



“Good With Children”

How To Help Children and Dogs Live Safely and Happily Together

When it's time to add a dog to a family with children, everyone looks for that dog or breed of dog that is “good with children”. Unfortunately, no one can guarantee how an individual dog will react in every situation.

To keep both children and dogs safe it is important to choose the right dog AND to train both dog and children.

Dogs Are Predators

The dog's perception of the humans in a family will often differ, depending on age and size of the human. As a general rule, an adult male will be automatically given the most respect and small children and babies the least.

Small children and babies move, act, smell and make noises in a much different way than adults. In many ways, they resemble PREY and your dog, no matter how cute and charming, evolved from predators! Of course, centuries of selecting for dogs that are gentle and submissive to humans mean that the predator in your dog is usually not a threat, no matter how the children act, but certain activities can trigger those instincts in your dog and that can be dangerous.

Be aware that activities like the dog and children chasing each other, tug of war, keep away and roughhousing can quickly escalate into trouble. Older children can be taught to “control the game” and with a well behaved dog may be able to play some of these games but younger children should never play with any dog in this way.

Children have HANDS, dogs have MOUTHS, and the canine version of grabbing, pinching, wrestling, hitting and pushing will involve TEETH! A bite from a dog that is “just playing” will break the skin or badly bruise a child. This same bite might not even be noticed by another dog and would be considered a normal part of canine play. In other words, if the dog were playing with other dogs he would be playing nicely. The dog doesn't mean to hurt or injure. He has to be taught that humans are much more delicate than dogs and that takes training and rules for both dogs and children.

House Rules for All Dogs and Children

- 1) Children should NEVER be left unsupervised with a dog or puppy and NEVER means NEVER! Adults must be in the same room with the child and the dog and not overly distracted by the TV or computer etc. If the dog and child are outside they need to be in sight of an adult at all times.
- 2) Dogs should be obedience trained by a responsible adult with special emphasis on commands such as “go to kennel”, “stay”, “leave it”, “wait”, “enough”, “settle” and “off”.
- 3) Children should be obedience trained by a responsible adult with special emphasis on “stop that right now”, “leave the dog alone”, “be gentle” and “if you leave your toys on the floor, the dog can chew them and you can't yell at him”.

- 4) All dogs should have a quiet place where they can be safely contained and will not be bothered by children. A comfortable crate in a quiet spot is usually the best and children should NOT have access to that area.
- 5) All children should have a place where they can play with their toys and not be bothered by the dog.
- 6) Dogs should never be allowed to take part in wrestling or roughhousing sessions with children. Proper play with dogs should always be directed at an object--balls, toys etc--never at hands or clothing. All games should be started and stopped by the child with adult back up.
- 7) Children should be taught how to properly play with the dog and what to do if the play gets out of control. "What to do" includes stopping all movement, being quiet, retreating slowly to a safe place and asking for adult help. This should be automatic on the child's part and enforced by the supervising adult anytime the dog is inappropriate (grabbing pants cuffs, barking and lunging at hands, feet or toys etc.).
- 8) Rather than let a dog rehearse bad behavior and try to stop it after the fact, plan ahead for such things as play dates with other children, parties and company. These are good times for the dog to be in his crate with a wonderful chew toy. If there is any question about how well the dog will handle any upcoming event, put him away BEFORE the excitement starts.
- 9) It may be helpful for the dog to wear a "house line" when around children. This is a lightweight cord about 4-5 ft long that is attached to their collar and is allowed to drag. The line will allow control of his actions without anyone having to reach for the dog, grab his collar or chase him. In the case of young children, the adults can use the line to encourage the dog to leave the area when children are bothering him. A longer version of the house line can be used when the dog is outside, to control rough play or chasing.
- 10) A dog should always be encouraged to leave when he does not want attention from children--he should never be allowed to stand his ground. For instance, when the toddler approaches the dog and wants to grab his ears, the dog should get in the habit of leaving the area rather than staying in place. Getting up on furniture should be discouraged as this will make it more likely that the dog will try to stay in his comfortable place and try to guard it from the child. In addition, high value toys/chewies should never be left around for the dog as this will also encourage guarding behavior.
- 11) While most young children are not capable of training a dog, the dog should be taught to respect them. Teaching the dog to respect young children is taught by the adults. This can be done by having the child feed the dog, insisting that the dog take treats from the child politely (sitting first, waiting for the "OK" from the child) and not allowing the dog to jump on the child. The dog needs to understand that the adults will back up the child and enforce the house rules.

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