

# TOP 20 WAYS TO KEEP KIDS & DOGS SAFE

by Kim Merritt  
cofounder, Good Dog in a Box



**Good Dog in a box™**

## About the Author

*“I had the great privilege during Dog Bite Prevention Week, to interview some of the most talented and well-respected dog trainers in the industry. Our topic of discussion was keeping children safe around dogs. This e-book is the culmination of that week’s interviews. I’d like to thank all the experts who generously gave their time to help speak out and educate the world on dog bite prevention.”*



Kim Merritt, cofounder of Good Dog in a Box & Good Dog Pro



Good Dog in a box was started in 2016, by sisters, Jenn Merritt, CPDT-KA, and Kim Merritt, to keep dogs and kids safe, through education, awareness, and advocacy. The sisters believed, that when kids were raised to respect dogs and animals, they would grow up to become more responsible pet owners. Today the company produces fun, reward based dog training and dog bite prevention products for families with kids and dogs, and curriculum and training materials for dog training professionals.





# OUR CONTRIBUTING EXPERTS



**Mikkel Becker**, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, KPA CTP, CDBC, CTC

Lead Trainer for Fear Free Pets

Certified Behavior Consultant, Certified Trainer & Author

Mikkel specializes in work with dogs and cats. She is the co-author of six books, including the recent, *From Fearful to Fear Free*, and was the featured trainer on Vetstreet.com. She uses positive reinforcement and non-force based training strategies that are rooted in scientific learning theory.

**Risë VanFleet**, PhD, RPT-S, CDBC, CAAPT-I

President & Founder, Family Enhancement & Play Therapy Center

Certified Dog Behavior Consultant, Filial Therapist/Instructor & Author

Risë brings over 40 years of clinical, supervisory and leadership experience in community mental health, health care & education. She specializes in animal assisted play therapy and family-oriented non-aversive dog training/behavior consultation. She is the author of numerous award winning books.



**Tracy Krulik**, CTC, CSAT

Canine Separation Anxiety Trainer

Managing Editor, iSpeakDog

Tracy is an honors graduate of Jean Donaldson's prestigious Academy for Dog Trainers. She is the founder and managing editor of iSpeakDog, a website and public awareness campaign to teach dog body language and behavior. She was a 2017, finalist for woman of the year by Women in the Pet Industry.

**Drayton Michaels**, CTC

Urban Dawgs & Pit Bull Guru

Drayton earned his Certification in Dog Training and Behavior Counseling from the San Francisco SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers, under the renowned Jean Donaldson and Janis Bradley. He is a reward based trainer and behavior consultant for Pit Bulls and large breed dogs of all ages. He's the producer of *The Pit Bull Hoax*, a short film that debunks common myths about Pit Bulls.



# OUR CONTRIBUTING EXPERTS



**Jamie Migdal**, CPDT-KA  
Founder & CEO of FetchFind

Jamie has been working with dogs and their people, and innovating within the pet industry, for nearly 25 years. Her current company, FetchFind, sells staff training and other business solutions to pet care service companies. Jamie received the Pet Age Woman of Influence award in 2018. Her company was selected as one of the most innovative pet care companies by Purina Pet Care.

## Cathy Reisfield

Owner & Head Trainer at Dependable Dogs, Family Paws Parent Educator  
Founder of Kids & Dogs Safer Together

Cathy has more than twenty years of experience working with humans and dogs, in a variety of settings including hospitals, rehabilitation, business, education, training, etc. Cathy founded Kids & Dogs Safer Together, a nonprofit providing education programs and materials to keep kids safe.



## Gila Kurtz

Co-founder and co-owner of Dog Is Good  
Puppy Training Expert

Gila is a serial entrepreneur who found her deepest passion in working with dogs and their people. Her company, Dog Is Good, is a lifestyle brand for dog lovers. She is a bestselling author and recognized as one of the top 25 women of influence in the pet industry (2015) by Pet Age Magazine.



