The Happy Dog Training Academy

Introducing A New Dog or Puppy

**Introducing a New Dog to Your Children.**

When anyone mention dogs and kids, most people conjure up an image of a toddler with an entire litter of Golden Retriever puppies and a long line of loo roll. But we should live in the real world. Introducing a new dog or puppy to your kids could quite easily be downright dangerous, if not done with careful consideration and planning.

**The First consideration should be picking the right dog.**

Your planning begins by choosing the right dog one in which will fit into your family. Whether you decide on a puppy or an adult dog, a cross breed or a purebred, choosing a dog involves careful thought about your lifestyle and your expectations. Reading the breed standards and attributes, each dog has a set of each, the kennel club can help there. When deciding on a cross bread dog it is not quite so easy, but if it is a first cross, for example a cockerpoo, being a cocker spaniel and a poodle, read about each, to get a general idea of what you may be looking at. Should your puppy be a full cross and has mixed parentage then, seeing both mum and dad may help, but it is very difficult to determine. Some dogs are great for apartment living, while others require a large, fenced yard. Some breeds are okay with being couch potatoes while others want lots of exercise every single day. And most of all, some breeds are known for being great with children while others have either health or temperament issues that make them less than great choices for a household that includes children. Small breeds such as the Chihuahua, Pekingese, and Yorkie are very delicate, especially as puppies. Children can seriously injure the dog by simply playing too roughly. Conversely, giant breeds like the Great Dane and Giant Schnauzer can injure small children because these dogs generally don't understand how big and strong they are. Guard dog breeds often don't make good pets for families with children because they take their guarding duties very seriously. They may decide to "help" you with discipline by nipping at your children, or they may get involved in the rough play in which kids get too boisterous with their friends. This is not to say any of these breeds do not make great pets with children, but you should as we have said before, do your research to find the right breed and breeder, many of these breeds have not been used for the guarding purpose for many generations.

**Breeds often cited as perfect for families include the following:**

* Beagle
* Bloodhound
* Boxer
* Cavalier King Charles
* Golden Retriever
* Labrador Retriever
* Old English Sheepdog
* Standard Poodle
* Vizsla

**Dogs that are not so good with children or need handling well, include:**

Dalmatian

Rough Collie

Staffordshire Bull Terrier

Border Collie

Weimaraner

Chihuahua

**Dogs that Love to play would include:**

Labrador Retriever

Golden Retriever

Pomeranian

Australian Shepherd

Springer Spaniel

**Preparing your child to meet a new dog**

Depending on the age and maturity of your child, you may or may not need to do some careful preparatory work before you bring a new dog home. It's only natural for small children to be curious about new furry creatures, and they may try to pull tails, stick their fingers in the dog's nose, mouth, eyes, and ears, or pull-on fur just to see what happens. It's likely your new dog won't appreciate any of these activities, although some will react gently while others will become less so and nip out at the child.

It's best to teach your child how to act before you bring the dog in. You might want to practice with a stuffed dog, pointing out that the child needs to stay away from the dog's face and not pull-on or play with things that belong to the dog. Teaching you child to respect the dog is paramount.

Older children, especially girls, tend to "over-love" dogs. They need to understand that dogs, like everyone, need their alone time. Set up a dog crate in the quietest room in your house and explain to your children that the crate is the dog's den. Just as no one is to go into the child's bedroom without asking, no one is to go into the dog's den without permission from a grown-up. Even then there is little reason for your child to enter the dog crate, once the dog or puppy has woken up your able to ask the puppy to come out, to this end I see no reason for children to enter a tight space, putting them in harms way. Puppies or adult dogs can become very territorial regarding dens.

**Rules for everybody**

You will also need to teach your children whatever rules you will have for the dog. If you're going to not allow the puppy on the furniture, or jump up, beg at the table, then everyone needs to have the same standards, so the dog learns the rules without confusion.

It's always exciting for both the dog and the child to have the dog jump up, putting his feet on the child's chest for a sloppy greeting. However, it is likely your dog won't understand the difference between jumping up on your 17-year-old, and jumping up on 98-year-old Granny, so jumping up should be discouraged. It is just bad manners.

It's up to you to decide what type of food you will give your dog, but I have one small tip about table scraps. Even if you decide to give your dog table scraps, don't do it from the table. You will be in for a lifetime of begging if you allow your child to give the dog his unwanted vegetables while sitting at the table. Your dog should not associate the table with his meals at all. Instead, take the plates to the kitchen and scrape the leftovers into the dog's dish. This reinforces the idea that the dish is the only place from which it is appropriate for him to eat.

