

INTRODUCING DOG TO CHILDREN

<https://positively.com/dog-behavior/new-dogs/introducing-a-new-dog/introducing-dog-to-children/>

Dogs and children can make great companions, and children can learn a lot about responsibility by caring for the family dog. At the same time, there is an alarming increase in the number of dog bites in certain parts of the world. Most victims of those bites are from dogs the children know.



Why are children more likely to be bitten by a dog?

Children tend to move quickly and erratically, and are generally unaware of where they are in relationship to where the dog is.

A child may step on a tail or trip over the hips of a dog that may react out of pain, resulting in a bite.

Some children do not understand that a dog is not a play toy, but a sentient being that deserves respect. They may run up into a dog's face and frighten him resulting in a bite.

How do I make the child/dog relationship safe and rewarding?

If your child is very young, supervise child/dog interactions at all times. Even a few seconds of unsupervised interaction can result in tragedy.

If you are too distracted to directly supervise, put your dog in a safe secure place (that the dog is comfortable being in) away from access by the child.

Teach your child that petting a dog is a privilege not a right and that contact should be gentle and kind.

Teach your child how to greet a dog safely by not just asking the dog's owner if it is ok to pet the dog, but to also ask THE DOG if the dog would like to interact.

This can be done by standing sideways, putting their hand low and into the shape of a fist and inviting the dog to come to them. If a dog chooses not to interact, tell the child it is nothing personal if the dog does not feel like interacting at that moment.

If the dog chooses to interact with a child, have the child pet the dog gently on his back rather than reaching down over his head. Have the child pet him for a count of 5, then stop and see if he asks to be pet again. It is important that children learn to respect the wishes of the dog.

When approached by an unknown dog, teach your child to stand still and calm, fold their arms in and stare at the ground until the dog goes away.

Be ready to intervene in child/dog interactions if you feel the situation is even remotely uncomfortable.

Teach yourself to read the nuances of dog body language in order to recognize the early stages of discomfort and intervene. Move the dog to a location where he feels more secure and comfortable.

What should I not do?

Never assume your child and dog can be left alone together without supervision. Children and dogs always need to be supervised.

Do not let a child 'ride' a dog, tease him or get in his face and pull his ears, whiskers, tail or any other body part. Dogs are not toys.

Avoid allowing your child to rush up to a dog they do not know.

Even if the dog's owner says it is ok to approach their dog, the child should always learn to ASK THE DOG FIRST!

If a dog growls then try not to punish the growl. Growling is valuable because it communicates that the dog is uncomfortable. By suppressing a growl, the dog's emotions might be the same, but he simply cannot express them. This creates a dog that does not give important verbal warnings before he bites.

Do not force a dog to accept teasing or mishandling from any child. If a dog is uncomfortable, help him to find a safe, quiet space away from interaction.