

## **Instructor Introduction**

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Staying Safe and Smart Around Dogs and Cats (Grades K-2)  
Recognizing Animal Communication (supplement for Grades 3-5)

Students will learn how to safely approach dogs, how to determine which animals should be avoided, what to do in unfriendly and potentially dangerous situations.

Students will learn how to recognize different ways dogs and cats communicate their feelings.

### **Excerpts from the MSPCA's Statement of Belief:**

“The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals believes that responsible pet owners protect the welfare of animals kept as pets, while at the same time ensuring that their pets do not impact negatively on other animals, the public, or the environment.”

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The following bullets list the important elements behind this lesson plan. For more information on any dog safety questions, please visit the MSPCA's website:

[www.mspca.org/petowners\\_Dog\\_Behave\\_Dog\\_Bite\\_Prevention](http://www.mspca.org/petowners_Dog_Behave_Dog_Bite_Prevention) or contact an MSPCA Education Coordinator.

- every dog has the potential to bite
- dogs use body language and vocalization to communicate; a dog may bite for many reasons, including aggression or fear, or in response to injury, illness, or being startled, or to protect or possess food, property, or a person
- like people, animals communicate in a variety of ways; learning basic communication can be effective at preventing unsafe situations
- there are situations when it is not safe for kids to approach a dog, as he might become scared, stressed, surprised, territorial, or aggressive. Kids should not disturb a dog (even their own) when she is eating, sleeping, ill, injured, playing by herself with a toy, chewing a bone, or caring for puppies
- it is unsafe for kids and adults to approach an unknown dog that is tied up, behind a fence, in a car, or roaming without a leash
- there is an appropriate way to greet a dog on leash; kids should be taught to:
  - ask their parent/guardian's permission first
  - ask if the dog is friendly
  - ask the dog's owner/guardian "May I pet your dog?"
  - know the appropriate places to pet a dog and know where not to pet a dog
- children can feel empowered by knowing what to do in a potentially dangerous situation involving an unfriendly dog

## Humane Education Lesson Plans

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**Lesson Title:** Staying Safe & Smart Around Dogs and Cats (Grades K-2)  
Recognizing Animal Communication (supplement for Grades 3-5)

### MA Curriculum Strands:

#### *Science Frameworks*

Biology K-2 (Living Things and Their Environment)

6. Recognize that people and other animals interact with the environment through their senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

#### *Social Studies Frameworks*

PreK-K, 6. Identify and describe family or community members who promote the welfare and safety of children and adults. (C)

#### *Comprehensive Health Frameworks*

K-5, 6.4 Identify what parents do to provide a safe, healthy environment for their children

(supplement for Grades 3-5)

K-5, 9.3 Describe personal responsibility for reducing hazards and avoiding accidents

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### Lesson Summary:

Students will learn how to safely approach dogs and cats, how to determine which animals should be avoided, and what to do in unfriendly and potentially dangerous situations.

(supplement for Grades 3-5)

Students will learn how to recognize different ways dogs and cats communicate their feelings.

**Preparation:** time to make copies, print photos, gather materials

**Lesson Time:** 1-3 lessons, each lasting 45-60 minutes

### Materials:

- 3-5 plush animals (several dogs of varying sizes and a cat)
- leash & collar, plastic water bowl, small blanket or dog bed, ace bandage, baseball cap or hat, backpack
- magazine photos or other images of dogs in various positions & activities
- images of: bike, bus, sleeping dog, happy dog, sick dog, playful dog off leash, dog on leash, growling/ snarling dog
- several images of cats in a variety of positions
- “Now I Know How to Be Safe and Smart Around Dogs!” certificate (Grades K-2)

- “Pledge to Be Smart Around Dogs” pledge sheet (Grades 3-5)
- additional handouts (optional)

### **Discussion Outline:**

#### Learning to Greet a Friendly Dog

**Ask** students if they like dogs and cats (to get an understanding of which children may have anxieties) and who has a pet at home.

- Does anyone know the safe way to meet a dog?

