

DOGS & CHILDREN

A Guide



Acknowledgements

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Children & Dogs: A Guide

“The world was conquered through the understanding of dogs; the world exists through the understanding of dogs.”
~ NIETZCHE

About this guide

In this eBook we will present to you an authority guide on how to effectively nurture the relationship between children and dogs.

What we are seeking to achieve with this guide is to give all the information you require to get an insight and an overview of the various aspects and best practices for developing a safe, happy connection between your dog(s) and child(ren).

This note is important. Always seek the advice and opinion of pet care professionals should your dog be experiencing problems of a medical nature.

Children & Dogs: What You Need to Know

The concept of dogs and children mixing without trouble has become an alien one to the media recently. With tragic dog attacks involving children sadly becoming more prominent in our media, it is essential that two points are address. The first being that children and dogs can and will get along famously and add value to each other's lives given the right preparation and approach. Secondly, it is the responsibility of the dog owner to ensure that there dog does not pose a risk to anyone, especially children.

There is always great concern in the media about dogs attacking children, certainly enough to cause anxiety amongst pregnant pet owners. Integrating your dog with your child should, and almost always is, a smooth experience. All you need is a bit of planning and a good dose of patience.

Introducing your new baby to your dog must ideally begin before the baby is born. This will give the dog time to adjust to the new changes in routine and family life that will accompany your new addition.

Firstly, make sure that your dog trained to obey the “sit,” “stay” and “down” commands, as these will give you control over him when you are interacting with the baby. This is especially important if your dog is known to jump up or get over-excited easily. If your dog has not yet learnt these commands you should seriously consider enrolling in an obedience class, or using a technique an established training technique, to teach your pet these

essential behaviours before the baby is born.

Once your dog has mastered these commands you can begin rehearsing his first meeting with the little one. Buy a child's doll and wrap it in a baby's blanket, then cradle it in your arms as you would an infant. Placing your dog in a "stay" position, begin mimicking activities that you would normally perform with a baby, rewarding your dog when he remains calm and obedient.

Once your dog has become accustomed to the sight of you holding a baby around the house you can add two new dimensions to the experience: smell and sound.

If you have family or friends who have recently had a baby, borrow a blanket from them which still has the baby's scent on it. This will begin to get your dog accustomed to the smells that will soon fill your home. At the same time, playing a recorded CD of baby sounds can acclimatise your pet to the new noises that will be heard around the house.

Remember that you are aiming to gradually get your dog used to all the new sights, smells and sounds that will enter his living space. Always reward him when he obeys your commands during these exercises so that he associates these new sensations with a pleasant experience.

Now that the dog is becoming accustomed to having a “baby” around the house it is time to look at lifestyle changes. The responsibilities of caring for a newborn bring with them an inevitable reduction in the amount of your free time. Routines are certain to change, and these changes can be stressful for your dog who will have become accustomed to your old way of life. Plan ahead and begin getting your dog gradually used to a new routine in advance of the birth. After baby is born you might not be able to manage two walks a day, or you may have less time for play, or you may even need to convert a room that your dog previously had access to in to a nursery.

With some foresight you can gradually get your dog accustomed to the new routine – for example you might begin walking him only once during the evening rather than once in the morning and once in the evening. Remember that if you do cut your dog’s routine down you should try to make the new routine more fun so that he does not feel like he is being given less importance and become unhappy. Take some toys along with you on the evening walk and have some fun with him.

If you know someone who has recently had a baby you might ask their permission to bring your dog over for a visit. He does not have to physically meet the child, but you can introduce him to the sounds and smells associated with a newborn in the home.

Before the baby is born make sure that your dog is regularly wormed and kept flea free, as worms can be transmitted to humans, and flea bites – whilst not life threatening – can be extremely uncomfortable for babies.

Once the baby is born, and you are ready to return home with your new infant, don't forget that your dog will not have seen much of either of you for the past couple of days as you will likely have spent a large portion of your time at the hospital. Your dog is likely to be excited to greet you on your return, so it is best if you greet him one at a time without the baby. This will allow him to say hello and get some of the excitement out of his system before you bring the infant in to the house.

For the same reason it is best if you do not return home with a large number of friends and family in tow. This will only make your dog very excited with all the noise and bustle, and will make introducing baby very difficult. You want their first meeting to be calm and controlled so ask friends and family to be patient and give some time before they visit.

Once things have calmed down, place your dog in a "stay" position and bring in the baby. At this point you can begin their first introduction. Allow your dog to see the baby from a distance of around ten or fifteen feet and then slowly bring the baby closer, with one parent controlling the dog and the other holding the baby. Make sure the dog remains calm, and should he become excited stop the exercise for a while and let him calm down again before trying to repeat. Always err on the side of caution when doing this exercise. You should aim to let your dog sniff the baby whilst remaining in his "stay" position, although do not expect this to happen in a single session.

Once the dog has become accustomed to the baby, perhaps over a period of a couple of days, you can allow the dog to be off the leash whilst it is near the infant. However, never leave the child unsupervised with the dog, or even allow the dog a free hand in investigating the baby. After all baby might not like having his face licked by a large wet tongue!

By rewarding the dog for remaining in a “stay” position whilst you perform tasks with the baby, you allow your dog to learn that baby’s time is a pleasant experience if your dog behaves himself.

When you are interacting with the baby your dog may begin exhibiting attention seeking behaviour – for example he may bring you a ball or a toy and pester you to play. Ignore these actions and continue what you are doing with your baby, placing the dog in a “stay” or “down” position if it persists. Always make sure you reward your dog when he obeys the command. Play with your dog after you have finished with the baby, as this reinforces the pecking order and helps him establish that the baby is ranked higher in the pack as you are demonstrating to your dog that baby’s needs comes first.

You may also want to keep used nappies in a sealed container away from any area accessible to your dog. Female dogs exhibit a maternal behaviour in which they clean up the urine and faeces of their puppies, and may begin doing the same with the baby’s nappies.

With careful preparation, introducing your newborn to your dog should be a smooth and enjoyable experience and he will soon become a valued protector of your child. The sight of them playing happily together will remain a treasured memory forever.

Important Tips

Never leave a dog unsupervised with a child. Whether it is for a second, or an hour, whether it is a Yorkshire Terrier or an Anatolian Shepherd, make this mistake and you will be the one to blame if something happens.

Don't forget your dog is your responsibility. Even if your dog is with a friend or relative, if you cannot trust that person to make the right decision about dogs and children, it is your responsibility as a dog owner to ensure they don't have to.

Think like a dog. One of the most used phrases in the wake of a dog attack is "He just turned, he was fine one minute, and then he attacked!" This is as wrong as you can get. Dogs don't just attack, it is the owners that don't spot the signs. Your child is playing on the floor near the dog's food bowl, your dog is lying down nearby, yawning. If you don't know what these signs mean, find out!

Any dog owner can be prosecuted under the dangerous dogs act. If your dog so much as nips somebody on

the hand, you are in breach of the dangerous dogs act. If you don't know the rules, learn them or risk losing your dog.

The only person to blame if a dog attacks is the owner. It is very rare for a dog owner not to be at fault if their dog attacks. If the dog is tied up outside a shop and a passing child goes over to play, it is still the responsibility and duty of the owner to ensure that their dog is never in a position where he may feel threatened. You owe it to your dog to keep him these situations.

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