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Kids and Dogs: How Kids Should and Should Not Interact with Dogs

20 (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comments) | Posted: July 18, 2011

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By Dr Sophia Yin



When a child is bitten by a four-legged family member, it can turn the household upside-down. Owners feel puzzled and confused. “They sleep together all the time,” they might say, or, “He’s always been really good. He even lets Timmy sit on him.” In a majority of cases, the bite seems out of the blue. The humans can’t fathom why their once-trusted companion would bite an innocent child. But anyone who reads “dog” or can see life from the pet’s point of view would most likely say, “I’m surprised it didn’t happen sooner.”

The fact is, a quick perusal of YouTube or a thorough investigation of a bite reveals that often the bite occurs because humans, especially children, are extremely rude. Parents may view their kid’s behaviors as cute and assume that because their dog is tolerating the behavior now, he will have an endless fuse and always put up with it, rather than eventually exploding. In other words, parents expect dogs to behave like saints, even

when they are pestered to the point that would try the average human’s patience and cause her to blow up!

For instance, I recall one tragic case where an infant was left at home with the babysitter and the family pitbull. The infant was allowed to incessantly crawl after the dog, tailing the dog as if she was an armed criminal. He followed her from corner to corner as she kept trying to get away from the baby, but the dog had no escape. While the parents were able to take a “vacation” from their child by hiring a babysitter and leaving the house, the dog was left at home to fend for herself. Ordinarily, a person being pestered this way with no way to escape would eventually turn and yell and possibly even resort to violence. A

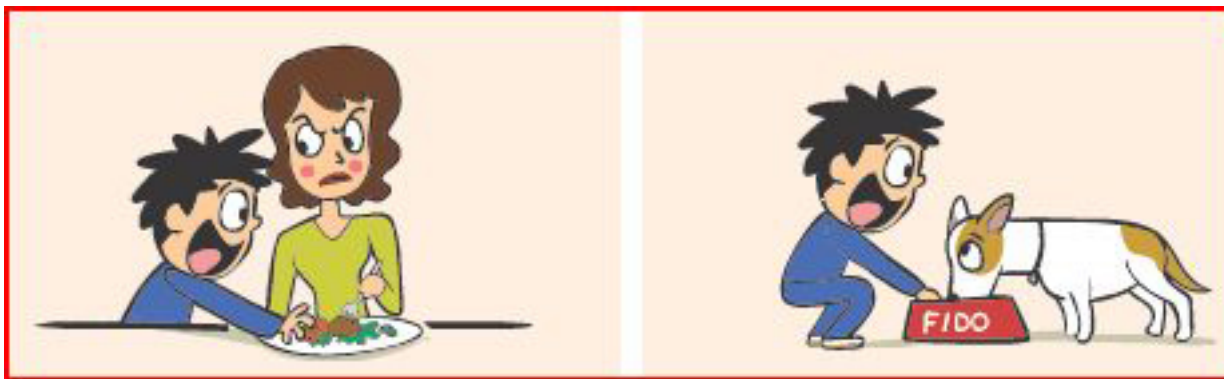
dog might do the same—turn and bark, snarl, or growl. But when all of these early signs are ignored, escalation to a bite can be the next step. Unfortunately, a bite by any large dog at her wits end can cause serious damage to a child, and in this case it resulted in death.

More often than not, cases where the dog bites a young child are tragic—often more so for the dog. The dog may be relinquished to a shelter, where he has a low probability of safe adoption. Or he may be euthanized after a quarantine period. The worst part of the story is that these bites could often have easily been prevented just by understanding the types of actions that drive a dog to feel bullied or pestered so much that he feels he has to bite.

Understanding What the Actions that Might Cause the Family Dog to Bite are Common Sense

In fact, understanding what can drive a dog to bite the family kids is pretty simple. They are the same things that drive humans to need a break from their kids.

Reason 1: For instance, most people dislike it when others stick their grimy hands in their meal. Similarly, dogs want to eat in peace.



Reason 2: We teach children that it's clearly wrong to steal toys from each other. It's also rude to steal toys from the dog. Kids should be taught to leave Fido's toys alone. To build in a tolerance in case the child makes a mistake when your attention has lapsed, dogs should be trained to give up their toy for a reward or even a sequence of rewards. That way, they will willingly give the child the toy instead of feeling possessive. (See *Perfect Pup in 7 Days*, chapters 1 and 6 .)



