for them in their environment. Make sure you heavily praise and reward the things they get right!

### Know your Dog's Sensitivities

Every dog is different. Understanding your dog's breed or mix of breeds and the history of those breeds will give you better insight into their behaviour. Are they a herding breed? Well they may just love chasing (and controlling) your fast moving toddler, their rolling toys and that new run bike you've just introduced. Knowing what triggers your dog's natural instincts to kick in is important so you can be proactive in your management approach.





### Invite, don't approach

Inviting your dog over gives them choice! Never bring your baby over to your dog and never let your toddler approach them. Teaching kids from a very young age that we ALWAYS invite the dog into our space keeps them much safer in your home and in the community. Children learn by watching, so what you do day to day with your dog is important. Always model safe behaviour.

### Include your Dog

It is important to find ways to include your dog with your baby or toddler. Walks together, meal times and set up relationship building games are all examples of inclusion. This is very unique to each family and each dog. Work with a positive reinforcement trainer to set your home up for success.

### Keep Sleep Times Safe

If your baby is napping and you are getting things done around the house, your dog shouldn't be in the nursery (or your bedroom). If you are co-sleeping or use a bassinet, your dog can't have access to your bed for safety reasons. Use an pen or crate if they are most comfortable in the bedroom with you.

### Babysitters

We all need a break and at some point you'll likely have a babysitter come over. It is not their job to watch your kiddo AND your dog. Put the dog away in their crate or safe space or take them with you on an adventure day (fun!). This is especially important if you have a sensitive dog and are working to build trust and safety in your home.



# 2



## Management Strategies

Management is a great tool to keep your child safe and minimize your dog's stress. When we use a management strategy, like a gate, we are adding safety and preventing unwanted behaviours.

### Which management strategy is right for you?

This depends on your dog, your home, your kiddo, your training goals and your capacity to actively supervise. A home with 3 young kids and an excitable adolescent dog will likely require much more management than a home with a calm older dog and a new baby. Work with your positive reinforcement professional to create strategies that work for you.

### Types of management

Here are a few management strategies. ALL of these tools need to be positively conditioned so that the dog feels relaxed when using them. We do not want to add stress. These tools are meant to help relieve it and keep everyone safe.

- **Gate** - A baby gate keeps your dog and child from accessing each other. These are essential with moving kiddos. If your dog is feeling stressed or is barrier sensitive, you may need a second form of management as well (like a crate).
- **Crates** - If your dog is crate trained this is a great option. Many dogs feel really safe in their crate and are happy to be removed from the chaos for a nap. Some do not. If your dog struggles with safe separation or their crate, please reach out to a qualified positive reinforcement trainer for support.
- **Tether** - A tether can be used as a backup management tool. For example. Your kiddo is in their high chair and your dog was asked to 'go to their bed'. A tether to the wall can be a great backup tool if you aren't available to hold the leash and actively train your dog. Tethers must be positively conditioned like crates so your dog does not feel stressed when you use one.
- **Waist Leash** - A waist leash can be a fantastic tool if you have two parents and one has the dog and the other the child. A backup tether to your waist ensures your dog won't go running into the other room when they hear your kiddo laugh or a new toy makes an interesting sound. Never allow a child to approach a dog who is in their crate or on a tether. They have no escape route and can quickly become defensive.





## Identify the high risk areas in your home

Knowing where you might have a problem is the first step. High risk zones are areas in your home where your dog may not want to move when your child approaches. These areas become very high risk when the dog can't move or is trapped. They can also be areas where the dog has something of high value, like their food bowl. These areas are where your child is at the highest risk for a bite to occur.

### Common High Risk Zones

- **The coffee table** - The space between the couch and coffee table is a common place for a dog to lay and also a common place for a new walker to play. Push that coffee table out further or remove it completely for a couple years to open up this space.
- **The front door** - Everyone is excited to go for a walk and rushes the front door. The increased arousal (excitement) can also make your dog more likely to react. Use safe separation until you are ready or hold you toddlers hand so they don't get too close.
- **The kitchen entrance** - The kitchen is a place we often hang out during the day and is also where meals come from. Many dogs are trained to lay just outside the kitchen entrance. This is great until there is a toddler going in and out constantly. Maybe even tripping on them as they go by. Consider where your dog lays and find a safer space out of the walkway.

