



Dog Meets Family Preparation Checklist

Welcoming your Rescue Dog

*as a family
with young
children
(ages 1 - 6)*



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This checklist is designed to help families with young children prepare for the arrival of a rescue dog.

Many rescue organizations and shelters have minimum age requirements for families with children. We recommend contacting your local rescue or shelter to find out about these rules beforehand.

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Disclaimer

This checklist is intended for informational purposes only and should not be considered a substitute for professional advice or the rescues/shelter policies. While it provides helpful tips for preparing your family for the arrival of a rescue dog, individual circumstances may vary.

Always consult a qualified dog trainer, veterinarian, or child development expert for personalized guidance tailored to your situation. The creators of this checklist are not liable for any outcomes resulting from the use of this information. Always prioritize safety and well-being for both your children and your pets.



Prepare your home and your family



Create a kid-free zone - the dog's safe space. This can be a crate, a separate room, or a gated area that children are unable to access.

- **Why?** *Most dogs need time to adjust to a new home and routine. You could also designate dog-free zones like kids' rooms or play areas (optional).*
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Think about routines in your home, such as hectic mornings getting kids to school or daycare, activities planned, playdates, work, and bedtime.

- **Why?** *Consider how your new dog will fit into your schedule and whether you need help on certain days, such as doggie daycare or a dog walker.*

Clear your schedule. Bring your dog home on the weekend or take a few days off. **Don't plan for meet-and-greets, parties, or taking the dog to busy places.**

- **Why?** *A good rule to follow is the 3-3-3 rule: 3 days decompressing, 3 weeks learning new routines, 3 months finally feeling at home.*

Have a plan for transitional or narrow areas, like entryways, hallways, or staircases. Examples: the child and dog enter or exit the space separately, or one after the other with an adult in between.

- **Why?** *Dogs may feel uncomfortable around children in tight spaces.*

Food and water. Establish a safe location where the dog can eat alone.

- **Why?** *Many dogs are protective of food. It can also be a choking hazard for small children. Water bowls with more than 1" of water pose a drowning risk. Children often like to splash in them, which can lead to slippery floors.*



Meeting your new dog

Whether you meet the dog at the shelter, rescue, or foster home, follow this set of guidelines to make sure the interaction is safe.



First Meeting. We recommend multiple meetings if the schedule allows. First, have the adults meet the dog. Next, bring the whole family to the meeting. **It's important for the whole family,** including other dogs, to meet the new dog before you decide to adopt it.

Allow plenty of open space to give the dog ample room to approach and walk away. Leaving a drag line on a dog can be helpful if you need to move or remove the dog safely. We recommend having a dog professional supervise and coach the meeting if possible. Children tend to get very excited when meeting a new dog. Practice how to greet and pet dogs with your children before meeting the dog. Check out videos on greetings and petting on page 9.

Pay attention to the dog's body language.

Call the dog over, but wait for the dog to approach first, ideally in a happy and relaxed manner. Do not use treats to lure the dog over. Initially, have the children seated in designated places, but you will want to see how the dog reacts to walking or playing children (keep a safe distance!). Do not overwhelm the dog by having everyone try to interact at once.



Questions to consider **BEFORE** adoption

1. **Is the dog “kid-friendly”?** Many rescues don't know the dog's history. The dog might have been around children before, but you won't know if they had positive or negative interactions. Even if the dog is considered child-friendly, dogs and young children should never be left unsupervised.
2. **What behavioral issues have you seen or were reported on the surrender form?** *Examples:* Reactivity, separation anxiety, resource guarding, any bite history
3. **How does the dog get along with cats and other pets?** Do you know if they lived with cats/ other pets? If yes, did they interact, or were the pets separated in the previous home?
4. **How do they walk on leash?** Are they reactive?
5. **How do they do in a car?** Is there any car sickness?
6. **How long have they been in rescue, foster, or shelter care?**
7. **Has the dog destroyed the house, yard, or furniture in previous care?**
8. **Breed-specific questions (shedding, alert barking/ vocalization)**
9. **What are their current training needs?**

Can we foster?

