

Children and Your New Dog



Creating a Safe Environment for Children and Dogs

Below are some guidelines to help you start off on the right foot with your new dog. Remember, children should never be left alone with a dog or puppy without adult supervision.

Holding:

- It's safest for both your child and puppy if your child is sitting down whenever he wants to hold the puppy. Puppies are wiggly and constantly moving and can easily fall out of a child's arms and be injured. If held insecurely, a puppy may become frightened and snap or nip in response.
- Have your child offer the puppy a toy to chew while they pet the dog. Puppies tend to chew on everything, especially when they are teething, including hands and arms, so having a proper chew toy handy is a great way to keep your child's arms safe and teach your puppy what is appropriate for chewing. An added bonus is that the puppy will come to associate something good (getting a great toy to play with) with being held by your child.
- For larger dogs, have your child sit on your lap or next to you, and let the dog approach you. This way you can control your child and prevent him from getting carried away if the petting gets too rough. You are also there to supervise the dog and help teach him to treat your child gently as well.

Petting and giving affection:

- Children often want to give their dogs a hug around the neck. In dog language this can be perceived as a threatening gesture, rather than one of affection, and can react with a growl, snap or bite. The best way for a child to pet a dog is underneath the dog's chin or on his chest, rather than hugging or reaching over his head. Also teach your child to avoid staring at, or looking directly into, a dog's eyes. This is also seen as a challenge by a dog and they might respond inappropriately.

Giving Treats:

- Children tend to be a little frightened and anxious when a dog tries to take a treat from their hand. This causes them to jerk their hand away at the last second, which may cause the dog to jump up or lunge after the treat. Have your child place the treat in an open palm, rather than holding it in his fingers. You may want to place a hand underneath your child's hand to help guide them and prevent any jerking movements.

Supervising Play:

- Children run with quick, jerky movements and have high-pitched voices. These actions are highly stimulating to any dog. Your dog may respond with chasing or

jumping up on your child. Encourage your child to play quietly around the new dog until both become more comfortable around each other. Your dog also needs to learn which behaviors are appropriate and which are not when playing with humans. It is up to you to teach your dog appropriate play and provide clear boundaries. A useful obedience cue is the "leave it" command that you can use when play gets too rough.

- Punishing your dog for inappropriate play or behavior will not help. If he learns that being around children always results in "bad things", he may become defensive and more reactive in their presence.

Possessions:

Your dog doesn't automatically know the difference between his toys and your child's toys. It is up to you to teach him!

- Your child must take responsibility for keeping his toys out of your dog's reach.
- If, and only if, they catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, then give him an acceptable chew toy and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- Don't give your dogs objects to play with that could cause confusion, such as old socks, old shoes or old children's toys. These closely resemble items that are off limits. He can't tell the difference!
- Dogs can be possessive about their food, toys and space. Although it's normal for a dog to growl or snap to protect these items, it's not acceptable. At the same time, children need to learn to respect their dog and his space. Dogs should not be teased or purposefully hurt and they need their time to themselves.

If your adopted dog is growling or snapping at your child for any reason, the situation needs IMMEDIATE attention. Contact Homeward Pet Adoption Center or a professional animal behaviorist.

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for the use of these informative tips.