### Very High Risk Zones

- **Food bowls & treats**- Never allow a child to have access to the dog's food, water or treats. This is a very high risk zone and is best kept off limits.
- **The end of the hallway** - Anywhere in your house where your toddler can corner your dog and they have no escape. Your dog will likely default to 'flight' when they are nervous, but if that is taken away then 'fight' becomes the only option. Your toddler is unlikely to see or listen to any early warning signs of stress. Your dog will have no choice but to escalate.
- **The couch, their bed or crate** - This is especially important with dogs who resource guard and our senior dogs who might find it painful to get up and move.





## Identify the risks and use management to avoid conflict

Move that coffee table, gate the hallway and put a pen up around your dogs food & bed. Good management is the key to a safe and happy home with a toddler and a dog.

### Why is Management (gates, crates, tethers, leashes) so Important?

**Reason 1:** Your toddler cannot make 'the right' choice. Their prefrontal cortex isn't fully developed until they are 25. At age 1-3 if you say 'please stay off the dog bed', they are unable to follow through. 5 minutes later they see the dog they love on their bed and they have to go see them. Our only defence here are gates and pens... aka management.

**Reason 2:** You cannot watch them all the time. You will have days when you are tired, overwhelmed or busy with 10 things at once. Safe separation will keep you sane! This is the number one skill to teach your dog when you are expecting or have a new baby.

**Reason 3:** Some scenarios don't set your dog up for success. A birthday party with 8 toddlers isn't the best place for your dog. Or maybe they really struggle with the new push toy that your toddler absolutely loves. Removing them from these situations is the best way to prevent them from practicing any unwanted behaviours and will also keep everyone safe.

Low stress will build tension over time. The more peaceful and stress free the environment is for your dog, the more like they are to build trust with your kiddo.

### Choosing the Strategy

There are many factors in choosing the right strategy. It needs to be safe and feel easily doable by everyone in the home. Your dog needs to feel comfortable, so the first step may be a training protocol to help them feel safe when separated. Always work with a positive reinforcement trainer (or separation anxiety specialist) if your dog is struggling with safe separation.

### When to use 2 barriers

If your dog is showing you they are stressed and don't have the ability to move away or are unlikely to choose to move away, then a second barrier is necessary. I also recommend a second barrier if you are unsure of how





your dog will feel or what they might do. This could look like 2 baby gates a few feet apart so the dog and toddler can't physically touch each other. It could also be a pen around the dogs crate, so your toddler can't approach the crate and make your dog feel uncomfortable.

### Gradual Introduction

Don't just set up a gate and assume your dog will be fine behind it. This must be SLOWLY introduced for most dogs. Start by feeding all meals behind the gate, offering enrichment after their walk and any yummy snacks or new puzzle toys behind the gate. Your dog should start to associate this safe space with good things happening for them. This can take weeks or months, so starting even before baby is born is a good idea

### Capture Calm

If you notice your dog relaxing in their safe space, calmly praise them. A well placed 'Good Girl' is incredibly reinforcing. You can also offer a treat or chew toy as a reward for their calm behaviour in their separated space.

### You need breaks too

Remember, it's not just about your dog and kiddo. You need a break too. If it feels good to put the dog for a nap in their crate while your baby goes for their nap, do it! Then you can enjoy complete peace and recharge.





# 3



## Baby Equipment

Baby equipment can look strange, smell strange, move and even make funny noises. This is likely all very new to your dog. Always introduce baby equipment without your baby present to start. You can do this in the evening while baby is in bed.

### Tips for desensitizing new baby items

Before you pop your baby into their exciting new jolly jumper that just arrived, it is really important to introduce it to your dog. Here are a few considerations and tips for introducing a new baby item.

