

Tips for selecting and Introducing Your New Pet to Your children

Teaching your children how to interact properly with dogs is extremely important. The Center for Disease Control has found that dog bites top the list of health problems for children in the U.S., above diseases such as measles and chicken pox. If your family has not owned a dog before and your children are unfamiliar with them, it is a good idea to have your children around other dogs before bringing a new dog into your home.

Find some friends or neighbors with dogs or visit your local animal shelter several times and coach your children on how to properly interact with a dog. You can visit www.doggonesafe.com for great tips on helping your children interact with these dogs.

If you are planning to adopt a new dog and have children in your home, please carefully consider the temperament and energy level of the dog you are thinking about adopting.

Families with children should avoid dogs that display the following behaviors:

- Avoid dogs that have excessive mouthiness or nipping, and that use their mouths to pull you around or guide you in certain directions.
- Extremely shy, withdrawn dogs do not do well with busy households with loud, excited children and lots of guests. Dogs that are fearful are more likely to bite if they feel cornered, threatened or handled in a way that is unpleasant to them.
- Avoid dogs that are uncomfortable being handled in any way. A dog that lives with children should tolerate lots of touch, handling and gentle tugs on their collar.
- Avoid dogs with any signs of aggression such as growling, raised hackles, stiff body posture, erect ears and tail or snapping. If a dog only shows aggression to other dogs or cats, realize that aggression to people and aggression to other animals are two different things and do not go hand in hand. BUT, owning a dog like this presents certain difficulties when you have children because the children **MUST** be vigilant when walking the dog or having it around other animals. A dog with a propensity toward aggression to other animals should not be walked by a child.
- Avoid puppies if you have children under the age of 6 or 7. All puppies go through a teething stage where they use their mouths to explore their environment and sharp puppy teeth can be painful for adults and especially painful for small children. Puppies can also develop behavioral problems if left to run around with young children without supervision. If you have young children, it is best to look for an older dog that has reached maturity and displays a good temperament.

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- Avoid small breed or toy dogs with young children. These types of dogs generally don't enjoy the company of children and do better in adults-only homes. If a dog displays any signs of intolerance, snapping or movement away from your children, the dog is not a good prospect for adoption.
- Avoid dogs that appear to be excessively energetic. You should look for a dog that is not overly energetic and not overly lethargic, but rather one that lies somewhere in the middle of the two extremes. Avoid dogs that get over-stimulated and aroused quickly.

Once you've found the right dog for your family, remember these important points:

- *Never* leave your new dog alone with your children unsupervised. A dog that has just been adopted needs lots of time and patience to adjust to your new home.
- Don't place the responsibility for caring for the dog on your children. It's an unrealistic expectation. It's wonderful to have children assist with caring for the dog by feeding, walking, playing and grooming him, but an adult should be supervising at all times and realize that young children do not possess the emotional maturity to care for all of the dog's needs.
- Teach your children how to properly handle the dog and respect its needs. Children must learn that dogs should not be bothered while they are eating or sleeping. Dogs should not be approached from behind to be hugged and their tails and ears should not be pulled. Toys should not be used to tease the dog or make it overly aroused.
- Take your dog to an obedience class and have your children work with you to train the dog. This is a wonderful way to help your children learn how to interact properly with the dog. Hiring a professional trainer for an in-home session is also a great idea. The trainer can discuss with you and your family training exercises to increase your safety in the home and provide guidance on how to interact properly with the dog.



If you have questions about your new pet, please visit the Association of Pet Dog Trainers' Web site, www.apdt.com, for a list of members in your area who can help you with your new dog.

To locate a local professional pet sitter to provide dog walks or in-home pet-sitting visits, please visit the Pet Sitter Locator at www.petsit.com/locate.

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