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Reason 3: Kids frequently can't help but get in your face. They often have to be trained to maintain the appropriate social distance. Similarly, putting your face into a dog's face, even if it's all in the family, can be irritating to the dog, especially when the dog has no control over the child's behavior.



Reason 4: Most people dislike being disturbed when they are resting or sleeping. But fortunately for us humans, we can often close or lock our bedroom door. Similarly, dogs need a safe location where they can be away from kids and excitement. Kids should avoid bugging them in their "private" location or any time they are sleeping or resting. If they call the dog from far away and the dog chooses to get up and come over to the child, this type of interaction is okay. But if the dog chooses to be left alone, he should be.



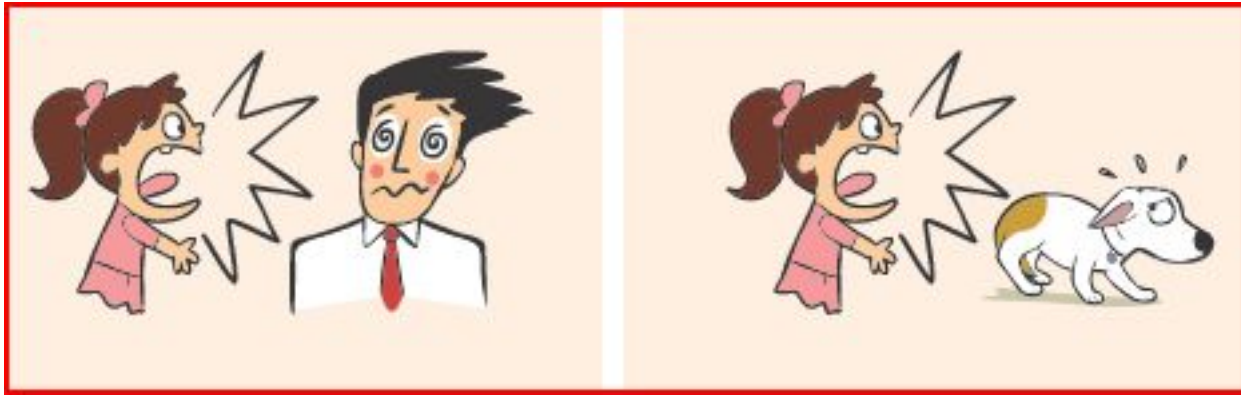
Reason 5: Kids dislike being handled roughly, and so do dogs. Dogs can be trained to tolerate or sometimes even enjoy this handling, so that they are not reactive when an accident occurs (See *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days*, chapters 1 and 6), but in general children should be taught to be polite.



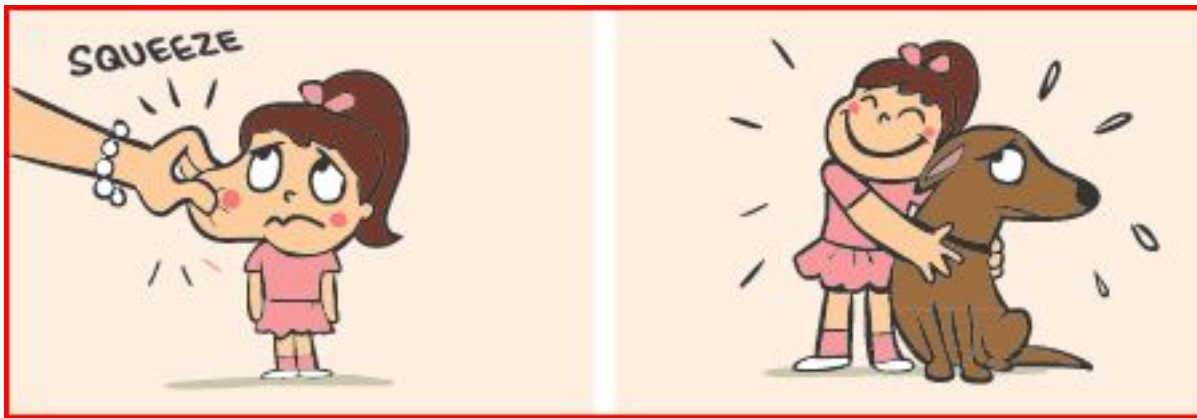
Reason 6: It's rude to climb on, step on, or otherwise invade someone's personal space. It's also rude to do the same things with dogs.



