

How to Train a Child Safe Dog

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Get S.M.A.R.T Dogs
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Millions of homes around the world are shared by dogs and kids. Growing up with a dog is thought to enhance a child's self-esteem by providing companionship and unconditional love, as well as fostering responsibility and a greater sense of empathy for all living creatures. Yet expecting dogs and kids to get along without any adult direction, training or supervision can be a recipe for disaster.

Dogs under two years of age are 'kids' too. They need to learn not only good manners such as 'sit' and 'come' but more importantly make positive associations with typical family life encounters. One of the most important associations is that all humans *particularly* the small, active, noisy, clumsy, erratic, rough humans we call kids – are safe, trustworthy and even fun. This is unlikely to be achieved by throwing a puppy and child together and hoping for the best – neither a baby canine nor a baby *homo sapien* is up to that task. No matter how much your child may have begged for a dog and no matter what responsibilities they promised to take on - the ultimate responsibility is going to be yours – the adult - to S.E.E. (SUPERVISE, EXPOSE AND EDUCATE) the child and the puppy into a happy long term relationship.

SUPERVISE for safety

Supervision means taking control of all interactions between your child and dog to ensure a positive and safe experience for both parties. You may need to consider:

How your child lifts, restrains, handles, pets and grooms your dog.

How your child plays with your dog.

Your child's level of training skills. Training an animal is a challenge even for adults and requires an understanding of training techniques, timing, consistency patience and empathy. Involve children in training but be sure to be there to guide and coach.

As a general rule, NEVER leave a young child and dog alone together. A dog should not be expected to tolerate the torments that small children may unintentionally inflict nor should you put your child at risk from a dog who may act aggressively for whatever reason.

EXPOSE to 'Kidz Biz'

Most problems with dogs are predictable and occur as a reaction to inadequate socialization or exposure to children in a variety of situations. These problems can generally be prevented by providing frequent, positive experiences with kids from an early age.

If you don't have kids of your own – beg steal or borrow some. For just as all kids should know how to behave around dogs ALL dogs should know how to behave around kids and the best time to start is the day you bring your puppy home.

You can use food treats (or part of your dog's regular meal) to pair the presence of children with good things – the experts call this 'classical conditioning'. If kids just stood still, that might be all you need to do but of course they don't. Kids and young dogs love to be active, run wild and play games. With a little foresight you can prepare your dog for typical 'kidz biz' to produce a more child safe pet .

'Hugproof' your puppy.

Kids love to bend over and give dogs a big hug but in doggy body language this is a very threatening gesture. Just clipping your dog on lead, also requires bending, reaching forward and grabbing the collar so you need to desensitize your dog to this action now. Reach for the collar slowly and gently then treat your dog. Gradually reach out and grab with a little more force. Repeat and treat hundreds of times with kids and adults.



Practice holding and restraining your dog in the same way. Work this exercise as a team with parent and child taking it in turns to hold the dog or to treat. Getting your dog use to being touched all over – the underbelly, ears, tail, feet – will make all health and veterinary care so much easier and will enable even your child to groom and care for your dog. This should be an exercise in mutual trust and acceptance rather than ‘boss dog’ techniques. Using force only works for those who are physically able to impose their will so generally such techniques are of no benefit to children as well as being unnecessarily, adverse and unpleasant. Handling should be a pleasurable experience for both people and dogs. Slowly increase the strength and length of your grabs and hugs rewarding consistently.

Nip ‘Nip & Chase’

Don’t allow your dog to chase and nip kids. Practice soon becomes ‘habit’ and before you know it your kids are too afraid to go out in the backyard to play.

Teach kids to ‘be a statue’ by standing absolutely still, folding arms, and looking away from the puppy. If chasing and biting aren’t yet established as a habit your puppy will soon learn that ‘statues’ aren’t much fun to chase and will give up the game.

Reward your dog for ignoring fast motion, screams and giggles. This is particularly important for breeds with strong chase or herding instincts. Attach a lead and reward your dog with lots of tasty treats for remaining calm while kids play. This is a way of ‘desensitizing’ your dog to the sights and sounds of play. An audio tape of children playing can also help if your dogs seems particularly reactive to loud sounds. Start the tape at a volume low enough for the dog to hear without reacting and reward calm behaviour.

Apply commonsense management techniques such as putting the dog away in a crate or in the house with a tasty chew toy until things are a little more settled. Remember the less your dog gets to practice this behaviour the less he is likely to want to do it.

“I’ll show you mine if you’ll show me yours!”

Lots of dogs learn that if they play with their own toys no one takes an interest but if they play with something of yours, a great game of ‘catch me if you can’ can be initiated. This can be prevented by doing lots of ‘swaps’ with your puppy right from the first day. Take away things he has including toys and food, look at them and either give them back or give him something of even higher value such as a delicious food treat or favourite toy. Adults should initially practice this exercise, then supervise the children and only then (if old enough) kids alone. This method is safer and more effective than expecting your dog to give things up simply because you are the ‘boss’. Being dominant over your dog may persuade him to give you a bone (reluctantly) but it will do nothing to safeguard your children or visiting children who may approach your dog when eating or chewing. Far better to change your dog’s opinion about the whole situation to the approach of any human – big or small – is good news for me!

All games have rules

Dogs and kids can have a lot of fun playing together but all games have rules:

DO:

- Teach your dog to retrieve. Bringing toys back to you is a great way for kids and dogs to spend constructive time together and wear themselves out.
- Play hide and seek by hiding toys or even members of the family around the house and sending the dog to ‘find!’.
- Teach your dog an ‘on’ and ‘off’ switch if you want to play ‘tug’. Stop play every minute or so and ask for a ‘sit’ or ‘down’. You can reward a correct response by continuing play or with a treat.
- Make certain children stick to ‘the rules’ by supervising games as necessary.



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- Quit play immediately if the dog seems to be getting over excited or if teeth touch human flesh (even accidentally).
- Make sure kids spend equal amounts of quiet time with the dog such as grooming . The presence of children should not = high excitement.

DON'T

- Allow your puppy to bite/wrestle/tug directly on human skin – all play should be directed onto toys.
- Allow adults, teenagers or children to play wrestling games with the dog.
- Allow games of chasing which may encourage nipping and biting.
- Allow young children to play with any dog unsupervised.

EDUCATE both the Child and the Dog

A dog is neither a babysitter nor a toy . If you have children when you get a dog , don't kid yourself – you are really taking on the task of training two species at the same time. Children need to be taught that dogs feel pain, fear, affection and joy just as people do. Dogs need to be taught human 'etiquette' such as appropriate house manners, greetings and games. But what a wonderful opportunity! Isn't this one of the reasons you wanted a dog? The dog becomes a focal point for demonstrating the value of patience, kindness, consistency and genuine praise – all important lessons in life. The presence of a dog has been shown to provide children with an increased sense of security, comfort, companionship, self-esteem, improved communication skills, a feeling of acceptance and a greater empathy for all living things – and - as if that weren't enough dogs are fun. In a sometimes all too serious world they remind adults and kids alike to take time-out to sniff the wind, feel the sun and smile!