# WHO SHOULD READ THIS eBook

According to the American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AMVA), 4.7 million Americans are bitten each year by dogs. As many as 800,000 people annually require medical treatment for dog bites. The primary victims are children, with the majority of those children being between the ages of five and nine years old.

Many of these dog bite incidents can be prevented with education and training.

This eBook contains information for parents, grandparents, children, dog owners, and friends of dogs that can be used to learn the warning signs of dangerous situations that can result in a dog bite. It covers do's and don'ts for human behavior around dogs, from some of the top names in professional reward based dog training and dog behavior.

Read this eBook as a family. Share the information with your kids and your neighbors. Tell your school, boys and girls clubs, and after school programs to share this with their students and members. Dog professionals may copy and hand out this material to clients and dog owners.

At Good Dog in a Box, our goal is to improve the relationship adults and children have with their dogs. Owning a dog can and should be a beautiful experience. Help us spread the word on how to keep kids safe around dogs.



# 1. LEARN TO READ DOG BODY LANGUAGE

Dogs communicate with us all the time, through their body language. They tell us if they're scared, uncomfortable, happy, or excited. The problem is, most people don't take the time to decode the signs that dogs are putting out.

If you're a parent, think about your kids. You know when your small child is tired, hungry, or needs to go home and take a nap, all from their behavior. It's the same with dogs.

Start to watch how your dog behaves at home, when everything is calm and your dog is relaxed. Take note of your dog's tail position, ears, eyes, body posture, etc. When you're familiar with your dog's body language when they are happy and content, it makes it easier to spot when your dog is stressed or scared. Behaviors like lip licking, tucking their tails under their bodies, crouching down, having dilated pupils, and having their ears pinned back can be signs of stress and an unhappy dog.

Paying attention to those signs early on and removing your dog from the situation that is contributing to their stress can help to prevent a bad situation, like a dog bite. The trick is to know and recognize the early warning signs of when your dog starts to show fear or stress.

A dog rarely "bites out of no where." Their body language will start giving off cues that they are uncomfortable, like a whisper. If those cues are ignored, they'll give off less subtle cues, like talking. The entire time they are trying to communicate to the humans nearby, until it escalates into a shout with a bite or snap. By listening to your dog, you can prevent situations from getting to that point.

## Teaching Small Children

Dog body language can be taught to children of various ages. Where children under the age of four may have a hard time distinguishing fear and some of the more subtle body movements, children over the age of five can start to see fear and recognize signs of stress in dogs. Cathy Reisfield, founder of Kids and Dogs Safer Together, says, "I talk a lot to parents about the onus is still on us as adults to provide management while looking at the dog and helping our children understand the visual cues the dog is giving. I find the SAFE game, developed by Good Dog in a box, is a really good way to reach two, three, and four year olds, as well as older children."



Cards from the Dog Smart Card Game



## 2. LEARN HOW TO TOUCH A DOG POLITELY

Teaching children how to touch dogs appropriately can help eliminate a large number of potentially dangerous situations. Cathy Reisfield warns, “Don’t stick your hand in a dog’s face. This is rude and intrusive. Dogs aren’t public property. You don’t need to touch every dog and everyone doesn’t need to touch your dog.”

Hugging and kissing dogs is an act that needs to be reserved for humans. Although we all want to show affection to our beloved pets, dogs don’t like the restricted feeling of being grabbed and held around the neck. The close proximity to a child’s face and a dog’s teeth in the middle of a hug, makes the expression an extremely dangerous one. “We like to hug and make eye contact. Dogs are more indirect and they really don’t like hugs around the neck. They much prefer a pet on the back of the shoulder,” reports Dr. Risë VanFleet.

“We don’t want to continuously tell children, ‘no, no, no,’ all the time,” says Dr. VanFleet. “We want to tell them something else to do.” She suggests instead of allowing kids to hug and kiss dogs, we need to give them an alternative. “I use a fun and interesting voice to tell kids that I know the secret of where this dog really likes to be touched. This dog will love you a lot if you touch it under the chin or on the shoulder or where ever it might be for that dog.”



