

Selecting a Dog for a Family with Children

What to Consider When Selecting a Dog for a Family Children

Age and Activity Level of the Children

- Small dogs such as toys and mini's are not suitable for toddlers and young children. These tiny dogs are too fragile to endure rough handling and supervising children 100% of the time is unrealistic. If a little dog feels vulnerable and threatened, his fear of the child may result in biting.
- Families with very young children should look for a dog no smaller than 25-30 lbs., a sturdier companion who will not feel so vulnerable.
- In general, very large dogs are often a better choice than very little dogs when the family includes babies and toddlers. Many of the large breeds — Newfoundlands, hounds, mastiffs, retrievers, Leonbergers — are generally more easy-going and are less likely to be hurt when accidentally stepped on or tripped over.
- In households with active older children and teens, high energy medium and large breeds may be an appropriate choice if enough exercise will be provided.



The truth is, all dogs have the potential to bite, and a dog's breed is only one of many factors that affect temperament and behavior.

Supervision

- Babies and young children must never be left alone unsupervised with any dog.
- Even well-behaved children are still children. They do silly things from time to time and sometimes those silly things can hurt or frighten a dog. Try to provide your dog with a quiet retreat area where he can go to safely escape from the children if he needs to.
- Even as the children get older, parents must understand that getting a dog requires an ongoing commitment to the supervision and training of both the dog and the children to assure a safe and happy relationship for all.

Timing

- Puppies are a lot of work! Young families in which all the children are babies and pre-school age, are well advised to delay getting a dog until the youngest child is at least five years old.

Puppy Or Adult?

- Many families with young children choose a puppy believing they are safer, easier to train, and more adaptable than older, larger pets. But this isn't always true. Because puppies are fragile, require much more time and care, and are prone to play-related scratching and biting, they may not be appropriate for homes with young children.
- The best choice for most families is to look for a young adult dog who has previously lived successfully with children. Look for a dog who obviously LOVES kids and not merely tolerates them.

Whose Dog Is It?

The best way to teach your children how to be responsible pet caregivers is to be one yourself.

- Parents should never assume that they are getting the dog "for the kids"—that the children will be primarily responsible for the dog's care. No matter how old the children, the adults must understand that the dog's daily needs, training and care will be their responsibility.
- Taking care of the dog can be shared by all family members. Children can, and should, be assigned tasks appropriate to their ages and abilities.
- Pre-adolescent kids may be intensely involved with their dog, capable of handling much of the dog's care and training. As they become teens, kids' social, athletic, and other interests may take precedence, and the dog may not continue to get as much attention.
- Think ahead. Dogs will often live 12-15 years. As the children grow and leave home, it will be the parents sole responsibility to continue to fulfill the dog's daily needs.

The best dogs for kids are those who receive proper socialization, humane family-friendly training, proper amounts of exercise, and attention.

Starting a Family: Whether to Get a Puppy Along with a New Baby

- Pregnant couples are sometimes tempted to acquire a puppy either during the pregnancy or shortly after the infant arrives. It's a lovely romantic notion that the baby and the puppy will be able to "grow up together."
- Unfortunately, this rosy vision is very difficult to achieve. The demands of caring for a newborn and a puppy simultaneously are far more than most people can (or would want to) handle. Having a baby is a life-changing event. Add a dog to your family when the child is older—at least five years of age.
- You will have more time and more patience for the new dog. Then you can be amply rewarded by the pleasure of watching—and helping—your child bond with the dog.

A baby is coming into a household where there is already a dog

- Preparation of your dog for the new arrival is the key to success.
- Even the most wonderful pet may have undesirable, though natural, reactions to the baby.
- If the dog does not already have basic obedience skills—sit, down, wait/stay, polite leash walking—don't delay. Enroll in a class or engage a trainer to help. These foundation behaviors will be essential to controlling the dog around the baby.
- Start at the beginning of the pregnancy to prepare the dog for the many changes the birth will bring to his familiar routine. Dogs are creatures of habit and may need help adjusting to these changes:
 - *Schedule Changes* — You will be waking up at new times and going to sleep when ever you can. Inevitably, there will be less attention paid to your dog (at least initially). Gradually adjust the amount of time you spend with your dog so that the arrival of your baby is not associated with a sense of deprivation or competition for your attention.
 - *New Noises*— There will be crying, screaming, gurgling, etc.
 - *New Smells*—There will be dirty diapers, baby powders and lotions
 - *New Objects*—There will be carriages, indoor swings, baby gates and bassinets
 - *New Rules* - There may be changes regarding access to your furniture, to your lap and even denial of access to certain rooms

Resources To Help You Prepare

- *Dogs & Storks*: Preparing the family dog for life with baby. Educational CD by behavior consultant Jennifer Shryock. To order: www.dogsandstorks.com.
- *Dog Gone Safe* - A non-profit organization dedicated to Dog Bite Prevention education - www.doggonesafe.com
- *Dog Gone Crazy Board Game* - Doggone Crazy is a fun game that teaches children how to interpret the body language and expressions of dogs. www.doggonecrazy.ca

Books for Adults:

- *Happy Kids, Happy Dogs: Building a Friendship Right from the Start* by Barbara Shumannfang, Top Notch Dog Books, 2006
- *Living With Kids And Dogs ... Without Losing Your Mind* by Colleen Pelar, C & R Publishing, LLC, 2007
- *Raising Puppies And Kids Together - A Guide For Parents* by Pia Silvani and Lynn Eckhardt, TFH, 2005
- *Parenting With Pets - The Magic Of Raising Children With Animals* by Christine Hammer & Margaret Hevel, Book Publishers Network, 2007
- *Helping Fido Welcome Your Baby DVD* by Suzanne Hetts & Daniel Estep, Animal Behavior Associates, 2007
- *Sounds Good Audio CD - Children* by Terry Ryan, Legacy Canine Behavior & Training, 2004
- *Sounds Good Audio CD - Babies* by Terry Ryan, Legacy Canine Behavior & Training, 2005

Books for Children:

- *Good Dog! - Kids Teach Kids About Dog Behavior And Training* by Evelyn Pang & Hilary Louie, Dogwise Publishing, 2008
- *Don't Lick The Dog - Making Friends With Dogs* by Wendy Wahman, Henry Holt & Company, 2009
- *Dog Training For Children DVD* by Ian Dunbar, James & Kenneth, 2006
- *May I Pet Your Dog? - The How-To Guide For Kids Meeting Dogs* by Stephanie Calmenson, Clarion Books, 2007
- *Meeting Milo* by Yvette Van Veen & David Perks

For more information on the Association of Pet Dog Trainers,
visit our Web site at www.apdt.com or call 1-800-PET-DOGS (738-3647) or email information@apdt.com.