



Raising children and dogs TOGETHER

Your children probably treat your dog like another sibling—they sleep together, play together, and even disagree sometimes. But dogs deserve proper handling from all of your family members, so it's your job to teach your children and your dog how to treat each other. Before you adopt a dog, find out which breeds do best with children and discuss the decision to get a pet with your children. They're more likely to accept some responsibility for the pet if you lay the groundwork and they feel involved.

Training your child

Most dogs—and especially larger breeds—are tolerant of small children. For example, setters, retrievers, and standard poodles all tend to be kid-friendly choices. Still, your kids need to learn to be gentle and never to bully your pet. Here are some rules to teach your children about pet handling:

- > **Don't bother your pet at meal times** or during his afternoon nap.
- > **When you hold your dog**, place your right hand under his chest, cradle his bottom with your left hand, and carry him close to your body, while you support his feet. (Never let a young child walk around holding a puppy. A puppy can easily squirm out of a child's hands and hurt himself or the child.)
- > **Play gently.** Rowdy play confuses and overstimulates your dog.

Supervise your children when they play with the dog for the first few weeks. And don't let children out of your sight when there's a dog around. Infants and toddlers don't understand the difference between their stuffed dog and your live pet, and an angry exchange between child and dog can flare in an instant—and be devastating.

Also don't be surprised if the new dog frightens your young children. From their perspectives, he's a large, barking, drooling beast. Over time, they'll get used to having a pet around, and you can ease your children's fears if they participate in training your dog and learn the commands to make your dog obey.

Training your dog

Dogs and children can be such good friends that sometimes your dog forgets your child is not one of his littermates. For example, rowdy puppy play can cause a pup to nip his brother, and childish exuberance can get the same reaction.

Teach your child to correct your dog if he nips and to cry like a puppy if the dog plays too rough. This will send your pup the message in a language he understands. Even better, encourage your children to play quieter games with the puppy to prevent this behavior entirely.

And consider taking your dog to training classes. Many training facilities let kids participate, so you, your dog, and your children can learn the rules of behavior together.

Your dog needs to feel like he's part of the pack, so introduce your pet to all of your family members and welcome him into your family.