### **3. ADOPT A FORCE FREE, POSITIVE REWARD BASED TRAINING PROGRAM**

“Dogs learn through association and consequence,” explains Drayton Michaels, the Pit Bull Guru. “Every association is either going to be safe, unsafe, or neutral. When you choke or shock a dog, you may stop them momentarily, but all you’re doing is helping that dog develop a negative association to a person, another dog, the environment, a kid that ran by, whatever is happening.”

When you adopt force free, reward based training, you reduce stress for everyone. Attention can be easily redirected with a toy or food. Dogs learn better and faster when they are not under stress. Drayton goes on to explain, “If you yell at your dog when they are around your children or baby, to the point that you cause fear or pain, that dog may end up with a negative association to your children or baby. Change your behavior and say ‘leave it’ and reward your dog with a treat. If you are kind and consistent, your dog will be better and you have less of a chance of that dog biting your kids.”



### **4. GIVE YOUR DOG HIS SPACE, ESPECIALLY WHEN EATING AND SLEEPING**

Remember the old adage, ‘let a sleeping dog lie.’ Nothing could be more true. Tracy Krulik, canine separation anxiety trainer, reports that some dogs have retained the need to guard from many years ago. “Fight or flight kicks in. It’s a reflex behavior. It’s nothing personal. It’s just in their DNA.”

Krulik recommends never going near a dog when it’s eating or sleeping. “The dog isn’t being dominant or aggressive,” she says. “Just give them their space.” Kids need to be reminded that dogs are off limits when they’re eating or sleeping.



## 5. BE AN ADVOCATE FOR YOUR DOG

Dogs can only talk to you with their body language. They can't say, "Stop it! I don't like being touched that way." People become magnets to your dog, reaching out without thinking. When they touch in an inappropriate way, your dog can become fearful and stressed.

Gila Kurtz, co-founder of Dog Is Good and puppy training expert says, "It's ok to step in between people and model for someone how your dog likes to be touched. Show them and tell them exactly what to do." She also says it's ok to step up and politely tell the person when your dog has had enough or doesn't want to interact at all right now. "It's important to present the concept of advocacy to our children so they can protect their dog from other kids or an adult."

Another part of being an advocate for your dog is teaching your children that it's not ok to ride the dog, stand on the dog, lay on top of the dog, pull a dog's ears or tail, or get in a dog's face. Mikkel Becker, lead trainer for Fear Free Pets suggests, "Give children ways to interact with dogs safely that the dog enjoys. Show children how your dog likes to be touched. Give your children a dog treat to feed the dog. Show them how to sit next to the dog and let the dog come up to you."

Even if a dog endures mistreatment from your children today, that doesn't mean that the same behavior tomorrow won't escalate into a dog bite. Different dogs have different levels of tolerance, which can vary from day to day. As the parent or guardian, you need to make sure dogs are safe around your children every day.





## 6. MANAGE YOUR SPACE

As humans, we tend to be gaga over a cute dog. They're so cute and cuddly, we just want to give them a good squeeze. Many times dogs just need to be protected from us. Dogs need a safe space. Whether it's a gate, crate, or leash, dog behavior is very much about the management of your space.

Jamie Migdal, professional dog trainer and founder of FetchFind recommends, "It's hard on the dog when there isn't consistency from all the members of the family. We want our dogs to be friendly and be part of the family, but it's tough when the doorbell rings and everyone isn't on the same page about how to handle the situation." Migdal says when someone comes the door and you don't want your dog to jump, "put the dog on a leash or put him in a crate."



## 7. "ASK" THE DOG FOR PERMISSION



We naturally want to say "hi" to a dog. When people go up to meet a new dog, they tend to act first and think later. It can be a natural reaction to go toward that cute fluffy dog and reach your hand out to pet it, but touching a dog without asking is not a good idea.

Mikkel Becker warns, "A dog could be reactionary or fearful and not like to be touched by a stranger or a child. We love dogs, but it's best to play a little hard to get. Don't look the dog in the eye. Look off to the side, instead. Keep your body relaxed and stand still. Don't bend or lean over the dog." She also recommends inviting the dog to approach us by turning slightly to the side or kneeling. If the dog moves closer to you then gently pet the dog on the back or chest, not on the head.

