



Introducing Puppies and Children

Kids act a lot like puppies. They're always on the floor and into everything. If you have children, teach your puppy not to mouth them from the start and also teach your kids proper dog handling skills so that everyone understands how to behave around the puppy. It is very important to include children in your puppy's upbringing, regardless if there are any children living in the home. You have both a responsibility to children in regards to your puppy, and a responsibility to your puppy regarding the children. What every child should know about training puppies:

- Children should use calm, quiet vocal intonation with the puppy.
- Use a gentle hand, lead or collar when handling the puppy.
- Do not disturb a sleeping puppy.
- Do not leave children's toys of any danger to a puppy in the presence of a puppy.

As a general rule, do not allow a child to handle a puppy without the supervision of an adult, and ensure that all children understand and adhere to all agreed rules of the household and lifestyle with the puppy. It is also important to remind owners that children do have a knack for winding up dogs; they move erratically, use high squeaky voices and often play rough and relentless. Therefore, to avoid unwanted social behavior in later life, discourage your children from rolling on the floor with the puppy, playing chasing games and other such potentially damaging behavior shaping activities. Consider that your puppy will likely start to view the child as another puppy, which will not only lead to leadership issues later in the relationship, it will encourage play bites, jumping and lunging attacks, harmless as they may seem. Play bites will not stop when the "game" stops, and will quickly become a stressful problem for the children and the puppies. In addition, teaching a puppy to be chased, in particular, will break-down your later successes with recall and overall obedience and behavior management.

If you want to included children in the puppy training process (and this is highly encouraged), teach the child how to call the puppy to them and initiate gentle play with the focus on a toy instead of the child's hands or feet. Having the puppy come to you rather than going to the puppy establishes rank in the household and builds the foundation for recall, installing that going to the owner is rewarding.

If the puppy becomes reliant on being visited or retrieved by its owner, it is less apt to care when its owner is in later life. A curious dog has been conditioned to having its owner follow their actions will wander off with little concern over getting lost. In addition, get the children involved in the puppy feeding routine and early training exercises. Feeding the puppy will also establish their hierarchy and enable them to teach and instill a few of the most important early command words: "sit", "leave it", and "wait".



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Tips for New Puppy Owners:

- **Provide a Safe Retreat:** Be sure your puppy has a canine sanctuary that is off limits to kids. Even pets that adore children need private time and a place to go that they know they won't be pestered. Make a bedroom or the puppy's crate and bed off-limits to the children and supervise to enforce the rule if the children are too young to understand.
- **Teach Kids Limits:** Ask toddlers to practice petting a stuffed toy or the child's own arm or head. Young kids take time to learn that dogs aren't stuffed animals and can be hurt and lash out from pulled tails or ears.
- **Practice Quiet Puppy-Talk:** High Pitched screams could potentially prompt puppies to aggress toward the child. Challenge children to a game to see if they can talk in an inside voice that entices puppies to come near for pets. You can explain that just like children can get frightened of scary sounds, puppies can be scared and it takes very talented kids to know how to be pooch-friendly.
- **Ignore the Puppy:** Staring is a challenge in dog language that can stress some pets, especially kids that are eye-to-eye level. But when ignored, pups are more likely to be intrigued enough to investigate on their own. So challenge your toddler or older child to "ignore the pup" game and see how long they can pretend the puppy is invisible. In most cases, a confident canine will eventually approach.
- **Seat the Kids:** Puppies take turns playing chase-and-tackle games with each other, so when chased by toddlers they may get too rough without meaning to. So make it a dog rule that young kids must sit before they can pet the dog and that the dog gets to approach. That also lets the pup control the interactions and move away when the pup has had enough. Forcing a dog to sit still for a child's unwanted attention may cause the puppy to avoid the child in the future. This instead makes it the dog's choice and a fun, rewarding experience. Once seated, the child can lure the puppy with a toy. Playing builds a positive relationship that can grow into love.
- **Offer Treats:** When pups still act reluctant to approach, find a smelly, tasty treat the pet loves but ONLY gets from the child. While sitting on the floor, the child should gently toss the treat to (not AT) the dog. Until or unless you're satisfied the puppy won't also nip the child's hands, make sure that the treat gets eaten from the floor rather than the kid's fingers.

There are always exceptions, but as a general rule, children should be at least six or seven years old before being given responsibility for a puppy's care. However you can begin at this age with supervised care duties, such as filling the puppy's water bowl or teaching how to comb and groom the fur coat. The most pleasant experiences your children enjoy with the puppy, the stronger becomes the bond between them.



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For AAWL adopters who need more information or if you have additional questions, please call our Behavior Helpline at 602-273-6852 ext. 124.