- Start slow - don't turn on all the sounds and movement on your baby gym or make your stroller start rolling with your dog right beside it. Go slow, take baby steps and watch for very neutral body language.
- Keep your sessions short & stay positive - These associations can take a long time with a fearful dog. Stay positive, use really yummy rewards and end the session before either of you gets really frustrated.
- Reward all the baby steps your dog makes and ask for professional help if you need it.

### What if my dog is really fearful, but I need that piece of equipment.

This often happens with the baby swing or the stroller. I would highly recommend working with a positive reinforcement trainer if this item is non negotiable in the house and the dog is really struggling. In the meantime, try and use a gate or a pen to keep the dog in another space when the item is being used. Give them something to do and praise them for just hanging out. They truly don't have to see the swing to know it's on in the other room. This is the very first baby step in your desensitization journey.

Example: If your ultimate goal is to enjoy peaceful stroller walks with your dog, consider these milestones:

- **Start inside** - Begin by setting the stroller up in your home and reward your dog for walking past it or sniffing it. As they get more comfortable you can progress to little movements back and forth. You can also practice sitting and laying down beside the stroller once they are showing no signs of stress when they are near it.





- **Go for a walk with 2 adults** - One adult takes the stroller and the other takes the dog. Find the sweet spot where the dog is far enough away that they can walk calmly and can take food. Now every time they glance at the stroller you can say 'yes!' and deliver them a yummy treat. This is teaching them that the stroller equals good things for them. Watch for self regulation signs like sniffing, sneezing and shaking off. This shows you that they are trying to 'shake off' the stress and are likely to be in more of a learning headspace.
- **Go out on your own** - Once your dog is really comfortable very close to the stroller, you can venture out solo. Always use the safety strap on your stroller and try a waist leash if you feel more comfortable hands free. Reward your dog from the same side to avoid getting tangled up. Make sure you celebrate your successes as you reach each new milestone!
- **Tip:** Leave your phone alone and drink the coffee when you get back. You really need to be present when stroller walking with a dog.

### Stay Flexible

Stroller walking isn't for every dog (or every baby either). If your dog reacts to other dogs, people, cars, skateboards, etc... then this might not be the safest option for you. A carrier is a great alternative and safer in many cases. You can also have another adult walk the dog or employ the help of a qualified fear-free dog walker.



# 4



## Training Tips... For Parents

Having a baby changes everything. You can't ever be truly ready for all the changes it will bring. Your dog feels that too. Be gentle on them (and yourself) as you navigate this whole new chapter together.

My number one tip is to prioritize safety. Accidents happen and a lot of the time it's because we 'thought it would be ok'. Never assume if you don't know your dog's response in a particular scenario. You need to know this dog (at this age) with this baby (at this age) in this scenario. Yes, it is that specific! If you don't, use the highest level of safety to start and slowly build trust.

### Practice Before the Big Day

If you are currently pregnant, you have time to practice with your dog before baby even arrives! Here are a few training tips to help you and your dog get ready.

1. **Switch up your position** - Ask your dog to sit or lay down while you are sitting, while you are laying on the couch, while you are sitting on the floor. Some dogs are VERY visual and our body language matters. Switch it up and practice their cues in various ways. One day soon you may have a baby sleeping on your chest and you'll be so glad you did!
2. **Distraction Levels** - Practicing cues indoors is pretty easy for most dogs. What happens when the baby is crying or someone knocks at the door. Challenging your dog with more distractions, as they are ready, will increase their skill level and make your life a lot easier when baby arrives.
3. **Guests** - If your dog struggles with guests, now is the time to work with a positive reinforcement trainer and come up with a plan! This one will help you immensely when baby arrives and everyone wants to come meet them. It will also help lower your dog's overall stress level if they are confident in what their role is when guests arrive.
4. **Change up your routine** - If your dog is very set in their routine, now is the time to switch it up. Right now you dog might eat breakfast at 6am, has a walk at 7am and then everyone leaves for work and he sleeps for 4 hours until the dog walker arrives. When baby is here, that routine is likely to go out the window. Try and switch it up a bit now so that it's one less thing to dramatically change with baby's arrival.