Becker adds, "If a dog is sniffing, that is not an invitation to pet the dog. Give them the time to figure out if they want to approach you." This is important advice for not only children, but also adults.



## 8. USE APPROPRIATE TOOLS

Cathy Reisfield, of Kids and Dogs Safer Together, talks frequently to parents of pre-kindergarten children in Ann Arbor, Michigan's Safety Town program. "Keep your dog on a leash at all times, when you're away from home," she says. In addition to a 4 or 6 foot non-retractable leash for optimal control, the use of a no-pull harness can transform troublesome walkers into a great companion for adventures about your neighborhood or community.

"In your own home," Reisfield says, "use dog crates, baby gates, and closed doors to contain and supervise your dog and your kids. Dog crates are not cruel and are one of the kindest things you can do for most dogs." A crate gives a dog a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life and noisy children when they just need a break.

Around your home, make sure real fencing is adequate. Check it seasonally to make sure there aren't spaces your dog can squeeze through. Remind family members to shut and lock gates and doors so dogs don't get out. Electric fencing with shock collars is never a method of containment that should be used on a dog. Never.





## 9. PROVIDE 'ESCAPE ROUTES' OR 'EXITS'

Dogs like to have a lot of space. Make sure your dog is free to get up and move away or leave a room if they are tired of human interaction and want to get away from noise or stressful events. Dr. Risë VanFleet says, "A dog needs to be able to make the decision to get up and walk away if they want to. In a situation where kids are playing with a dog, I ask parents, 'does the dog have an escape route?' It's really just an exit to allow the dog to get out of the situation when they get stressed. If a dog is surrounded by a group of people and can't get away, it can make that dog very stressed."

Tracy Krulik explains in her training with renowned behavior expert and trainer Jean Donaldson, it was called letting your dog 'vote with his feet.' "You need to let your dog have a say in when it's time to get up and leave an interaction. Don't stick a dog somewhere that they can't escape from. Give your dog a choice and respect that choice. When they've had enough, let them leave," says Krulik. Explain to children that the dog is tired and will come back when he's ready to play more.

## 10. ALWAYS ASK TO SAY HELLO TO A DOG

Drayton Michaels lives in a New Jersey, neighborhood with lots of kids, so he is always prepared for an encounter when walking his dog. He starts with a 5 foot non-retractable leash. From there, his mantra is, "supervise, orchestrate, and separate." He gives adults and children specific

instructions on how to approach and touch his dog. He doesn't linger in conversation either. He allows a brief interaction and then moves to create distance between his dog and the humans he's met. The entire encounter lasts 12 to 15 seconds.

He stresses that all adults and kids need to ask permission before touching a dog that isn't theirs. "You need to have respect for dogs. Just because your family dog will allow you to do something at home, doesn't mean a strange dog is going to act the same way. A dog only has the cognition of a three year old child and it needs to be protected by its human," instructs Michaels. "If your dog isn't comfortable with a stranger, politely say 'no,' and continue with your walk."





# 11. SUPERVISE ALL INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

You've got a nice dog and a nice kid. What can go wrong? Kids and dogs can be unpredictable, but kids can be more unpredictable than dogs. That's why the one thing all our experts agreed on was the need to supervise all interactions with children and dogs, especially children under the age of ten.

Gila Kurtz of Dog Is Good recommends teaching kids of all ages what is appropriate behavior around dogs. "Kids have more erratic movements than adults. They can be loud one minute and quiet the next. A dog might react negatively to that behavior. Even an accidental trip or fall by a child near a dog can startle or frighten a dog and lead to a bite or nip," says Kurtz.

Dr. Risë VanFleet says, "We want to educate people, not scare them. Little kids love to get on the floor with the dog. This is not good. A dog can lash out from getting excited or being grabbed. A parent needs to supervise all interactions."