Reason 7: Loud screaming can frazzle humans, imagine its effect on the more sound-sensitive dog!



Reason 8: We often forget that even some friendly gestures, such as pinching a child's cheeks, may be irritating. In general, dogs dislike being hugged, even by family members. You can tell by the expression on their face. (See the Body Language of Fear and Anxiety in Dogs poster and chapter 7 in *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days*.) You can train dogs, especially as puppies, to enjoy cuddling and hugging (See *Perfect Puppy In 7 Days* chapters 1 and 6) and other close handling. But even so, it's important for children to know the types of interactions their pet likes and also to realize that other dogs may not have the same tolerance as their dog does.



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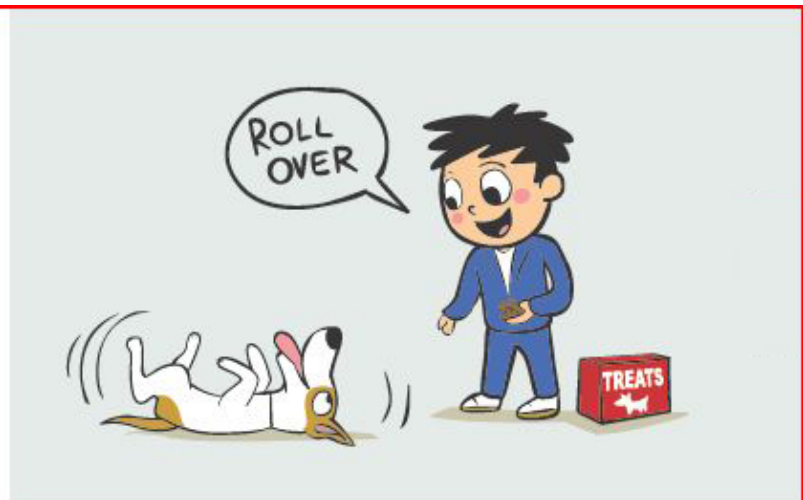
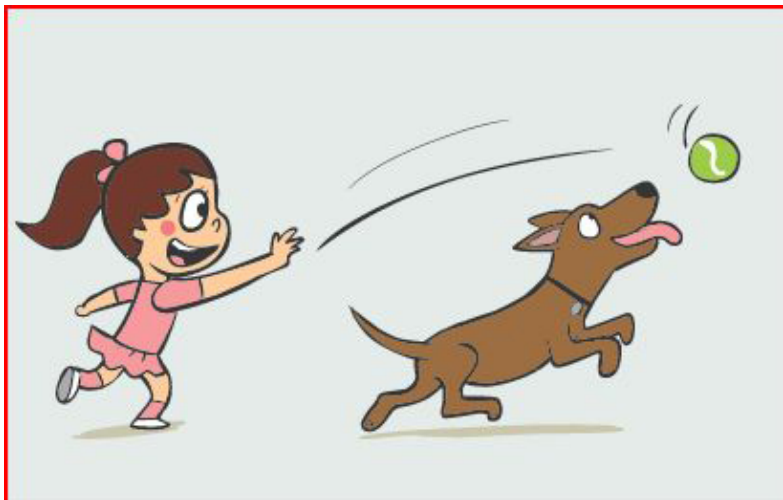
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Types of Child-Dog Interactions That are Appropriate

With all of these DON'Ts, it must seem like kids can't interact with pets at all. In reality, they just need to be taught to be polite and kind to pets, instead of treating their companion like he's stuffed animal. Parents should also teach their children to read the signs that Fido is fearful or anxious, so that the child knows to back-off.



Once the children understand that they should be kind to their pet, they can be taught appropriate games to play. For instance, fetch where the dog willingly gives the toy and remains polite before it's tossed is fun for dogs who love to retrieve. Kids and pets love to learn tricks that result in rewards such as yummy treats or bits of the dog's meal/kibble (See Dog Tricks (<https://drsophiayin.com/search/dog+tricks/>)). All dogs need their exercise, and kids can be a part of this too if the dog is well-trained. Hide-n-seek is a great way for dogs to learn to have fun, and the dog is practicing his search and rescue skills.



