

Kids and Dogs and Problems, Oh My!

A house, two kids, and the perfect dog - it's the American Dream, right? But dogs aren't perfect and - newsflash! - kids aren't either; so in order to keep that dream from turning into a nightmare, here are some simple rules and techniques every parent should know:



Having a dog in your home is a responsibility similar to having another child - and so, while it is perfectly reasonable for children to be given tasks aiding in the care of their new four-legged family member, the ultimate accountability for a dog's well-being should always fall upon adults within the home. It is never appropriate for a child to have sole responsibility for a living, breathing animal.

When it comes to kids and their interactions with dogs, remember: supervise, supervise, supervise! Never leave young children alone with a dog, and never, ever leave even the best-behaved dog alone with a baby or small child. Humans and dogs communicate differently - and sometimes that difference can lead to painful encounters for both the two-leggeds and the four-. Ensure harmonious interaction with your presence!

Speaking of communication: many signals, both verbal and non-verbal, used within human culture just don't translate well into dog-speak. For instance, while hugging and head-patting come naturally to humans, in canine culture both of these actions are considered unspeakably rude - even though some dogs learn to tolerate our man-handling! By the same token, in canine language, teeth are often used as punctuation of sorts, and are accepted in much the same way; but our tender human skin isn't as forgiving as tough doggy-hide. Learn appropriate human-canine communication skills, and then teach all of your family members, both two-legged and four-, to be bilingual, too.



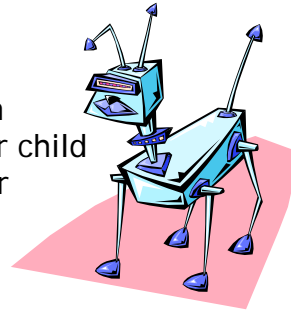
Dogs should be trained to see all humans as leaders, not littermates. As hard as this concept may be for young humans to understand, though, how difficult must it be for your dog? You can help out by involving your child in every step of the training process, from handling and grooming to teaching simple cues. Teach your child gentle, effective, and age-appropriate handling and training techniques; then back her up by standing near her when she's working with

your dog, and quietly repeating and reinforcing her hand signals and cues so that your dog learns to respond correctly to even the most pint-sized leader!



Not all dogs enjoy the hustle and bustle that comes with a houseful of children, and indeed **your dog's perception of your child and her friends may be quite different from your own.** Make sure your dog has a private place where he can retreat when the activity level begins to overwhelm him. Explain to your child that when the dog is in "his room" he is not to be disturbed - just as she wouldn't want to be disturbed when she is resting or playing quietly.

Finally, dogs are not toys: they are living, thinking, moving, and feeling animals, and should be treated with love, kindness, tolerance, and respect. The lessons your child learns about this important relationship now - during her formative years - will stay with her for a lifetime. Help her to build healthy relationships and happy memories: these are the building blocks for future success!



For more information on raising mixed-species families, please read the book [Living with Kids and Dogs... Without Losing Your Mind](#), by Colleen Pelar, CPDT. And if a problem presents itself remember this: dog training is cheaper than emergency room bills! Get help from a qualified professional early, and you won't regret it later on down the road.