

Dogs and Children

Important Information for Parents

BENEFITS OF CHILDREN & PETS

Living with a dog can be wonderful for many children. Growing up with a dog can boost a child's self esteem and help them learn how to be responsible. Children and dogs can be a great match, but will not necessarily have a wonderful relationship right from the start. Parents must be committed to teaching dogs *and* children acceptable behavior. Setting appropriate limits for all family members is the first step towards a harmonious relationship between canine and child.

PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE

Don't let your child hug your dog around the neck. Young children almost always intend for this friendly human gesture to translate equally to canines, but unfortunately, dogs rarely interpret this as affection. Rather, it is often seen as a threat to their own safety and they may react accordingly with a growl or snarl. Teach your child to pet your dog gently underneath the dog's chin instead of reaching over or around her head.

Don't stare! Just as in the human world, staring at your dog or looking directly into her eyes for prolonged periods of time is considered a threatening gesture. Although children are often tempted to gaze into their best (canine) friend's eyes, teach them to show their affection in other less intimidating ways.

Encourage safe, pleasant exchanges. Children, especially those who have had previous unpleasant experiences with dogs, tend to become nervous and anxious when a dog tries to take a treat or toy from their hand. This often causes a child to jerk his hand away at the last second and further excite or inadvertently "tease" the dog, encouraging her to jump up or lunge to take the object. Teach your child to offer treats with a flat, open palm, and always in the presence of a responsible adult.

Let sleeping dogs lie. Never allow your child to wake your dog, or to play around your sleeping dog. When a dog is startled out of her sleep by touch or sudden noise, she will often become surprised or scared and may attempt to snap or bite in an effort to defend herself. Teach your children that your dog's sleeping space is her own, and that she is not to be disturbed while she is resting.

PLAYTIME

Watch body language. Young children naturally move with quick, jerky movements, have high-pitched voices and often run, rather than walk. All of these behaviors somewhat resemble the behaviors of prey animals. Almost all of a dog's play behaviors are based on predatory behavior! Consequently, your dog may respond to your child's behavior by chasing him, nipping at his heels, jumping up at him or even trying to knock him down. Teach your child to play quietly around your new dog until she becomes more comfortable and calm.

Discourage rough play ... among all family members. Many people love to wrestle and play roughly with their dogs. While this type of play is certainly fun, it is important to NEVER encourage your dog to nip, mouth, paw and tug when there are children in your household that she must learn to interact with. Consistency is extremely important to dogs. If your new dog is led to believe that this type of rough play is appropriate, she may continue these rough play behaviors with your young children and inadvertently injure them by mouthing, pawing and tugging too roughly.

TOYS AND POSSESSIONS

Keep things out of reach. Your new dog does not understand the difference between her toys and those belonging to your child until you teach him. To prevent your new dog mistaking your child's favorite toy as one of her own, teach your children to pick up their belongings and keep them out of reach of the dog.

Resource guarding. Dogs can be possessive about their food, toys and space. Although the Berkeley East Bay Humane Society makes every effort to match families with children to appropriate dogs with no known resource

guarding problems, it is always better to take proper precautions when it comes to children. Teach your children to respect your dog's space while she is chewing, eating and napping. While it is normal for a dog to growl or snap to protect high value items, it is not acceptable behavior and should be avoided at all costs.

SUPERVISE, SUPERVISE, SUPERVISE

Visiting children. Even if your children are remarkably well behaved around your new dog, consider the possibility that underage visitors to your home may not know the rules. Visiting children will most likely be thrilled and excited to interact with your dog, but make sure all interactions are closely monitored and that all handling is appropriate. If you are uncomfortable, or feel that your dog is overwhelmed by the situation, confine her appropriately in a quiet area where she cannot be disturbed.

Never leave your children unattended with your new dog. Not even for a minute, not while you're in the shower, not even to turn your head to answer the phone. Keep in mind that you do NOT know your new dog well enough to trust her in every circumstance, especially around young children who may not always be appropriate in their interactions. Confine your dog properly when you are unable to supervise, and let your children know that they are not allowed to interact with the dog when you are not present. In doing so, you are ensuring that every interaction between your child and your dog is positive, supervised and safe.



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