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An Important Lesson Learned »

## Our Friends (and Teachers): Animals



"Run dog run!"—the often coined Dr. Seuss phrase — jogs my memory of how important and fun teaching young children can be, especially when utilizing animals as tools for success. Have you ever considered how important pets are in the development of social skills? They can teach children valuable lessons about taking responsibility, taking turns and simply being kind. For early skill development, the use of a dog can be especially motivating. For example, consider sitting with a group of three slightly impulsive youngsters and play "the waiting game." This consists of petting a dog for a period of 30 seconds to one minute depending on the age of the children. After each child has successfully waited his or her turn, a sticker might be rewarded. The same model might be used for gentle touches. Such games teach children about appropriate animal and human interaction as well as patience. Praise can be given to boost self-esteem, in addition to tangible reinforcements (like stamps or stickers) to further motivate social skill development. After the game consider reading a book about the type of animal that was used during the "waiting game" to promote early literacy development.

—**Stephanie Mihalas, Ph.D., NCSP**

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Tags: [dogs](#), [pets](#)

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[Abby](#) (115)  
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[Barney](#) (9)  
[Guests](#) (45)  
[Joan](#) (99)  
[Suzanne](#) (97)

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[Activities](#) (41)  
[Books](#) (140)  
[Child Development](#) (46)  
[Features](#) (32)  
[Food](#) (33)  
[Giveaway](#) (16)  
[Grandkids](#) (79)  
[Guests](#) (91)  
[Holidays](#) (67)  
[Music](#) (46)  
[Video](#) (39)