

Your New Dog & Children

Getting a new dog or puppy is an exciting experience. It can also be a scary and stressful time for your new pet. Careful planning and supervision are the keys to a successful introduction. Following are some helpful tips to make this experience a positive one for the dog and your family.

Getting Ready

Before bringing your new dog home, prepare the dog's living areas. Food and water should be placed in an accessible but low traffic area where the dog can eat without interruption. The dog's bed should also be placed in a quiet, low traffic area. You want to create a safe place where the dog can go to take a "time out" if it wants to sleep or just get away for awhile.

The First Few Days

The best thing you can do for your new dog the first few days is to set up a calm, stress-free environment in which the dog can ease gradually into your family's daily activities. Establish a regular elimination schedule. For the first few weeks, expect the dog to have some accidents. Take it out more often than you might think necessary to help avoid accidents. Be sure you praise the dog when he/she eliminates appropriately. Allow the dog to get to know you and your family prior to bringing home a lot of visitors. Avoid loud, high pitched voices and sudden movements, as this may stress or scare a new dog. Children need close supervision to ensure their interaction with the dog is a positive one.

Pet Care & Kids

Caring for a pet can be a wonderful way to teach your children respect and compassion for all living things. Make it clear to them from the beginning that a pet is not a toy and should be treated gently and handled with care. Although children can be involved in some of the more light-hearted care activities like grooming and playtime, a parent must be fully prepared to be the primary caretaker.

What Parents Should Teach Their Kids About Dogs

Even the most docile of dogs can cause harm if teased or frightened or if their prey drives are triggered. As a parent it's up to you to teach your children the basics of dog behavior and safety. Some suggestions include:

- Teach your children to treat animals with respect. Never provoke a dog into growling, barking or lunging. Show them how to properly approach and touch dogs.

- Help children understand canine body language so they can recognize when a dog is friendly, fearful or aggressive.
- Always supervise your children's interactions with any dog. When a child greets a dog, they should move slowly and offer the dog the back of a hand to sniff before petting. Petting the dog under the chin or on the chest will be less threatening to the dog than the top of the head.
- Children should not encourage a dog to chase them. Quick movements and high-pitched voices can trigger a dog's attack-and-chase response.
- Avoid tug-of-war games as this sets up a competition between child and dog. These games often over-stimulate a dog and can encourage a dog to grab at clothes and hands.
- Teach children to respect a dog's privacy. Never allow a child to disturb a dog while eating, chewing on a bone or toy, or sleeping. Dogs are naturally territorial and may growl, snap or bite to protect their possessions.
- Tell children not to look a dog directly in the eye. In dog language, a stare is a threat and may trigger the dog to act dominantly or aggressively.

What Dog Owners Should Teach Their Dogs

As a responsible pet owner, it's up to you to teach your dog appropriate behavior. Socialization and obedience training are keys to preventing inappropriate behaviors. Some suggestions to keep your dog from biting include:

- Early and regular socialization cannot be overemphasized. Exposing your puppy or dog to a variety of situations will minimize its fear of new people and surroundings. These sessions should be based on positive-reinforcement training methods.
- Teach your dog to obey commands. Obedience training will instill good manners and allow you to gain control of the dog. Reinforce the dog's training on a daily basis and always reward the dog for the correct response.
- Spay or Neuter your dog. The American Humane Association reports that most dog bites are caused by unneutered males protecting their territory.
- Don't leave your dog tied up in the yard. Many pet experts believe that chaining or tying up a dog for long periods of time may promote aggressive behavior.

