



Before We Play

A gentle guide to connection, choice, and feeling safe — for children and the dogs they love.

This guide helps families notice dog body language, respect both child and dog, and begin with calm, low-pressure connection. Adult supervision matters. Every dog is an individual.



Observe first

Take a moment to notice how the dog is feeling. Look at their body, not just their tail.



Offer choice

Give the dog space and let them choose if they want to come closer, stay, or move away.



Keep it gentle

Use calm voices, slow movements and gentle hands. Kind and respectful interactions help everyone feel safe.



What Is Your Dog Telling You?

Dogs speak with their whole body. Start by noticing how they look, move, and choose distance.



Soft & curious

- Loose body
- Easy breathing
- Approaches gently
- Ready to explore



Unsure

- Pauses or slows
- Looks away
- Hangs back
- Needs time



Needs space

- Turns away
- Moves off
- Hides or freezes
- Give more room



If you're not sure, pause and give the dog more space.



Everyone Gets a Choice

Safe relationships begin when both child and dog can say yes, no, or not now.



Pause

Slow your body.
Notice how the dog is
feeling before moving
closer.



Invite

Let the dog come
forward first.
Curiosity is a better
start than pressure.



Respect the answer

If the dog turns away,
moves off, or looks unsure,
give space and try again
later.



Choice helps both child and dog feel safer,
calmer, and more ready to learn.



Connection Before Play

Simple, low-pressure ways to begin together.



Watch & wonder

Sit nearby and notice what the dog sees, hears, and smells. Curiosity builds connection.



Offer a choice

Offer your hand, a toy, or a moment of quiet. Let the dog decide what feels comfortable.



Keep it gentle

Short, kind interactions help everyone stay regulated and engaged.

Learning happens in relationships.

When children and dogs both feel safe, supported, and free to communicate, new possibilities open.

