



NORTHERN LIGHTS THERAPY DOGS • DOG AND FAMILY SAFETY

Dogs, Babies & Families

Simple safety steps for home and community 🐾

The goal is not perfect behavior—instead:

Safe Distance ↔

Calm Choices 🤔

Respectful Boundaries 🙅



1. Bringing Home a Newborn

Prepare first. Introduce slowly. Never rely on "the dog has always been good."

- Before baby arrives: schedule veterinary care if your dog is nervous, anxious, reactive or has any aggressive history.
- Practice calm skills before: go to mat, wait at doors, leave it, settle behind a gate, and walk beside an empty stroller without attaching the leash to it. Never attach leashes to a stroller.
- Create protected zones for both baby and dog. Use gates, doors, crates or pens—not verbal reminders alone. Allow the dog to smell all new baby gear—crib, stroller, car seat, swing (still and in motion). Get the dog used to all new items.
- First meeting: have two calm adults present; keep the dog at a comfortable distance; reward calm behavior; allow only a brief approach if the dog remains loose and relaxed. If not, try again later that day. No approaching unless tail is up and wagging with relaxed body posture.
- Build the relationship gradually. Pair baby sounds and routines with calm enrichment, treats or rest—never force sniffing or closeness.



2. Children & Dogs

Adults supervise. Children ask. Dogs are allowed to say "no."

- Ask the owner/handler before approaching. A wagging tail, friendly breed or service-dog vest is not automatic permission.
- Let the dog choose whether to approach. Stand sideways, keep voices quiet, and pet the shoulder or chest for one or two strokes—then pause.
- Never hug, climb on, corner, chase, tease, stare at, ride, or take food or toys from a dog.
- Leave dogs alone while they are sleeping, eating, chewing, injured, hiding, in a crate, or trying to move away.
- Watch for early stress: turning away, moving away, freezing, closed mouth, lip licking, yawning, tucked or rigid tail, pinned ears, "whale eye," growling or showing teeth.
- Do not punish a growl! Calmly increase distance and get adult help; the underlying fear or discomfort still needs attention.



Watch for early stress



Turning away



Lip licking



Yawning



Pinned ears



"Whale eye"



Tucked or rigid tail



Growling or showing teeth



Golden Rule: A baby or young child is never left alone with a dog—not even the family dog, and not "for just a minute."



3. Safer Community Dog Ownership

Calm and controlled is more important than greeting everyone.

- Use a secure, well-fitted collar or harness, identification, current veterinary care and a standard leash. Retractable leashes are not recommended for dog and people safety.
- Skip on-leash greetings unless both handlers agree and both dogs are relaxed. "My dog is friendly" does not remove another person's dog's need for space.
- Scan ahead. Cross the street, turn around or step behind a barrier before your dog becomes overwhelmed.
- Keep enough distance that your dog can eat, think, respond and recover. Reward calm behavior and your dog checking back with you.
- Avoid forcing a fearful or reactive dog closer. Overwhelming exposure can worsen fear; sudden new behavior changes warrant a veterinary exam.



Dog parks: know the limits

Dog parks are not necessary for a dog to be well socialized. They can work for some healthy, socially skilled dogs, but they combine unknown dogs, health histories, play styles and unknown handler skill in a setting where people have very limited control. They are a poor choice for puppies without veterinary clearance, fearful or reactive dogs, medically vulnerable dogs, socially selective dogs, families with young children inside the enclosure and those without a fast physical response capacity.

- Common risks include conflict at gates, mismatched play, guarding, unregulated aggressive play, injury, disease exposure and a frightened dog and owner being unable to leave.
- Safer alternatives: parallel leash walks, one compatible dog friend, small supervised playgroups, reward-based classes, sniff walks, hiking on leash and enrichment at home.



4. Dog Fear: Safety Before Contact

Fear after a charge, bite or frightening encounter is understandable. Forced contact is not the goal.

- Start at a distance where the person feels safe and can think clearly.
- Use predictable steps, simple canine-body-language education, grounding and permission to stop at any time.
- Progress may mean calmly seeing a dog across a park or room and having the option to leave at will. Petting a dog is never required.
- NLTD may provide safety education and carefully structured observation with an appropriate therapy-dog team when available and suitable, however this help does not replace medical care, psychotherapy, animal control, legal reporting or a veterinary behavior assessment. We will recommend referral when those services are needed.

Need help deciding the next safe step?

Northern Lights Therapy Dogs 🐾 • info@nltdogs.org



If a bite occurs

- Move people and animals to safety without chasing, hitting or "testing" the dog again.
- Wash the wound with soap and running water for several minutes.
- Seek medical care right away. All bites should be evaluated.
- Report the bite to your local public health or animal control office.
- Save the dog's information if known (owner, address, vaccination status).



🐾 Educational guidance

Sources: CDC, UC Davis Veterinary Medicine, AVSAB & Psychological First Aid • [Crisisdogs.org](https://crisisdogs.org)

Northern Lights Therapy Dogs is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. 🐾