

# Kids and Dogs

The following suggestions were gleaned from several volunteers and their many years of experience. The recommendations can apply to both puppies and adult dogs.

- A puppy is not a toy. A puppy is a baby. Adults must supervise all interactions between children and animals. A crate can be used to protect the puppy if supervision is not available.
- Parents and caregivers must teach children to respect the puppy's possessions. This includes the puppy's bowls, blanket or towel, playthings, and especially the crate. Do not allow children to invade the crate. The puppy or dog must know that the crate always means a safe haven.
- A dog's social group is called a pack. The adult owner of the puppy, soon to be an adult dog, must assert themselves as the "alpha" animal, or pack leader. Children are seen as siblings to the puppy. The "alpha" should always be able to discipline the pack. This includes taking away food and even treats from a pack member. This is not the role for a child. Children need to be taught to never take food or bones away from the puppy or dog, but to alert the "alpha".
- A puppy will be better behaved when children stay up off the floor. Children sitting or playing on the floor are at the same level as the puppy and are considered "fair game". This can lead to excessive roughhousing and biting. Have children sit up on the furniture. This way the puppy or dog must look up to them.
- Dogs and puppies love to chase. Never encourage children to run away from the animal as a game. Instead, teach them to throw a ball or toy for the puppy to chase. Never allow a small child to hold a "wanted" object above their head. This will cause the puppy to jump up potentially scratch the child's face while attempting to get the desired object.
- Puppies need lots of love and affection. Hold them and kiss them and give them safe toys to play with. Never roughhouse with puppies using your hands. This will only encourage them to bite. Do not play "tug-of-war" with any dog or puppy. In addition to potentially pulling out puppy teeth, a dog has much stronger and dangerous jaw strength. Talk gently to them and use their name often in a positive tone of voice. Screaming and loud voices can be very scary to a puppy. This includes a group of children having fun. Parties and holidays are good times to crate the puppy. This is not only to protect the children, but also the puppy, which might easily misjudge the situation and become overexcited.
- It is always dangerous to assume all dogs are friendly. Children should never approach a strange dog. This includes dogs that are being walked on leashes. Strange dogs can not only be dangerous to the child, but also to the dog the child may be walking. To help avoid this, it is important to teach a child how to walk a dog and not allow the dog to walk the child. Dog fights are truly scary things and do not make good memories.
- Even the best mannered dog can become frightened when approached by a man with a beard or someone wearing a hat. This is especially important to remember when holidays are near. Costumes may confuse even the gentlest family dog. Snowsuits and children's "dress-ups" should be considered costumes.
- Just as a child becomes cranky when over-tired, a puppy can do the same. Playtime should be monitored and "time-out" enforced if necessary. Let the puppy calm down and then crate for rest time.
- Teach children never to disturb a sleeping dog. It is common for the dog to become disoriented and may even snap. It is also a good idea not to "bear hug" a dog. This places the human face much too close to the dog's mouth.
- Socialize young puppies with children of all ages. Take the puppy for rides to the car, walks in the yard, and visits to friends and relatives. The more exposure the puppy has to the world, the more well-adapted the animal will become. Before socializing with other dogs or puppies, it is suggested that the puppy be fully inoculated (older than 16 weeks). Puppy class, and then obedience class, always helps the dog to feel secure and less threatened in new situations. It also helps to begin training early.
- Last, but not least, many dogs do not like their tails touched or pulled. Curious children should be redirected to gently stroke the dog's back starting at the nape of the neck. NO pulling the ears, pounding on the head, poking the eyes, checking out the teeth, or brushing the fur backwards. If this is not possible for the child, perhaps this is not the best time for a puppy or an adult dog in the family.