

# Children and Dogs: Important Information for Parents



There are so many great reasons to introduce your children to the joy of owning a dog. Dogs help children's self-esteem, help them learn responsibility and help them learn empathy. Living with a dog also has its health benefits. Studies have shown that children who spend the first year of their life exposed to animals have lower risk of developing allergies and asthma as they get older.

However, children and dogs don't automatically start with a wonderful relationship. Parents must be willing to help teach their children acceptable boundaries and rules regarding interaction with the dog. They must also be committed to teaching the dog appropriate behavior when interacting with children. Management and proper socialization is the foundation for a safe and fun environment for children and dogs.

## Selecting a Dog

### ***What age of dog is best?***

As a general rule, if your child is under 6 years old, it is usually best to adopt a dog over 2 years old. Many families picture a puppy and child growing up together, but there are a few things to consider before adopting a puppy (under 1 year of age) if you have a young child. For the below reasons, it's Homeward Pet's policy to adopt puppies to families with children at least 6 years of age or older.

- **Time and energy:** Puppies require a lot of time, patience, training, socialization and supervision. These are all important in order to raise a well-adjusted adult dog. If you have a young child who already requires a lot of care and time, you should consider if you have enough time and energy to deal with a puppy as well.
- **Safety:** Puppies, because they are still babies, are very fragile. A puppy can be frightened, and possibly injured, by a well-meaning, curious child trying to pick him up, hug him or pulling on his tail and ears.
- **Rough Play:** Puppies have sharp teeth and claws. Puppies use their mouths to check things out, and can inadvertently injure a small child. Puppies tend to jump up more than adult dogs and can accidentally knock over a small child. All interactions between children and puppy will need to be closely supervised in order to minimize any chance of injury.
- **Advantages of getting an adult dog:** full grown dogs require less time and attention once they have adjusted to their new family and routine, however you'll still need to spend time helping your new dog through this transition and keep up on socialization and basic training. Adult dogs are easier to gauge on how tolerant they will be around children and many adult dogs have a history that helps shelters decide what age range they are best suited for. All dogs over 6 months of age at Homeward Pet Adoption Center are given a behavior assessment which helps us estimate a suitable age of children for that dog's particular temperament.

### **What breed is best?**

- **Size:** Toy and small breed dogs, such as Chihuahuas or poodles, are usually not the best choice for a young child. These dogs, because of their size, are very fragile and can easily be injured by a well-intentioned child just wanting to play. These dogs also tend to become more frightened by loud noises and lots of activity; and frightened dogs are much more likely to snap or bite in order to protect themselves. Larger dogs are often better able to tolerate the activity, noise and rough play that is part of living with children.
- **Breed type:** Some sporting breeds, such as Labradors or golden retrievers, can make good pets for families with children. Breeds that have been particularly bred for protective behavior, such as Chow Chows or Rottweilers, are usually not recommended. It can be difficult for these types of dogs to comfortably tolerate the many comings and goings of children and their friends who may be perceived as territorial intruders. Herding breeds, such as border collies and shepherds, are inclined to "herd" children, chasing and nipping at their heels.
- **Temperament:** While generalizations can be made about specific dog breeds, it is just as important to consider a dog's individual temperament. A dog's personality is shaped by both their past experiences and genetics. A dog originally bred to guard or a herding breed might have an excellent history with children of all ages, and as long as they are continually socialized properly, might make the best choice for your family.

### **Whose responsibility is it?**

It is completely unrealistic to expect a child, regardless of age, to have sole responsibility of caring for a dog. Dogs need the basics; things like food, water and shelter, but they also need to be played with, exercised and trained consistently. Teaching a dog the rules of the house and helping him become a good companion is too overwhelming for a young child. While responsible young teenagers may be up to the task, they may not be willing to spend an adequate amount of time with the dog, as their desire to be with their friends usually takes over at this age. If you're adopting a dog "for the kids" you must be prepared and willing to be the dog's primary caretaker.

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