

Scooby Doo Hotchner's Twenty-five Rules for Kids
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NOTE TO PARENTS: *An encounter between a dog and adult which causes frustration due to a communications breakdown can result in a bite when a child is involved. The Humane Society of the United States recommends playacting and practicing dog-related situations with your child as if there were a dog present. Act out situations together with your child. They may save your child’s life—or her face. This isn’t just about your family dog, since a child will probably encounter many dogs in her life.*

The Following Is for Children

This section is just for kids. I call it “Scooby’s Rules” because my dog Scooby Doo needed help being nice with children. He is a really, really big, tall dog—some little kids say he’s so big he could almost be a small horse. One little girl asked if I had a saddle so she could go for a ride! (I hope you know to never sit on any dog—even a nice big one—because a dog’s back isn’t as strong as a pony’s. Even if you’re just trying to have fun, a friendly dog can turn nasty if you try to get on him, because it could hurt or frighten him.)

The reason for “Scooby’s Twenty-five Rules for Kids” is that the one thing that used to really frighten Scooby—and this is going to sound crazy—was *children*. *He was scared of children*. That’s kind of weird, huh? Scooby is twice as big as most little kids, so if he was scared of you, it’s kind of like the elephant being afraid of the mouse. I guess Scooby is one of those dogs who just doesn’t understand smaller people. Since I know

other dogs who have this same scaredy-cat problem with kids, I thought I'd better tell kids so they don't get hurt accidentally.

Scooby's trouble feeling comfortable around kids probably happened because he didn't meet any children when he was a little puppy himself. He didn't get a chance to get used to kids because he wasn't around them, so you smaller people were kind of scary to him. People who raise litters are supposed to introduce young puppies to children so they can feel comfortable around people who are young, too. But whoever owned Scooby's mother didn't do it for him when he was a little pup. I couldn't do it because I didn't even get Scooby until he was five months old. I got him at the animal shelter, so I'm not sure what kind of life he had before. The truth is, Scooby is a little bit of a nut. Even though he's such a big guy, he's scared of almost everything: little things like spiders, bigger things like umbrellas, and once a bag of apples rolled across the floor and he hid under the bed! There are probably lots of dogs like my Scooby Doo: they think kids are interesting and cool and fun . . . but a little scary. So it's up to *the children* (that's you) to help dogs be comfortable and happy around them.

You can read Scooby's Rules with your parents, or you can read them by yourself, but it's really important that you tell other people what you read. Even *parents* need your help, because they might know *some* of these things, but not all of them. Also, your brothers and sisters need to know Scooby's Rules, too, especially if this is your first family dog. Maybe you could bring the "Twenty-five Rules for Kids" into your class at school and see if the teacher would like to share them with everyone.

1. Talk to the owner before you go near a dog. Ask if the dog is friendly. Ask if the dog is used to children (now you know—but some dog owners might *not* know—that

kids are something special for dogs to get used to). You can make friends with dogs in your neighborhood, as long as the owners agree and are there for the first meeting.

2. Do not pat a dog on top of the head. A dog may not like that. Your hand coming over the top of his head can be scary. He can't see your hand above him—so he might think you're going to hit him. Touch a dog on his shoulder instead.

3. Do not look right in the dog's eyes. Dogs think it is really rude to stare. Your mom probably tells you not to stare at people, too, right? Except the difference with dogs is that staring right at their face makes them think you want to fight with them. So don't stare into a dog's face—if he thinks you want to fight him, who's going to win that fight? The one with the most big, shiny, sharp teeth.

4. Your own dog is not all dogs. You probably understand a lot about dogs because you are growing up with one. But every dog is different. Don't ever think that "dogs are dogs," and what works with your dog at home will be the same for all dogs.

5. Hand signals can be dangerous. Don't try to give a strange dog any commands or use a hand signal you know from your own dog. Most dogs have learned hand signals that tell them what to do—but maybe not the same hand signals that you know for "sit" and "shake." The dog may not like signals he doesn't know; you can never tell how a dog will react to something strange to him.

6. Do not reach over a fence to pat a dog—or reach into a crate or into a car window to pat a dog. When a dog is on his own property he wants to protect it, so don't put your hand anywhere near a dog in a car, a kennel or his fenced yard.

7. If a dog lifts his lip and shows you his teeth, it means he wants you to go away. Right away. So if any dog ever shows you his teeth, DO what he wants and back off.

8. A dog who lies down and shows his tummy to you is showing that he wants to be friends. It means he trusts you. He wants you to rub his tummy, so go right ahead.

9. Respect a dog's "personal space." Don't touch or bother a dog when he is eating, sleeping or even peeing!

10. Don't surprise a dog. Even the nicest dog can turn mean if he is surprised. If a dog is resting, don't just come up behind him and pat him. A dog can be shocked by something touching him when he doesn't expect it. It could make him scared or angry enough to bite. So let a dog know you're there by saying something before you touch him and make sure he heard you.