Some rescues and shelters allow you to foster first before committing to adopting. There are pros and cons.



- **Even if the dog is not the right match, many children (and adults) struggle with the decision of returning the dog.** If you don't think you can handle that, don't foster/ foster to adopt.
- **Fostering is a great way to find out if adding a dog to your busy family life is doable.** It may help you realize that you can't do it in this season of your life, or the dog was not the right fit.



Your new dog is home!

It's never safe to leave any dog alone with young children. When you leave a room, call the dog with you or bring the child with you.



Never force interactions. Many rescue and newly adopted dogs may feel anxious when they first arrive at their new homes. If your new dog wants to stay in their safe space for a few hours or even a whole day, let them. When they feel comfortable, they will come out.

Go slow when introducing your rescue to the other pets in your home. Many rescues will be tested with other dogs, but this doesn't necessarily mean they will like your dog (or cat) right away. Even when meetings outside your house went okay, inside could be another story. Keep children away during initial introductions, and separate pets when not actively supervising until they are fully acclimated. Initially, feed pets separately from one another.

Signs of stress and observations. Observe your dog closely and consider keeping a journal to record your observations. Look for signs of stress, triggers, changes in eating patterns, health issues, and protective behaviors, especially around children. *Dog Meets Baby offers a [Dog Body Language course](#) to help you understand your dog's signals.*

Honeymoon period. Some dogs may be calm, timid, and won't bark at first, but once they become more comfortable, you will likely see new behaviors, and their whole personality will come out. Remember the [3-3-3 Rule](#).



Training

Leave the harness and drag line on to catch your dog safely, in case your dog grabs something you don't want them to have, or jumps on your child. Avoid grabbing an item from the dog's mouth unless it's absolutely necessary. Work on safe collar grabs.

Initially, walk your new dog alone, without strollers or children, until you get to know your dog. Young children should not walk dogs on a leash independently.

Videos: [Walking with Dog, 2 Dogs and Stroller](#), and [Staying Safe on Walks](#)

Create Safety Rules. Somewhere between the ages of three and five, most children are able to get beyond childproofing measures. That's why it's very important to have safety rules in place and learn about a dog's body language.



Training. Training will be necessary even if some dogs know some behaviors. Be prepared for potty training in the new space, even for adult dogs.

Pro-Tip: For families with young kids, the [Leave it](#), [Away](#), [Drop it](#), and [Go to bed](#) cues are the ones we recommend training first.

Sign up for an in-person class or take an online class.

Book a consultation with a [certified dog trainer](#), especially if you notice behavioral issues. Don't wait, address problems as they arise!

Take a Dog Meets Baby Course:

- [Baby and Toddler Courses](#) (for caregivers of 4 to 48-month-old children). Both courses include a video training library.
- [Dog Body Language Course](#)

****Check with your rescue if they have a discount code for Dog Meets Baby courses.*



Things to have before your rescue dog comes home.



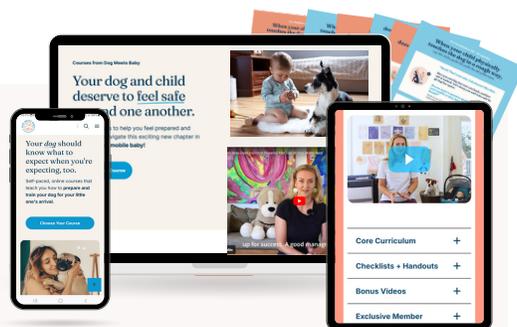
1. Separate **bed** or **crate**, especially if you have other pets in the home.
2. **Water and food bowl**, just for them.
3. **Puzzle toys**, and **toys** just for them. Each child can give the new dog a toy. We recommend a **long toy** in case the dog grabs it too excitedly from their hand.
4. **Leash** (non-retractable), non-slip collar, and/or harness.
***Pro Tip:** Bring the leash to the pickup!*
5. If possible, try to get the **food** your dog is currently on before transitioning to the food of your choice.
6. Get a **pet tag** with your information on it. If you are deciding on your dog's name, you can add it later. ***Pro Tip:** Put the tag on the collar immediately at pickup.*
7. **Treats** and **chews**. Initially, stick to 1-2 types of treats and 1-2 chewies to avoid an upset tummy and diarrhea.
8. **Baby gates** to separate kids and dogs.
9. **Find a vet** clinic and book an appointment. Some veterinarians have long waitlists!