Drayton Michaels takes his advice a step further. He tells his clients to continue to supervise interactions with dogs until kids are learning to drive. "Around sixteen years of age the human brain starts to process risk assessment. That's when I tell parents they can ease up on the supervision."



## 12. SOCIALIZE YOUR KIDS

Growing up in the 70's, Jamie Migdal of FetchFind remembers a different relationship with dogs. "In our suburban Chicago neighborhood, dogs were out running around like the kids were. It was on the kids to be careful around the dogs. If you got bit, it was your fault for bothering the dog. Today it's much harder for kids to figure out where things are in the hierarchy."

"Today the dog has been elevated to the point where people are dressing up their dogs in pink top hats and bow ties, taking them to restaurants and on shopping trips. It's much harder for kids to figure out what the situation is. Kids look at these dogs much more like a stuffed animal or toy. You have to explain to kids that even though the dog is dressed up, it's still a dog and dogs can bite," warns Migdal.

Parents need to have discussions with kids about what is appropriate behavior around dogs, how to pet a dog, how to meet a dog, that we never hug or kiss a dog, we don't take things out of dog's mouth, and we respect dogs.



## 13. RELATE TO THE DOG ON THEIR TERMS



Mikkel Becker, lead trainer with Fear Free Pets, says it's all about building empathy and understanding. "Teach the child what the dog needs and what makes the dog feel comfortable. The parent needs to figure out how a kid can be a kid, but not upset the dog." She suggests having different barriers, rooms, and spaces in the home that can separate the dog and the kids when the dog needs his space.



## 14. LISTEN TO GROWLS, SNARLS & SNAPS

Do you thank your dog when he growls? Tracy Krulik thanks her dog for growling. “I love it when Emma the Beagle growls. It’s my favorite thing. It is a way for dogs to tell us that they don’t feel comfortable and they need space. All these behaviors occur because the dog is scared or stressed.”

Krulik goes on to say, “When she growls she’s saying, ‘please back away and give me some space. I’m on a leash and I can’t get away.’ People get so scared of it, of course, when teeth are shown, but once you change your thoughts and opinions about growling you can start thinking about it in a positive way. My dog got scared and could have bitten that kid, but she didn’t. She said, ‘Dude, I need some space, please back off.’ That’s great! The dog is talking. Be there to listen.”

## 15. UNDERSTAND DEVELOPMENTALLY WHERE YOUR CHILD IS

How old is your child? What type of impulse control are we expecting them to have? Telling a two or three year old, “no,” doesn’t necessarily work. There’s no guarantee that five minutes later they will retain the information. You need to understand what your child is able to do, what their developmental level is. Cathy Reisfield gives an example with three to five year olds, “They can reach into a dog’s space, where they don’t have controlled release. They grab a dog and hang on for dear life. We used to call it the ‘baby Vulcan death grip.’ You can’t get the baby or the dog out of that situation fast enough.”

Reisfield suggests practicing with your small child how to pet the dog gently, hand over hand. “We have to be realistic as to what these kids can do and how these dogs might respond. As parents, we have to think about it on a number of different levels. As Colleen Pelar wrote in her book, *Living with Kids and Dogs Without Losing Your Mind*, dogs are really good at being dogs and kids are really good at being kids. We have to look at where the intersection of those interactions are so we can be proactive and set up management strategies.”





## **16. PRACTICE INTERACTING WITH A STUFFED TOY**

As a Filial play therapist at the International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy, Dr. Rise VanFleet, likes to use a stuffed toy to demonstrate proper behavior with small children. “Show what to do and what not to do on a stuffed animal and let a child try it. Have them stand still. Practice a stuffed dog sniffing them. The more we can make it playful, the easier it makes learning proper behavior.”

## **17. KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FRIENDLY DOG & SHY DOG**

When is it safe to approach a dog? Tracy Krulik says, “Never! Let the dog approach you.” A shy dog is going to tuck their tail, pull away, lower their head, and appear to make themselves smaller. “We don’t want kids running up to a dog like that,” warns Krulik. “I never walk up to a dog. I let the dog come to me, if they want to. If the dog doesn’t want to come to me, we’re cool. It may be the situation. If there’s too much going on in the setting, a normally friendly dog may not want to say hello.”



