

RSAC Tips: Let's Talk Pets!

SAFETY

With everyone spending extra time at home these days, it's more important than ever to be aware of safety between children and pets. Below are a few tips for ensuring that all of your family members remain safe in your home.

Supervise all interactions between your child and your pet.

Even if your pet has always been fine with your child, animals are not predictable.

Teach your child when it's safe to interact with the pet and when it's not.

Sometimes this is tricky for a child to learn, so if your child is verbal, you can teach her to ask you if it's a "safe time" or not (for example, "Is it Fido time? Or does Fido need space?")

Teach your child what behaviors are safe and unsafe toward pets.

As you start to learn your pet's signals, teach them to your child as well! Narrate what you're doing ("Snowball is happy! I'm going to blink my eyes slowly at her to say hello, and then maybe we can read her a story together.") and prompt your child to follow your instructions.

Consistency is key!

Because some children with autism have difficulties with generalizing skills, it's best to have one set of rules for all dogs instead of a set of rules for your family dog and a different set of rules for unknown dogs. In other words, if you wouldn't allow your child to pull the tail of a dog that you don't know, don't allow your child to pull the tail of your family dog.

Unsafe: interacting while pet is eating, while pet is on his own bed, when pet has a bone or other toy, when pet is sleeping

More Safe: interacting with your pet while sitting on the couch with the family, while caregivers are near

Unsafe: grabbing ears, touching face, pulling tail, touching stomach of a cat, touching paws, riding the dog or placing any weight onto the animal, loud noises around the pet

More Safe: petting gently, talking to the pet, giving "eye kisses" or soft eye blinks to cats, giving the pet a puppet show, letting the pet approach you instead of chasing, telling the pet a story

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