Adults should ensure that the dog has lots of positive associations with the kids. The kids can regularly give food rewards for the dog's calm, polite behavior, such as automatic sits.



Even if the child is generally well-behaved and the dog very tolerant, it's essential for all interactions to be supervised. Accidents can happen in a split second.



A Final Take-Home Message

The key is to teach both the dog and the children to be polite. Make sure your children interact with your dog the same way you want them to interact with you. Follow these simple do's and don'ts and everyone will be safer and happier.

What sorts of activities do your kids and your dog engage in?

Tags: dog (/tag/dog/), dog bite prevention (/tag/dog-bite-prevention/), dogs (/tag/dogs/), kids (/tag/kids/), kids and dogs (/tag/kids-and-dogs/), kids and pets posters (/tag/kids-and-pets-posters/)

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20 responses to “Kids and Dogs: How Kids Should and Should Not Interact with Dogs”



Anne Taylor says:

July 19, 2011 at 9:36 am (</blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2688>)

Great work Thank you

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2688#respond>)



Sophia Yin says:

July 20, 2011 at 10:40 am (</blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2690>)

hi Vivian:

Yes they may be printed and distributed “as is” for free.

You may also translate it to other languages if

- 1) you include the translated words under the english description).
- 2) You include who it was translated by
- 3) and you keep the rest of the poster the same (e.g. with my wordmark and copyright intact).
- 4) you send me a pdf or jpeg of the final version.

thanks

sophia

sophia

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2690#respond>)



Vivian Wong says:

July 20, 2011 at 12:16 pm (</blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2689>)

Hi Dr. Sophia,

Your pictures are so wonderful, they are interesting, easy to understand.

May I have the honor to print them for promoting positive training purpose?

Thank you very much!

Best Regards,

Vivian Wong

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2689#respond>)



Rose says:

July 24, 2011 at 12:17 pm (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2691)

As a rescue volunteer, I can't tell you how many dogs we have gotten in for exactly the behaviors you are illustrating!

Once the dog bites he/she's got a very difficult strike against him/her.

Great job on the illustrations.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2691#respond>)



esther says:

July 25, 2011 at 12:44 pm (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2692)

hi

i have a small toy poodle who is now 4.5yrs old and she has been a big part of our lives... i have 2 kids aged 9 and 12 and they have always gotten along.. about 6mths ago things changed and the dog started to hump my youngest daughters leg all the time one time it got so bad that she growled at us when i tried to get her off my daughters leg... she bit my daughter. ever since then she is very nasty to her (9) and tries to bit her most days. she doesnt do it when im in the room but when they play she bites her. just small nips...she also hates males. not sure why but tries to attack them...i got her at 5wks old and hasnt been bullied by a man... i would like to know what to do.

i was thinking of getting her put down but the kids love her.. i spoke to an animal behavioural person and she cant guarantee that she cant fix this and being a single mum i cant really afford the \$250...

PLEASE HELP.....

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2692#respond>)



Gabi says:

July 29, 2011 at 9:21 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2693)

Hi Dr. Sophia,

Your posters are incredible.

Can I use this article in my blog?

Thank you very much!!

Gabi.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2693#respond>)



sophia yin says:

July 31, 2011 at 11:30 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2694)

\$250 is pretty cheap for a vet behaviorist or CAAB behaviorist because these services require a lot of time and education and experience on the part of the resource.

I have plenty of articles/videos on my web site (check the dog training and behavior issues page) for those who can't afford \$\$ but are willing to put the effort in. You'll have to search around a bit. I would start with the Perfect puppy in 7days book to start working through the learn to earn program and understand body language. But then you'll also want to read How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves to understand why she's fear aggressive and the general principles of what to do.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2694#respond>)



Linda Guffin says:

August 23, 2011 at 9:55 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2695)

I too would like to use these wonderful illustrations of impolite behavior. They would be used at gatherings such as fairs etc. Thank you

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2695#respond>)



Staci Lemke says:

September 22, 2011 at 9:51 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2696)

Fantastic post – love the illustrations!!