## 18. KNOW WHY DOGS BITE

Jamie Migdal of FetchFind says, “Dogs bite because sometimes they are supposed to.” She explains that some dogs are bred to bite. All dogs have a predatory motor pattern. All dogs, regardless of their breed, are born into the world with a set of behaviors that are true to what they were bred to do. Migdal explains, “For example, a Border Collie was bred to herd, to stalk, to eye, and to chase. First they eye something. They orient their bodies. They stalk it. Then they chase it. That’s where it stops. If they went to the next level of predatory motor pattern, it would be to grab. Any Border Collie that starts to grab or bite the sheep they are herding, no longer is part of the gene pool. From a predatory motor perspective, we don’t expect a Border Collie to bite. It’s not what they were bred to do.”

“Now let’s take a Rat Terrier. They were literally bred to orient, eye, stalk, chase, grab, bite, kill, dissect, and ingest. That’s what they were bred to do. We can’t be super surprised when they are triggered. That predatory behavior is to bite. That being said, it’s never OK to bite. It doesn’t mean we should excuse it. What I’m saying is that dogs bite because they were supposed to. At the end of the day, if a dog that was bred to bite, bites, we shouldn’t be surprised, but we need to be very careful with these dogs. We need to make sure that we don’t put that particular dog in a situation that will arouse their behavior to make them want to bite.”

It’s important from a management perspective and a safety perspective to know as much as possible about what your dog’s breed was bred to do. Were they a hunter, guard dog, lap dog, draft dog, or ratter? Every dog is unique and their personality is not 100% dependent on their breed, but understanding more about the background of your dog can help you make decisions about training and alert you to parts of your dog’s personality that may be more challenging to deal with, especially if you have children in your house.



## 19. SOCIALIZE YOUR DOG

As a dog owner, you have a very short window of time to socialize your dog. Socialization needs to take place between 3 weeks to 12 weeks of age and can extend up to 16 weeks.

During this time frame you want to expose your puppy to as many new, positive experiences as you can. From different types of handling to new sights and sounds to new textures and places, giving your puppy a chance to explore the world in a calm and comfortable way makes for a sound, fear free adult dog.

A negative situation during this time can have the opposite effect and can turn an event into a fearful and stressful behavior for your dog later on. Mikkel Becker explains, “This is a time when your puppy learns who their friends are and how to play with other animals. It’s a really big learning time for dogs. If you miss that time, you can still help them and train them, but it’s much harder for them to learn later on.”





## 20. TEACH CHILDREN WHAT NOT TO DO AROUND DOGS

Every dog is different, just like every child is different. What behavior could bother one dog, may not even phase another. That's why we need to explain to children from an early age, that no two dogs are going to respond the same way to them.

On the list of things not to do around dogs, running and screaming is behavior that is not likely to get positive results and should be avoided. Waving arms and fast movements in children can be scary to dogs. Taking things out of a dog's mouth, whether it be food or a toy, is never something a child should do. Children should never ride dogs, kick dogs, inflict pain, pull ears or tails, or treat a dog like a toy. Children should also be taught not to feed dogs from the table or sneak dogs human food without a parents permission.





## IN CONCLUSION

Dogs, like children, have unique personalities and can be unpredictable at times. As parents and adults, it is our responsibility to manage their interactions and make a home that is safe for both.

It's important to remember that no dog has perfect behavior. If your dog is doing something you don't like, you need to change the environment to redirect what your dog is doing and has access to. Drayton Michaels says, "Behavior is in the environment, it's not in the dog." Set up your environment to help you manage your dog and situations with your entire family more easily.

At Good Dog in a box, our goal is to help reduce the number of children who get bit by dogs, through education and engaging products that make dog bite prevention and reward based dog training fun for the whole family. We welcome your comments on this guide and invite you to visit our website at [gooddoginabox.com](http://gooddoginabox.com) for more free resources.