11. An older dog may not feel well, so just leave him alone. An old dog can feel pain in his body; maybe he doesn't see or hear so well, either. An older dog is like your grandpa or grandma: when people and dogs get older they have some problems and sometimes they just want to be left alone.

12. Don't bother a mother dog with her puppies. She does not want to be disturbed. She does not feel safe letting strangers touch her babies or even come near them.

13. Running right toward the dog can frighten him. Walk slowly toward a dog; say a few friendly words so he knows you are a nice person.

14. Not all tail-wagging is happy. People probably told you that a wagging tail means a dog is happy—but there are times when a wagging tail means something else. If

the dog's tail is low and sweeps from side to side, that is a happy wag. But there can be danger if the dog holds his tail high and stiff and it wags only at the tip. If there is another dog around, the dog with the high tail might try to start a fight.

15. Screaming or yelling loudly can upset a dog. It's natural for kids to be loud when they're having a good time, but dogs have such good hearing that they can hear a leaf fall off a tree. So loud kid-voices can hurt their ears and put them in a bad mood.

16. Jumping up and down can frighten a dog. He can get worried and think you're going to do something bad to him.

17. Pulling a dog's ears or tail is NEVER a game to a dog. It's like someone pulling your hair. It hurts: it can make a dog angry.

18. If you see a dog by himself, he may be lost. He may be scared or confused, so he could hurt you. Don't try to make friends with him or rescue him. He might be so upset that he tries to chase or bite you. Tell an adult and they'll figure out what to do safely.

19. Stay away if a dog looks hurt or sick. When dogs are in pain or don't feel well, they can be mean to people. If a dog has been hit by a car, he could be in a lot of pain, or be in shock. There is a good chance he will bite. Tell an adult, so they can call the owner or get help for the dog.

20. Stay away from dogs who are fighting or growling. You could get badly hurt if you get in the middle of two dogs having an argument. Even if it's your own dog, do not put your hand anywhere near them, and do not try to grab a collar. Call an adult for help.

21. Be a tree when a dog you don't know comes up to you. Stand straight with your feet together. Hold your hands up under your chin, and hug your elbows in close to your body. Don't let any part of you stick out. Make yourself into one solid pole, like a tree trunk. If no part of you is moving, there's nothing for a dog to bite.

22. Stand still until the strange dog walks away. Many dogs will just sniff you and leave. Once the dog walks away, you can walk away. But don't run: move slowly. And don't turn and run—walk backward, slowly. If you run, it makes the dog want to chase you.

23. Don't run away from a dog. Running really fast can frighten a dog. It can also make the dog want to chase you or hunt you like a rabbit. And if it's a race between you and a dog, who do you think would win? The one with four legs!

24. If you are walking, running, skateboarding or riding your bicycle and a dog growls, barks or runs at you, push something at him to bite instead of you. Push your bike, your backpack or your skateboard at the dog so he bites one of those and not you.

25. If a dog knocks you down or you fall, be a big solid rock. Stay very still. If you don't move around, the dog will be less interested in you. Think of yourself as a rock or a boulder. Scrunch up on your knees with your head down, facing the ground. Curl up into a ball with your fists covering the back of your neck and your wrists over your ears. In this position you are less interesting to a dog. If you cover your head and face with your arms, it can protect you from being really hurt.

Things Kids Do That Annoy Dogs

NOTE: *This list is designed to teach parents and other adults about children and dogs so that they can then handle situations their own way. The important thing to know*

is that it is natural for your dog to react poorly. There is nothing wrong with your dog—a dog can react negatively to these activities of normal children.

> A child's display of affection can be loud, shrill and spontaneously physical. To a dog, a child's behavior can seem threatening. You need to explain this to the child.

> Roughhousing is never a good idea. A child pushing a dog down to the ground, wrestling with a dog, taking a ball out of a dog's mouth—any of these games are likely to wind up with a dog being rough the one way he can: with his teeth.

> Children's movements can be rapid and unpredictable. This tendency is similar to the behavior of certain prey—which can confuse a dog or make her more reactive in a situation. Children's food, clothing and body parts are moving targets for dogs, and easier to grab than an adult's.

> Whistling or blowing in a dog's face is unpleasant for him. It can provoke aggressive behavior in a dog.

> Some children may tease and taunt a dog for fun. Excessive teasing can cause a dog to lash out in frustration. Pre-teenage kids may experiment with the limits of a dog's tolerance by restraining the dog and then calling him, or getting the dog to bark or growl or whine by holding a toy or a treat just out of his reach.

> Some dogs don't like to be patted on the head. A hand coming over a dog's head may be threatening. The best place to touch a dog—once you get the owner's permission—is on the dog's chest or shoulder.

Tracie Hotchner is making "Scooby Doo Hotchner's Twenty-five Rules for Kids" available for personal and group educational use as a hand-out. There is a great more to learn in THE DOG BIBLE about the way that babies, toddlers and school-age children should interact with dogs. Scooby Doo urges you to please get your hands on a copy of the book to get the whole story. Please visit <http://www.thedogbible.com> for more information.