

INTRODUCING DOGS TO CHILDREN

Introducing dogs and children is an ongoing process. Building a strong, respectful, and loving relationship between your child and the dog is a rewarding experience that can enrich both of their lives. With patience, education, and vigilance, you can ensure a harmonious bond between your child and your furry family member.

BEFORE INTRODUCTION

TEACH THE CHILD GROUND RULES

- 🐾 Educate your child about dog behavior and body language and the importance of respecting the dog's boundaries. Explain that the dog may need breaks and quiet time. Emphasize the importance of not bothering the dog while they are eating, sleeping, or in their designated space.
- 🐾 Develop clear rules for your child to follow when interacting with the dog, such as no rough play, no pulling on the dog's ears or tail, and no sudden movements or loud noises.
- 🐾 Teach your child to approach the dog calmly and gently, using slow movements and a quiet voice.
- 🐾 Teach your child not to touch a dog when they are eating a treat, chewing a bone, sleeping, or relaxing in their bed or their safe space. Dogs who feel insecure about their safe spaces and feel a child may take their things, disturb them, or are bothered by them may escalate to growling. **Growling is a healthy communication to STOP. If growling is not respected, it can escalate to dangerous behaviors like snapping and biting.**

LET YOUR DOG ADJUST TO THEIR NEW HOME

When the dog first arrives home, allow them to explore their new environment without immediate contact with your child. This helps the dog become comfortable in their new surroundings. Once your dog is comfortable and settled, have your child sit or stand calmly and allow the dog to approach when they feel ready. Avoid overwhelming the dog with hugs or loud noises.

SAFETY DON'TS | FOR SAFETY, PLEASE DO NOT EVER ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO:

- Put their face in the dog's face
- Hug the dog
- Sit on the dog
- Ride the dog
- Touch the dog when the dog is eating
- Touch the dog when the dog is in their crate/on their bed
- Touch the dog when the dog is sleeping
- Pull their ears or tail
- Interact with the dog if the dog growls

*Remember, growling is communication and is **not** a "bad" behavior. Punishing a dog for growling will teach the dog that their boundaries are not respected, and they may escalate in future interactions to snap or bite.*

DURING THE FIRST MEETING

TO INTERACT, THE CHILD SHOULD CALL THE DOG TO THEM

It is important not to startle a dog. Making the child call for any interactions allows the dog not to startle and gives them the choice to interact with the child if they want to. The child should call to them in a happy voice with treats, and give treats to them when the dog does come. If the dog chooses not to approach, the child can toss treats to start building a positive relationship with the dog.

POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS

Encourage your child to offer treats and use positive reinforcement to create a strong bond between them and the dog. This teaches the dog to associate your child with positive experiences.

MONITOR & ASSESS

Continuously monitor the interactions between your child and the dog and assess both their comfort levels. Make adjustments as needed to ensure a positive dynamic.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP

If at any point the dog is displaying signs of discomfort (lip licking, ears back, tucked tail, growling), the interaction should immediately be ended.

MORE TIPS

WALKS AND PLAYTIME

Encourage your child to participate in supervised playtime and walks with the dog. This promotes a positive and active relationship.

DOGS SEE RUNNING AS PLAY

If a child gets scared of a jumpy or mouthy dog/puppy and runs, the dog WILL chase the child. This can be scary for a child, and the dog doesn't know this. They think they're playing a fun game of tag! Keep this in mind when your child is interacting with a dog.

SUPERVISION IS KEY

Always supervise interactions between your child and the dog. This ensures the safety of both your child and the dog.

EARLY SOCIALIZATION IS IMPORTANT

If you have a puppy, expose them to various people, situations, and other dogs from a young age. This helps the puppy become well-adjusted and confident around children.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE

If you encounter any issues or concerns with the dog's behavior around children, consult with a professional dog trainer or behaviorist. They can provide guidance and training to address specific challenges.