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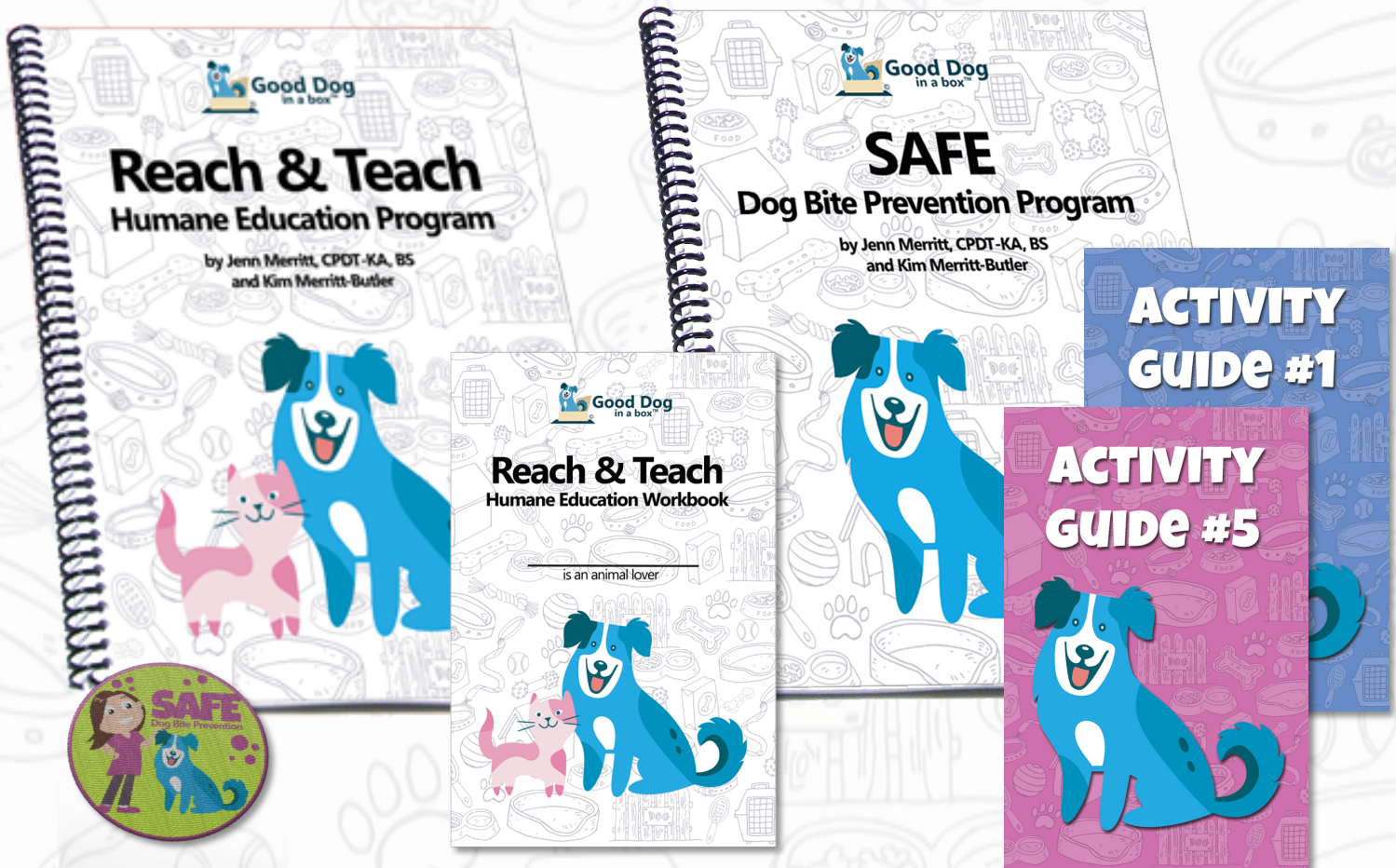
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