

Keeping Children Safe Around Banned Breed Dogs in the Home



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'
**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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Purpose of guidance

The Dangerous Dogs (Compensation and Exemption Schemes) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 amends the Dangerous Dogs Compensation and Exemption Schemes Order (Northern Ireland) 1991 and The Dangerous Dogs (Compensation and Exemption Schemes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 to remove the requirement to have third-party liability insurance for Pitbull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino, Fila Brasileiro and XL Bully dogs designated by Article 25A of the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and adds a new exemption condition which requires that children under the age of 12 should not be left in close contact with a banned breed in a private space.

How to keep children safe around banned breed dogs in the home

From 1 November 2026, owners of banned breed dogs must ensure that any child under 12 does not come into close contact with their dog in a private place, such as a home or garden, without appropriate adult supervision.

This guidance provides information to help owners of banned breed dogs understand the new legal requirement relating to children under 12 and appropriate adult supervision. It also includes examples of steps owners may wish to consider to help reduce the risk of unsupervised contact between children and dogs in the home.

Why this requirement matters

Young children, especially those under 12, are at higher risk of dog-related injuries in the home, where incidents often involve a dog, they know. Children may behave in ways that some dogs find uncomfortable, including:

- sudden movements
- loud noise
- close contact

This guidance explains how to follow this legal requirement. It also gives advice on how to keep children and dogs safely apart when supervision is not possible.

Understanding 'appropriate adult supervision' means

'Appropriate adult supervision' means an adult aged 18 or over is present and able to take steps to keep children safe around dogs. The supervising adult should:

- remain nearby and keep both the child and dog under observation
- pay attention to their interaction, and be able to intervene if needed
- be able to separate the child and dog immediately if necessary

Supervision should be in person. Cameras, baby monitors, video doorbells or other devices are not a substitute for an adult being physically present and able to intervene.

Supervising children and dogs in the home

A child under the age of 12 must only be near a banned breed dog if an adult is there to watch them closely and step in if needed.

Dog owners and carers of children should plan ahead for times when supervision may be difficult, for example, when an adult is:

- cooking
- answering the door
- using the bathroom
- taking a telephone call
- caring for another child
- moving between different areas of the home-

Understanding when a dog may need space

Dogs may be more likely to react unexpectedly if they are stressed, unwell, overwhelmed or unable to move away from children. Adults should be alert to situations where a dog may need space and separate the child and dog where necessary. Examples include when the dog is:

- resting or sleeping

- eating or drinking
- playing with or holding a toy
- unwell, injured or recovering
- overwhelmed by noise, movement or attention
- trying to move away
- showing signs of discomfort

Separating children and dogs inside the home

The safest way to separate dogs and children will depend on the layout of the home, the age and needs of the child, as well as the needs of the dog. Any method of separation should prevent physical contact between the child and dog.

You can separate children and dogs by:

- keeping the child and dog in separate rooms with doors securely closed
- using secure stair gates, safety gates or other physical barriers
- keeping the child and dog on different floors of the home, with gates or doors preventing access between areas
- taking either the child or the dog with you when moving between different areas of the home
- using a crate, pen or other enclosed space (where it is suitable for the dog and the dog is already comfortable using it)

Any barrier should be secure enough to prevent the child or dog getting over, under, through, or around it. The barrier should not allow children and dogs to touch. Owners should also consider whether a child could reach through, over or around a barrier and make contact with the dog.

Separating children and dogs in private outdoor spaces

A private garden or other outdoor space can be used to help separate a child and dog. Any outdoor area must be secured to prevent escape, as it is a condition of a certificate of exemption.

You can separate them by either:

- allowing the child and dog to use the area at different times
- using secure fencing or barriers to create separate spaces for the child and dog

Owners should consider the dog's welfare when choosing a method of separation. The separation method should be safe and suitable for the dog and should prevent physical contact between the dog and child. Further advice on dog welfare, body language and crate training is available from animal welfare organisations listed below

Using dog crates or pens for temporary separation

A dog crate or pen may be used to separate a child and banned breed where it prevents physical contact between them and is safe and suitable for the dog.

Further advice on crate training and dog welfare is available from the animal welfare organisations listed in the 'Further information' section at the end of this page.

Applying these principles more widely

While this legal requirement applies to banned breed dogs and children under 12, many of the principles in this guidance may also be relevant to other dogs, children of different ages, and vulnerable adults. All dog owners should consider how they supervise interactions between dogs and children and take steps to reduce the risk of harm where appropriate.

Further information

Further information is available from animal welfare and child safety organisations, including:

1. [RSPCA: Understanding your dog's body language](#). For guidance on recognising signs that a dog may be relaxed, worried, angry or very unhappy.
2. [Dogs Trust: Dogs and children living happily together](#). For advice for parents and carers on safe, positive relationships between dogs and children.
3. [Blue Cross: Keeping your dog and visiting children safe](#). For advice on supervision, separation, dog body language and preparing children and dogs for visits.
4. [Battersea: How to crate train your dog](#). For advice on introducing crates positively and making sure they are suitable for the dog.
5. [PDSA: Crate training your dog](#). For advice on crate size, bedding and reward-based training
6. [Child Accident Prevention Trust: Dog safety resources](#). For child safety resources, including translated factsheets.
7. [Woodgreen: Dog Safety Animation](#) – family resources – animation that promotes safe interactions between children and dogs



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