## Support System

Having a dog and a baby is a big job. If you have a high needs or very sensitive dog, it can feel impossible some days. Build a support network around you and ask for help! Here are a few things that really helped me in my early years as a mom.

1. **Ask a friend to walk with you** - It seems way less overwhelming to take everyone out if you have an extra set of hands. Have your friend push the stroller or walk the dog for you. You won't be so worried about the baby screaming or that dog down the road that lunges at the fence. You'll have someone there who can help if things go sideways and the company is really nice too.
2. **Escape for an early 'mom walk'** - I still do this. It keeps me sane. Walking the dog at 6:30am while my partner gets the kids breakfast is my moment of peace before the chaos begins. If walking your dog brings you joy, then find time to do it without the baby. It'll be good for both of you.
3. **Hire or ask for help** - Find a good dog walker (or babysitter!) and get a little help on days when it's just all too much. When you are tired, overwhelmed and frustrated everyone feels it and feeds off it. It quickly snowballs. If you have the means, hire some help. If you don't offer to do a trade with a neighbour or just ask a friend. Many people are willing to help new parents, you just have to ask.
4. **Seek professional support** - Whether for your dog, your health or your mental wellness. Being a new parent is really hard but there should be more good days than bad ones. If you or your dog are struggling, reach out to a professional who can help.



# 5



## Relationship Building

We dream of this beautiful bond between our dog and our kids, but creating that kind of relationship might look a little different than you think. It can take a long time to build the trust required for a really deep, loving and safe relationship.

In this chapter, we'll explore what this looks like and how to foster this type of relationship in your home.

### Baby Stage (Newborn - Crawling)

During these early months, your dog might not even notice your baby. That's ok! They really aren't doing much and are always up in arms, a bassinet or a carseat. Here are a few ways to build trust in these first few months.

1. **Homecoming** - It is really important that you don't 'introduce' your new baby to your dog. When you bring baby home, YOU should say hi to your dog. They want you. Then the emphasis should be on calm behaviour at a distance while we build trust and increase comfort. Continue rewarding calm behaviour as we slowly increase the amount of time they are around the baby.
2. **Gradual Exposure** - When including your dog, start with less challenging situations and gradually increase the difficulty. If baby is sleeping in your arms and your dog is comfortable laying at your feet, that's ideal. We want them to be around baby when they show us they are relaxed and neutral.
3. **Do fun things together** - Go for a walk together or maybe a car ride (with safe seating arrangements). Doing something your dog enjoys with the baby nearby can help with their positive association.

### Crawlers & Early Walkers

This age can be really challenging. These kiddos move FAST and your dog might feel really unsure. This is the age where I commonly hear "he has always been fine around the baby, until today when he growled at her". Sometimes we miss those early signals that our dog is stressed and sometimes the changes just happen too quickly and you are as surprised as your dog. The reality is crawlers, cruisers and early walkers don't move like every other humans your dog has encountered before and that can be really unsettling. Here are a few relationship building tips for this age:





1. **Safe Separation** - The goal for this age is to minimize stress, so increase your safe separation and be very calculated about inclusion activities.
2. **Passive Inclusion** - Now we can use the highchair! Use this glorious tool to build their bond. This CANNOT be a free for all. Have your dog 'go to their bed' and wait until your kiddo is done eating. Use a tether if needed and reward intermittently for them staying on their bed. Once mealtime is over release them to clean up! It becomes the best jackpot reward ever for all of their patience. It is really important that your dog's bed is the appropriate distance away. Some dogs are more comfortable close by and some need more space. Remember to use a tether, pen or gate for safety if needed. You can also continue with walks, car rides and anything else they enjoy doing side by side.
3. **Actively teach inclusion activities** - These are fun for everyone. Here are 3 I love for this age:
  1. Kibble fetch - Feed your dog their breakfast by tossing one kibble at a time across the room. Have your kiddo sit beside you or on your lap. As they get older they can help throw!
  2. Lick mat prep - Let them use pumpkin, yogurt or peanut butter to paint your dog's lick mat. This is so fun, but be sure to use ingredients that are safe for your toddler to sample.
  3. Find it - Help your kiddo hide treats while your dog is behind a gate or with another adult. Then have them search for them all. Start easy while they learn the cue and then get harder and harder.