**Explain** that dogs don’t go up to people and shake their hand and say, “How do you do?” but rather they meet and greet people by using their eyes and ears and especially their noses.

**Demonstrate**, using a plush dog, how to make a fist and slowly bring the fist up to the nose of the plush dog (but not to come in direct contact with the nose). You can ask the children pair up, with one of the children pretending to be the sniffing dog and the other practicing his/her fist and approach to the dog. Then alternate so each child has a chance to make a good fist for sniffing. Repeat same for cats. Move on to a discussion about how wonderful animals are but emphasize that all dogs can bite (and cats, too).

#### **Ask**

- Which dogs are safe to approach?
  - Only approach a dog on a leash with its guardian/owner’s permission.
  - Ask: “Is your dog friendly?” If the answer is yes, you can ask: “May I pet your dog?”
  - If yes, then make a fist for the dog to sniff before petting.
  - If the guardian/owner answers no, then you can say “thank-you, anyway.”

**Demonstrate** Practice with class using a plush dog wearing a collar and leash. Vary answers to the children’s requests to approach the dog (“yes, no, I’m sorry my dog isn’t feeling well today, my dog doesn’t like children, my dog can’t see very well, hats make my dog nervous”).

#### When it’s Unsafe to Disturb an Animal

#### **Ask**

- Has anyone ever been bit before by a dog or cat?
- What situations might be unsafe to approach an animal?
- What might make animals grumpy or nervous?
  - sickness
  - sleeping
  - being surprised
  - eating
  - scared
  - loud noises, such as thunder
  - being teased
  - being tied in a yard or behind a fence
  - meeting another dog or cat
  - hugs or close handling in sensitive areas (paws, tail, belly)
  - people wearing hats, hoods, or sunglasses
  - some dogs are nervous around men or tall people

- people with a cane or wheelchair
- staring into a dog's eyes
- What about cats?
  - All of the previous, plus the presence of a dog.
  - Some cats will climb out of reach if they are frightened.
  - Do not attempt to grab, reach, or climb up to them. Discuss with the class.

**Demonstrate** Show images of animals in a variety of positions and activities. Use plush animals (one with ace bandage around a paw; one eating/drinking from bowl; one on a collar and leash that you are holding; one sleeping on the blanket; one with its ears back or teeth showing; one with a ball in its mouth; one chasing a bicycle; one who might be scared (thunder, firecrackers, noise, jumping around him/her); one dog meeting another dog)

### Ask

- Which animals are safe to approach?
  - Only approach a dog on a leash with its guardian/owner's permission.
- Which animals are unsafe to approach?
  - Never approach dogs off-leash that you do not know.
  - Never approach an animal roaming without an owner.
  - Find a parent and tell them that there is an unfamiliar dog roaming outside and that they should call the animal control officer or police.
  - Stray animals may not have had vaccinations to keep them healthy and they may carry diseases.
- When is it unsafe to disturb our own pets?
  - When they are doing anything that might make them grumpy or nervous (eating, injured, sleeping, etc.- see list above)
- What about cats?
  - Cats can bite and scratch, too! SO, be careful around cats.
  - Always ask for permission from a guardian/owner who is present about petting a cat.
  - Never approach a cat who is hissing, has a raised back, or is attempting to scratch.
  - Don't approach a stray cat outside but find a parent or trusted adult and tell them about the animal.

**Demonstrate** Using a plush dog or available images, show a variety of unfriendly positions. Never approach a dog showing teeth or who is growling, or with its ears back, tail up straight, and hair standing up on its back. These are ways that dogs tell us that we shouldn't go near them.

Animal Communication \*\* supplement for Grades 3-5

### Ask

- Do you think dogs communicate?

**Discuss** People communicate through a variety of ways, mainly through speech, but also by posture.

### Ask

- What are some ways that people communicate without speaking?
  - facial expressions like smiling, frowning, and wrinkling your forehead
  - hand gestures like waving or giving the “OK” sign
  - other body language like crossing arms, hanging one’s head, or leaning forward

**Discuss** Dogs tell us a lot of things without speaking. They tell us when they want to play, have to relieve themselves (go to the bathroom), are hungry, are hot or cold, when they feel nervous, happy, or angry.