Dog Meets Baby Resources

Dog Meets Baby Courses:

- **Baby and Toddler Courses** for caregivers of 4 to 48-month-old children
- **Dog Body Language Course** for dog parents with and without children



Free:

Young Children and Dogs Handouts:

- [Toddler Foods Toxic to Dogs](#)
- [What to say when your child invades the dog's space](#)
- [Safety Rules for Children](#)

Rules for Petting and Greeting a Dog:

- [Is your dog saying NO to being petted?](#)

General Guides:

- [Gates Guide](#)
- [Puzzle Toys and Chews Guide](#)

Other:

- [Toddler Blog Posts](#)

Watch Videos:

- [How to tell if the dog wants you to pet them?](#)
- [How NOT to greet a dog](#)
- [How to greet a dog and do a consent test](#)
- [How to pet a dog](#)





How to safely involve a 3 to 6-year-old with your dog



As always, both child and dog should be consenting, relaxed, and happy to participate.

Creating space

Involve your child in creating the space for the dog, such as choosing the dog bed, a special toy for the dog, and helping set up the dog zone and decorate with colorings or drawings.

Giving treats

Around this age, children are more reliable about treat delivery – holding it properly in an open hand and then releasing it to the dog.

Assisting with feedings

Older toddlers and preschoolers can [fill kongs or other puzzle toys](#) with treats or kibble, and can [pour kibble into food bowls](#) and give it to the dog. Teach your child to [always back up](#).

[Getting the leash, collar, harness and poop bags ready for a walk](#)

Assisting with training

With your supervision, your child can practice many of the basic behaviors you've been teaching your dog.

Playing fetch

Fetch can be a great activity for building their relationship, but playing with rules is best. Watch this video: [Dog and Toddler Play Fetch](#)

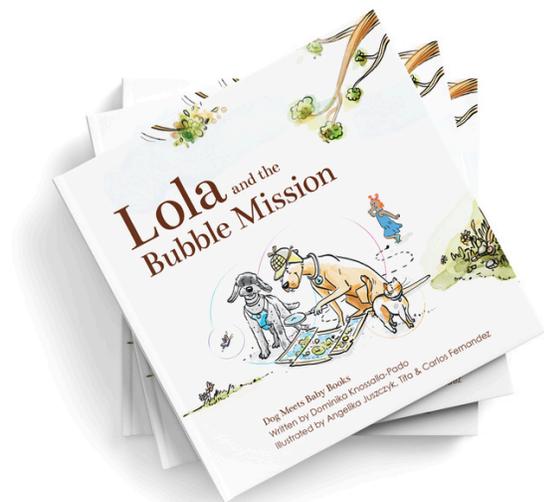
Learning about body language

Talk to your child about your dog's happy and unhappy body language, and frequently reinforce what it looks like when your dog needs space.



Lola and the Bubble Mission

The picture book that teaches what every child needs to know about pets.



What's the book about?

Lola and the Bubble Mission is a heartwarming story about a dog named Lola, her sister, Hela, and their family's cat, Daisy.

The book teaches a simple, yet powerful lesson: all animals live in bubbles that help them feel safe. Through her adventures, Lola shows children how to read a dog's body language and the importance of respecting a pet's space.

No more worrying

about pulled tails or scared pets—this book gives you and your child the tools to read animal body language like a pro.

What makes this book special:

- ✓ **Simple** "bubble" concept children can easily remember
- ✓ **Practical** body language lessons woven into the story
- ✓ **Positive** reinforcement of respectful pet interactions
- ✓ **Perfect for preparing children** for pet ownership
- ✓ **BONUS INCLUDED:** Scan the QR code to download a matching printable coloring book and Bubble Mission Badges - perfect for creative minds.

[Learn More Here](#)

Check out our new series

Kids and Dogs Activities:

15+ Safe & Fun Ideas
for Children