**Important Safety Tip:** Your dog may get closer than they are comfortable with when food is involved. A sudden movement or loud sound could lead to a defensive reaction from your conflicted and now startled pup.

**NEVER** use food as a means to get your dog to come closer to your child when they are showing signs of discomfort.

### Toddlers and Preschoolers

These guys LOVE to help. Be sure to give them stuffed toys and other play items so they can really use their imaginations.... without requiring your dog's help. Model the behaviour you want to see and know that their prefrontal cortex (decision making part of the brain) is still





developing and they can't always make the 'right choice'. **Supervision and management are still key at this age.**

**Here are 3 relationship building games for toddlers and preschoolers:**

1. Freeze Dance - Turn on some music and let your kids dance and get silly. Have your dog on a leash and use a tug toy to play with them. When the music stops everyone freezes and you can cue your dog to sit (and reward them with a treat for doing so). Remind your kids that when they are calm and still, it helps their dog be calm and still. Repeat! This helps your dog learn to go from silly to calm. It also shows your kiddos the effect they can have on your dog's behaviour when their bodies get still and calm.

2. 3 cups - Have your kid hide a treat under one of the cups and mix them up. Your dog is in a down stay on their bed or on leash with another adult (or behind a gate). When your child is done, they return to you or behind their tape line/on their spot. You can then release the dog to find the treat. Keep your dog on leash for safety.

3. Hide and Seek - Have the dog behind a gate or on leash or in a sit stay. Have your kids hide with an adult. Start easy until your dog knows the game. Have the dog try and find you! Make sure the adult delivers the treat and that the dog is on a leash if needed as a safety precaution.

**Remind kids that dogs like calm bodies and quiet voices. We don't want them to feel scared. If your child is under 3, try and do this at a time where they are naturally a little calmer... maybe right after a nap or before bedtime.**

Have fun & never assume it will just be ok! More precautions and VERY slow progression will build more trust over time. Remove your dog if you see any signs of stress. It is your responsibility to understand their body language and advocate for them so that they don't feel they need to advocate for themselves.



# 6



## Dog Safety in Your Home & Community

Kids under 5 are the most likely to be bitten by a dog. That dog is typically either the family pet or a friend's dog. Here are a few tips to help keep your little ones safe.

### Invites Decrease Bites. Simple.

We want to teach kids to invite the dog into their space and NEVER to go into the dog's space. This gives the dog choice!

We also need to respect the dog's choice to say 'no thanks'. That can be a really hard parenting moment, but it is so important. Kids also learn by watching us. Model safe behaviour and they are really likely to follow your lead. This is especially important with a strange dog, a dog with prized resource (food, treat, their bed, their person) or a dog who is tied or has no escape.

### Be a Tree

Stand Tall. Fold your branches. Watch your roots grow, take a big breath and count to 10.

Hopefully by 10 an adult has come to help. When we run, wave our arms or scream it is likely to excite, frighten or increase defensive communication from the dog. Teach your kids these simple steps. Let them know that the dog may come sniff them, but dogs can't chase trees! Dogs chase fast moving things, which is exactly why we don't run.

You can practice this using the 'Freeze Dance' game in the previous section.

### Doggie Detective

When your kids understand how to speak dog, they can understand how a dog is feeling. This means they may catch the early signs of stress so the dog never has to growl, snarl, lunge or bite. **To learn more about Doggie Detective, Be a Tree and the many Family Paws Resources check out [www.familypaws.com](http://www.familypaws.com)**

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## **Share Your Success Stories**

We'd love to hear about your success stories and the positive changes you've seen in your dog.

## **Your journey can inspire others!**

Learn more about Good Dog Academy's commitment to positive reinforcement training and bettering the lives of dogs and their guardians.



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