



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.

Petting

- It's safest for both your child and puppy if your child is sitting down whenever they want 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 or pet 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 them from getting carried away if the petting gets too rough. You are also there to supervise the dog and help teach them to treat your child gently as well.
- Children often want to give their dogs a hug around the neck. Dogs don't express affection the same way we do, so hugs can be very uncomfortable for them. 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 their head. Teach your child to avoid staring at the dog or making direct eye contact for a prolonged period of time. This can also make the dog feel very uncomfortable, eliciting an unwanted response.

Giving Treats

- Children may be a little frightened and/or anxious when a dog tries to take a treat from their hand. This causes them to jerk their hand away at the last second, causing 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 their fingers. You may want to place a hand underneath your child's hand to help guide them and prevent any jerking movements. If the dog is a little too excited about the treat, teach your child to drop the treat on the ground instead.

Supervising Play

- Children run with quick, jerky movements and have high-pitched voices. These actions are highly stimulating to most dogs and may signal play time! 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. Reward every behavior you like, even if it's just calm behavior around your child.
- Punishing your dog for inappropriate behavior will not help. If they learn that being around children always results in punishment, they may become defensive and more reactive in their presence.
- If your dog is playing too roughly with your child, your dog may need another outlet for their energy when your child isn't around. Additional exercise, play time, and/or mental stimulation during the day will help them stay calmer when around children in the home.

Possessions

Your dog doesn't know the difference between his toys and your child's toys.

- Your child must take responsibility for keeping their toys out of your dog's reach.
- If you catch your dog chewing on something they shouldn't, give them an acceptable chew toy or a high value treat. When the dog drops the inappropriate item, remember to praise your pup!
- Don't give your dog 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. They can't tell the difference!
- Dogs can be possessive about their food, toys, and space. It's normal for a dog to growl or snap to protect these items and it's important that we listen to these signals and not punish them. If you notice your dog is growling or snapping at your child when they have these items, separate your dog from your child. This may mean your dog only has these high value items when your child isn't around or when the dog is in their own space, like a separate room or a crate. Remember not to punish these behaviors. Dogs typically won't bite if they are allowed to growl or snap as warnings instead; we just need to listen and adjust our response appropriately.
- If your adopted dog is growling or snapping at your child for any reason, the situation needs immediate attention. Contact the Animal Behavior Manager

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at Homeward Pet Adoption Center or another certified trainer or behavior consultant who focuses on positive reinforcement based training for help.