

Dogs and Children:

How to live happily ever after

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The sight of a child and a dog curled up together or playing or the child waling a dog a leash is a wonder to behold. But these “picturesque” moments don’t happen without effort. The relationship between a child and their dog needs to be formed through positive interaction and training: Training both the dog, *and the child*.

1. **Children should be taught how to behave around dogs, even if their own family does not own a dog.** This means it is up to you to educate your children, as well as any children that enter your house or property:
 - a. **A child should never approach a strange dog without asking the owner if it's OK** to pat the dog. If the child sees a loose dog on the street, he should not approach it even if he knows the dog.
 - b. **Children should never scream or run away from a dog** – these behaviors encourage the dog to chase, jump, nip and even attack. Dogs have a chemical response in their brain called “prey drive” that encourages the dog to chase, catch and shake. The dog is reacting to chemical stimulus, not rational thought, once triggered; this response is almost impossible to interrupt.
 - c. **Children should never stare at a dog.** Staring is considered a challenge in the dog world, and the dog may bite to protect himself.
 - d. **Children should never chase a dog.** Chasing puts the children in a position of subordination – and tells the dog that it is the boss of the child and has the right to do what it likes to the child – including “correcting” misbehavior by biting or snapping.
 - e. **Children should never hug a dog.** This makes the dog feel trapped and it may bite to “escape”
 - f. **Children should not wrestle or play tug-of-war with the dog.** This behavior brings the child to the dog’s level as a “playmate” not as someone to be respected.
 - g. **Children should be taught to never hit dogs with their hands or an object,** to lower their voices when playing with the dog.
 - h. **Children should leave the dog alone when he's sleeping, eating, or ill.** Under these conditions the dog does not want to play and the child may not accept “no” or a growl as an answer.
 - i. **Never tease a dog in any fashion.** Many dog bites occur because the child teases the pet beyond endurance.
2. **Dogs should be taught how to behave around children and people in general.** Do not allow your dog to practice any behavior on you that you would not want it to practice with a three year old (i.e.: jumping up, mouthing, chewing on hands or clothes, nipping)

- a. **Any time a new dog is added to your family it should immediately attend a training course.** This not only give your dogs expectations for behavior, but many training courses expect your family to attend, and give you rules and guidelines to start you out in the right direction.
- b. **The dog should never be left alone with a child less than seven years old.** A young child may challenge or injure the dog unintentionally and the result could be tragic.
- c. **Dogs and children should be separated at snack time** so the dog doesn't learn to steal food from tiny hands.
- d. **The dog should have a place he can go to “get away from it all”.** This can be a crate in the house. The children should never be allowed to bother the dog when he is in his place.
- e. **If there is a fenced yard, owners should make sure that neighborhood children cannot accidentally or intentionally tease the dog.** Kids often begin by goading the dog to bark, then to snarl. This makes the children feel powerful, but it makes the dog begin to hate kids.
- f. **Do not play tug-of-war or wrestle with any dog that is around children.** Dogs learn to bite and hang on to the things they want, even toys, clothing, or appendage. Wrestling teaches the dog that short people are to be played rough with – and actually increase aggression towards children.
- g. **Never tie a dog in the yard.** Children tend to tease tethered dogs even without realizing it, which can lead to aggressive behavior.

Families can live in harmony by teaching the dog and the child to mutually respect each other. The more effort families put in to education and training, the fewer children will be bitten and fewer dogs will be euthanized for aggressive behavior

Canine College West
“Turning Pests into Pets”
(775) 351-4854
www.k9west.net