

## **How can we keep our child safe around our pets?**

Martin N. Simenc, Child Safety Expert

You're right to be concerned that your child and your pets might not always get along. Many pets do extremely well with small children, but even gentle pets can bite or scratch if provoked. The cry of a newborn can be enough to put some dogs on edge, and once your child is old enough to grab tails and pull whiskers, anything can happen.

For the next few years, the best thing you can do is make sure your child is never alone with a pet. Let them get to know each other gradually under your close supervision.

If you have a dog that's at all aggressive, look into putting him through obedience training. Many professional trainers offer specialized classes to teach dogs and even cats how to get along with young children. But if any pet continues to be a threat to your child, it's time to find the animal a new home.

Having pets presents other, less obvious dangers to children. Your child could choke on pet food, and — believe it or not — the water dish is a drowning hazard. I frequently recommend that dog owners place their pet's food and water in the garage or outside, where their child can't get to it.

If you have an indoor cat or a small dog, a safety gate can be an effective way to separate your child from your pet's food and water, and, in the case of cats, the litter box. Look for a gate with openings wide enough for your pet to get through yet narrow enough that your child can't become trapped or get through himself.

Finally, don't overlook the pet door, if you have one. A curious crawler could get outside very quickly or even become trapped. Use a safety gate to block your child's access to the pet door, or keep it locked for now.