One of the things I ask my clients with children (not toddlers but older kids) to do is take the child to a pet supply store and allow them to pick out a special toy they will be theirs to play with the dog. The toy only comes out during playtime with the child and all play between dog and child is directed to that toy. I encourage them to get extra large toys that can be thrown or pulled along the ground for the dog and keep children's fingers away from the dog's mouth. I also love games such as hide and seek as appropriate child dog interaction. And, of course, always supervise child and dog!

Staci Lemke, RVT, CPDT-KA
Manners For Mutts Dog Training

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2696#respond>)



Susen - Angelo del Guardiano cane corso says:

September 22, 2011 at 2:25 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2697)

this is the wisest and best written article ever, made on this issue with kids and dogs. really well done, my compliment .I hope that many people will read and learn from this, so no more dogs have to die because people dont understand, that dogs are not toys and have to say stop, at one point..

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2697#respond>)



Laurene says:

October 26, 2011 at 11:18 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2698)

My son will “get” these illustrations far better than my rules or words. Great stuff.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2698#respond>)



Kim A says:

November 3, 2011 at 7:03 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2699)

I love how you illustrated this as it’s exactly what I teach kids when I do workshops and field trips. I will often incorporate the kids when possible in my training sessions with the family dog. I find the kids tend to listen more to me than to the parents and I love teaching them. I also use “bounce back” recall games that the whole family can enjoy with thier dog as well as Hide and Seek Runaway.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2699#respond>)



Kris says:

December 14, 2011 at 4:46 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2700)

Ick. Hiring a sitter is not taking a “vacation” from your kids.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2700#respond>)



Ali P says:

December 21, 2011 at 2:05 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-2701)

I really enjoyed this and would like to have affordable copies to give out to parents in our practice to hopefully prevent the disaster you described. I especially liked the way you compared the human interactions with the dog/human child interactions.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=2701#respond>)



Michelle says:

March 11, 2016 at 5:14 pm (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-3712)

I agree that people with or without kids need to train. Both the dogs and the people in the home about respect. Respecting space, respecting feelings and not to allow inappropriate behavior to continue whether it be directed at a person or an animal. This all goes back to respect. Children need to be "taught" appropriate behavior. As far as I am concerned if you have a pet it should not be separated from the family unless it is for the safety of the pet, for example open doors or long term stressful situations. Why have a pet if it cannot be with you? Aren't they there so they can enrich our lives and for us to enrich theirs? People aren't born with knowledge. It is the responsibility of the adults to teach the kids and train the pets. As far as food or anything hitting the floor, my dog stops and waits for permission to have it before he grabs it unless it is "his" toy. Respect is really the answer here.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=3712#respond>)



Lyn McKittrick says:

March 30, 2016 at 2:07 am (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-3830)

Hi,

I am a very experienced dog owner and feel there is one very common problem you have overlooked in the above. Kids playing chase or run away with the dogs. One thing that they do, do with their peers. I have spent the past 40 years trying to teach children not to do it but they just don't seem to understand. Maybe you can explain why this is not a good practice.

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=3830#respond>)



Aleta says:

July 14, 2016 at 10:14 pm (/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/#comment-4740)

I just adopted a German Shepherd and although he is so loving, he freaks out around my granddaughter. He plants his feet and does a stern bark that even scares me. I need to get him used to everybody in the household. So should I allow my six year old granddaughter to take him for a walk with me so he'll get used to her or how or what do you suggest?

Reply (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/?replytocom=4740#respond>)

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(<http://www.dogsonthefarm.com/blog/2016/04/27/kids-and-dog-safety/>)

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MEET DR. SOPHIA YIN

Dr. Yin was a veterinarian, animal behaviorist, author, and international expert on Low Stress Handling. Her “pet-friendly” techniques for animal handling and behavior modification are shaping the new standard of care for veterinarians and petcare professionals. She passed away in September of 2014 but her work and legacy lives on.

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WE ARE DEDICATED to helping others experience the same joy we share with our own pets. Cattle Dog Publishing takes scientific principles of animal behavior and creates practical applications that are easy to understand and accessible for everyday use. Our understanding and knowledge, and thus our training and teaching techniques, are always evolving. They allow us to create unique educational materials to empower both pet-care professionals and pet owners. Our insight into the animal’s point of view and awareness of how all our interactions affect them allows us and our pets to have fun and enjoy life together every day.

Sophia Yin