



# CHILDREN AND DOGS

There's no denying that children and dogs can become great friends. We've all watched those lovely movies on TV depicting wonderful bonds between a dog and his human friend. For the most part the above does happen but unfortunately in some cases, children and dogs can become their own worst enemies.

These days, nearly every second household owns a pet of some sort, with dogs being the most popular choice. Nearly every fourth household has a child under the age of 12 years with a dog for a pet. Also interesting to note that most dog attacks occur to children under 12!

This handout is to provide a brief overview on the do's and don'ts with children and dogs, so that we can create a happy and harmonious existence between the two.

## **Introducing your new dog to children**

Whenever you bring home a new dog, you must have a process set out to keep the introduction calm and safe, so that you don't overwhelm the new dog and cause a bad experience.

Ensure all children understand what is expected of them during the initial introduction. It helps to rehearse this before the new dog comes home and perhaps write up the steps on a piece of paper and keep it on the fridge.

## **When you introduce**

**KEEP IT ALL VERY VERY CALM**

- No screaming in excitement, jumping up and down or running around
- Have children standing up with very young babies in your arms. Kids should be nice and calm standing still
- Allow new dog to come up and sniff the children for a little while before any interaction happens.
- If the dog wanders off, that is okay. Wait for his return.
- Have one child only pat their leg to entice the dog over, then ask the dog to sit (adult can do this) and child can pat the dog under the chin. Avoid patting on top of the dog's head as some dogs don't like this, especially from new people they have just met.
- If you have more than one child (except young toddlers and babies), they can each then call the dog over to meet and greet.

**NOTE:** If the dog does not come over when the child pats their leg, then do NOT go up to the dog. It may be a good idea to just give this dog time to settle and get acquainted with the new environment.

Remember ALL dogs are capable of biting if they feel scared and overwhelmed; therefore it is important that you teach you children to always remain calm when around the dog. Refrain from chasing games or encouraging a dog to jump on a child that is on the floor.

Let's look at how we can make dogs and children safer around each other.

## **Creating a child- safe dog**

There is no secret, the safest dogs are those that are socialised from a young age and *obedience trained!* These dogs are calmer around most everyday situations and are easily controlled when need be. But make no mistake.....**ALL DOGS, REGARDLESS OF BREED, AGE AND TEMPERAMENT, ARE CAPABLE OF BITING!!** Especially if being cornered, poked, teased and coaxed (generally speaking – tormented!) Some dogs are more tolerant than others, but generally, any dog will defend itself if it feels it is being threatened, regardless of who by!

## **Creating “dog-safe” children**

Children can be great “tormenters” when they are under 12 years old. Children must be taught and educated on how to be dog-safe children. This means no tormenting the dog, *especially* when it's sleeping, eating or resting. They must also be shown the acceptable type of play around dogs, ie, a screaming child who is waving his arms about whilst running around the house is going to attract the dog's attention. The dog thinks this is play and will start to chase and nip the child and if the dog becomes overexcited, he may start to jump up and nip/bite.

The safest way for a child and dog to “play” together is by way of a fetch game. Teach the child (if old enough) how to play fetch games with the dog. This keeps your child standing (not running!) and is

also giving the dog a safe and fun game to play (make sure you teach the dog to sit for the ball throw!). For younger children, have them sitting between your legs whilst you throw the ball for the dog. The main aim is to keep the child in one spot and not running around. If your dog doesn't enjoy a fetch game, then perhaps the child could be amusing him/herself with games that don't involve running around.

If there are many children and you cannot supervise the play at that time, then it is best to keep the dog somewhere where he cannot interfere with the children playing. This way you eliminate the possibility of accidents occurring.

#### **DO'S for your children around dogs**

Stay calm and don't scream (this includes adults)  
Pat the dog under the chin  
Play safe games such as fetch  
Feed the dog from his bowl  
Ask permission before you approach a dog  
Leave the dog to sleep, rest and eat quietly  
Keep away from dog's sleeping areas  
Play safe games like fetch

#### **DON'TS for your children around dogs**

Run around flapping arms and screaming  
Pat the dog on top of his head, pull ears/tail  
Play chase, tug or wrestling games  
Feed the dog from the table  
Rush up to a dog to pat it  
Torment the dog at any time  
Sit in the dog's sleeping area  
Hug or kiss the dog

By following the above, you are ensuring the safest possible interaction between your child and dogs and also developing the beautiful bond that is a child and his/her dog.

#### **What if the dog growls at my child**

A growl is a warning from a dog to cease what we are doing. This means that whatever we were doing at the time, be it patting, brushing, playing rough etc, may be hurting or overwhelming the dog. Dogs usually give plenty of warning before they actually bite so it's good idea to adhere to the warning and assess the situation that caused the growl. In some cases, it may have been the children were playing too rough, causing pain or discomfort...OR perhaps children were disturbing the dog whilst eating or sleeping. Whatever the reason, be thankful the dog decided to give a warning first

We recommend a re-assessment of the situation that caused the growling and putting in place measures to ensure it doesn't happen again.

#### **Other warning signs**

Not all dogs growl as a warning, therefore it's a good idea to learn the other signs that indicate a dog may not be comfortable. These can be :

- Suddenly stiffening their body
- Giving a cold hard stare
- Curling their top lip exposing their top teeth



#### **Final Reminder...**

Always supervise children and dogs at all times  
Never trust a dog around a child  
Teach children to respect dogs  
Learn the warning signs  
Keep your children and dogs safe from each other

**Always supervise whenever your pets and your children are together. Never leave them alone!**

# How Kids SHOULD NOT Interact with Dogs

It's common sense. Just imagine how people should interact with each other.

Avoid taking people's food



Avoid bothering dogs when they are eating



Avoid stealing other people's toys



Avoid taking a dog's bones or toys



Avoid putting your face right up to someone else's face



Avoid putting your face right up to a dog's face



Avoid bothering when asleep



Avoid bothering animals when they are resting. Let sleeping dogs lie.



Avoid pestering



Avoid grabbing tail/ears



Avoid climbing on or trampling



Avoid climbing on or trampling



Avoid pinching



Avoid hugging. Most dogs dislike it.



Avoid screaming around

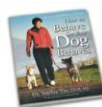


Avoid hollering and shouting. Use your "inside" voice instead.



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# How Kids SHOULD Interact with Dogs

Use common sense.

Be polite and kind to pets

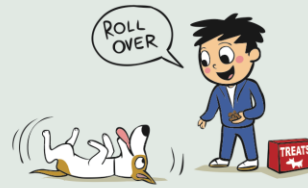


Learn to recognize when your dog is scared or anxious



Play appropriate games with pets, such as:

Fetch



Training tricks (like roll over, shake, beg, etc.)

Walking and running with a dog



Playing hide-n-seek

Always remember:

**Supervise all interactions. Accidents can happen in a split second.**



Train your dog to associate the kids with positive experiences so he'll be more likely to tolerate your child in case she accidentally interacts inappropriately.



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