**Children and lead walking.**

When you have schooled your children, set up a safe den for your dog, and taught everyone in the house the dog rules, you are ready to bring your new dog home. With older children, you will likely take the child to the breeder or shelter and choose a dog who interacts well with the child.

However, with a younger child, you might want to introduce the dog more slowly. You may want to take an old towel and have your child play with it for a few days before you leave the house to pick up the dog. Let the dog sniff the towel to get used to your child's scent, which can prevent the sometimes-scary nose sniffing, children get from dogs, dogs will give everyone a good sniffing when meeting a new scent.

When you get the dog home, acquaint him with the spot in the yard you have designated for "business", then bring the dog into the home, keeping the leash on. You may wish to have your child sit in a chair at first, so the dog won't knock the child down. Do not tell the child to sit on the floor, as the dog will immediately assume dominance over someone who is lower in stature. Keeping the dog on the lead, allow the child to pet the dog, and let the dog sniff the child. As long as there are no displays of aggression or fear on either side, allow the child to walk around near the dog, then finally to walk the dog around the inside of your house on the lead. Introduce the dog to his crate or safe area, away from anyone and let him rest for a while inside without any disruptions. The pet learns that this is a safe haven that allows an escape from all of the activity if it becomes too much.

**Get your child involved in grooming the new dog.**

If there is still no sign of aggression or discomfort, allow the dog to come off the leash. Do not allow your child to play unsupervised with any dog. You must always supervise and observed them in several different situations such as playing, feeding, cuddling, and chasing/running. Many dogs go strictly by instinct when they partake in these activities, and any of them can turn dangerous in a heartbeat. Your dog may become territorial over his food, toys, or personal space, and may take affront to your child for invading. When your child runs, the dog may mistake him for prey and try to take the child down, grabbing at the little arms waving around.

Get your child involved in the dog's care so the dog sees the child as an ally, rather than as a pest. Have your child feed the dog or participate in grooming and exercise rituals so the dog associates your child with fun, the dog will also see the child as an alpha and not as a subservient.

**If you see any aggression**

If the dog shows any signs of aggression while meeting your child, it doesn't mean you have to get rid of the dog (or even the child!) It simply means you need to slow down. Try having the dog interact with you in one room while the child plays quietly in a nearby space, preferably where the dog can see and smell the child but doesn't have to interact with him.

Work with the dog in small doses to prevent over-stimulation. A tired dog is more likely to be aggressive, so allow the dog to rest in his crate for a few hours, then try the introductions again.

Try to assess what sets your dog off. If he only curls his muzzle into a snarl when food is present, make sure your child is not nearby at feeding time. If he raises his hackles when someone comes near the child, he is likely feeling protective and must be taught that it's okay for you to pick up the child.

If you slow down the introduction process, it allows your dog to become more comfortable in your home before taking on the additional task of dealing with children. Depending on the dog's history, it may take a long time to teach the dog that not all kids are abusive or hurtful.

If you are taking in a rescue dog, you are also taking in all of his baggage, so you need to proceed with caution. Coming into a new home can be very stressful for a dog, particularly if he or she has been abused in the past. Allow the process to unfold slowly, letting your new dog get used to each new situation one at a time rather than all at once.

**Use barriers to introduce your dog and child**

Baby gates are a wonderful tool for introductions because you can put the dog on one side of the gate and your child on the other side. Both of them can see each other, but neither one is seen as threatening because there is a barrier. Let your dog tell you when it's time to remove the barrier. He'll let you know when he is comfortable enough to proceed.

You may graduate from the baby gate to a muzzle, putting the muzzle on some time behind the baby gate, allowing the dog to get used to having the muzzle on before removing the gate. if necessary, until the dog shows absolutely no aggression toward your youngster.

If after several weeks, your dog is still showing aggressive behaviours toward children, it may be that you have not selected the right dog for your family. Call the shelter or breeder, you may wish to consult a trainer or canine psychologist for advice, ask the shelter or breeder what their policy is for returning dogs. You may be required to return your dog to them, and they may or may not have a replacement dog available for you.

Be patient as you introduce your dog to your children. It may go absolutely smoothly, and you may have that Hallmark moment when your toddler wrestles with his puppy in the new-mown grass, but you should be prepared for less desirable outcomes and take steps to protect both your child and the dog. You should always remember the dog or puppy is not a new toy, and as such treat the child to respect the puppy or adult. The slower you take the first steps the easier the transformation will go and the more likely the new dog will become you and your child’s best friend.