Sometimes when dogs are nervous or scared, their “fight or flight” response is triggered. People and animals have the fight or flight response, it’s the feeling we get when in a potentially dangerous situation. You either want to defend yourself (fight) or run away (flight). When a dog is threatened or scared, it wants to get out of the situation. A dog will either try to get away (flee/flight) or defend itself by attacking (fight) if it’s backed into a corner. This is why it’s important to give dogs space when they are scared, ill, injured, or protecting a toy or food.

**Demonstrate** Using a plush dog or images, show dogs in a variety of positions that show them being uncomfortable or unfriendly.

**Discuss** Children should never approach a dog that is:

- barking, growling, or showing its teeth
- tucking his tail between his legs or shaking
- staring directly at you
- holding his ears flat against his head
- stalking or shrinking to a crouch
- showing his “hackles” (the hair on his back is standing up unnaturally)

**Discuss** words we might use to describe a dog’s behavior and what they mean: alert, excited, afraid, sad, happy. Words like submission and dominance should be avoided because they don’t accurately describe behaviors (side note: there’s a lot of controversy among animal behaviorists whether or not these terms are appropriate to use in reference to dogs at all).

### Coming into Contact with a Stray Dog

#### **Ask**

- How should we react to a dog who is loose (off-leash and no owner present)?
  - do not try to interact with the dog or pet it; it may not be friendly!
  - stay calm and do NOT run; dogs might chase
  - put your backpack or bicycle between you and the dog or stand behind a tree or car
  - walk calmly backwards and away
- What if the dog is jumping or barking?
  - STAND LIKE A TREE, AND DO NOT MOVE
  - make a fist and curl in fingers, keep close to body (demonstrate)
  - do not yell or scream
  - do not look directly at the dog, instead keep your gaze to the side
  - walk calmly backwards and away
- What if the dog knocks you over?

- if the dog knocks you over, curl up in a ball on the ground (demonstrate)
  - make fists with your hands and cover your ears and head with your arms
  - most dogs will sniff you, then get bored or walk away
- What if the dog does not walk away?
    - if someone is close by, in your deepest and calmest voice, shout “help!”
    - a high pitched voice might further stimulate an already agitated or aggressive dog, whereas a sense of quiet might help to calm an animal

### **Ask**

- Why do I tell you all of this? To scare you?
  - NO...to make you all SMART around dogs! !
- What can we all do to help our dogs and cats be safe animals?
  - children have a responsibility to keep their own pets safe around others
  - make sure your dog is properly trained (not to bite, to come when called, to walk on a leash)
  - spay or neuter your dogs and cats (to make sure they are content not to roam, to lessen their chances of becoming aggressive to other animals and people, and to prevent unwanted litters of puppies or kittens)
  - treat your pet like family (properly fed & watered, kept safely indoors, receive good veterinary attention, exercise, and lots of love)
  - NEVER tease animals or hurt them (by pulling their tails or poking them in the eyes, etc.)

### **Humane Learning Outcome**

“All dogs have the potential to bite. To be smart and safe around dogs, it is important to learn the appropriate way to greet with them, and understand that there are times it is unsafe to interact with animals. Children have the power to help teach their own dogs how to be safe animals.”

### **Activities:**

Handouts: Grades K-2:  
 & Books: “Now I Know How to Be Safe and Smart Around Dogs!” certificate  
 “Safe or Unsafe” handout  
 “Kitty Cat Chat” (Kind Teacher, 2005-2006)  
 “Dog Bite Do’s and Don’ts” coloring page

Be Gentle with the Dog, Dear by Matthew J. Baek  
Please Don’t Tease Tootsie by Margaret Chamberlain

Grades 3-5:  
 “Pledge to Be Smart Around Dogs” pledge sheet  
 “Act Safely Around Dogs” (Pet Pals 3-4)

When Gorilla Goes Walking by Nikki Grimes