

Kids and Dogs



Congratulations on deciding to enrich your family life by adding a canine companion to your household. Here are some suggestions for a safe, rewarding relationship between your kids and your dog.

THREE PRE-DOG CONSIDERATIONS:

Don't Make the Kids Responsible for the Dog

Adopting a dog “for the kids” is an unrealistic expectation. Children cannot be solely responsible for dogs. They can learn to participate in the responsibilities of dog care and commit to long-term care of the dog. They can learn empathy, the use of positive training methods, and self-control. But you, as the adult, must be prepared to be the primary caretaker for the dog's lifetime.

Supervise, Supervise, Supervise

The success of dog-child relationships depends on choosing a family-friendly dog and on consistent parental supervision, management, and the modeling of appropriate interactions and humane training methods. Only get a dog if you are prepared to take 100% responsibility for the supervision of your children with the family dog—as well as the supervision of your children's friends, relatives, or any other child that interacts with the dog.

Choose the Right Dog

Research the breed or breed mix, learn about the history of the dog if you can, and find out about the individual dog's temperament. Good family dogs are friendly and social, both with people and other animals, and enjoy being handled by adults and children. Avoid dogs with any form of aggression toward people or dogs.

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL DOG-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS:

Start Gently

The first few weeks in a new home can be as stressful to a dog as they are exciting to a child. Living with a child is an adjustment for many dogs—the movement, noise, and activity may overwhelm or scare them. To make this easier for your new dog, plan a schedule of supervised interactions and downtime/rest. Balance your child's enthusiasm for spending time with the dog with the dog's need to be alone and get adjusted, especially with shy or fearful dogs.

Set Up Safe Spaces

Dogs need their own space for meals, chews, or special treats and for rest away from the child's activities. The dog's space must be a secure area for times when a parent/guardian cannot supervise the child and dog. Don't allow children to play in the dog's crate or sleeping area.

Educate Your Dog

Take your dog to positive-reinforcement dog training classes to teach him appropriate skills. He needs to be exercised daily, socialized with people and other dogs on a regular basis, and taught manners such as walking nicely on leash, sitting for greetings, and not jumping on people.

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Make It Fun

Involve and supervise children in your dog's daily care. Assign dog care responsibilities appropriate for your child's age and/or ability. Involve your child in dog play by instructing, modeling, and supervising appropriate play, such as fetch and Frisbee. Teach positive interactions such as obedience or dog tricks. Avoid over-stimulation in both dog and child.

Keep It Safe

Do not allow wrestling, ear pulling, pony rides, fur grabbing, rough play, or teasing. These types of games teach your child inappropriate and unsafe interactions with dogs. Every dog has his limits and may bite under certain circumstances, so strict supervision and management is a must.

Do Not Disturb

Teach your child to respect your dog's boundaries while eating or sleeping. Give food or chews when the dog is in his safe space. The dog must be allowed to enjoy these items or take a rest without interruption.

Be a Good Role Model

Attend a training class that teaches and models positive training skills. Be sure to notice and reward your dog's good behavior with praise, food treats, or other rewards. Never use physical punishment (hit, kick, or shake your dog) for misbehavior or aggression. These methods are dangerous and teach children an incorrect way to solve problems.