



PAWS[®] CHICAGO

TRAINING PROTOCOLS | Households with Children

Bringing a newly adopted dog or puppy into a household with children can be a wonderful addition to your family, giving your child a best friend for life and teaching responsibility and important life skills.

Dogs who have not yet been acclimated to children may find children's body language confusing or over-stimulating. Similarly, children who do not have experience with dogs may not know how to be gentle with their new friend.

The first step is finding a dog that will enjoy a family with children. Not all dogs will be able to get along with children; in fact, some dogs are even afraid of children. If looking to adopt, be sure to bring the whole family. This helps make the adoption a family experience and helps to ensure a proper fit.

Regardless of whether bringing home a puppy or adult dog management, adult supervision and training are important to keep everyone safe and comfortable. Management means controlling the environment to make sure both the children and dog are kept safe. Supervision requires that an adult is present and watchful of all interactions between the children and the dog.

It is advised to enroll in a training class to help teach basic behaviors to the new dog or puppy. Teaching the basics can help a new dog learn impulse control and help avoid the dog practicing bad habits such as jumping up on people, chasing the children or developing bad leash behavior. PAWS Chicago recommends using only trainers that use positive reinforcement and that avoid the use of punishment. *See our handouts on Managing your Dog's Behavior, Clicker Training, and Relaxation Protocol.

Set up The Environment For Success

- 1. Socialize the new dog around children.** This means slowly introducing children in a positive way and observing the dog's body language in multiple situations. Coach children to be gentle and calm to create good feelings for the new dog. Do not force interactions and allow the dog to approach or leave on his own terms. Use plenty of the dog's favorite treats and lots of praise. Be observant and remove the dog if there are signs of stress. Start with family members only and move on to the children's friends, one at a time, after the dog shows confidence around the children.
- 2. Practice Handling Exercises.** Even well-behaved children will want to hug and pet the dog and may even pull the dog's fur or tail. Get the dog used to this type of handling using treats and praise. Pull gently on the dog's tail, examine the feet and ears and give the dog a quick hug followed by favorite treats and praise. Consult a trainer if the dog exhibits fear of this behavior and supervise the children closely to avoid putting the dog in a precarious situation.
- 3. Set up a quiet or "safe" place for your dog.** Even the most tolerant dog may need a place to get away or rest. This can be a crate in another room or a room with a secure baby gate. *See our handout on Crate Training. Confine the dog to its crate or quiet space with a stuffed Kong toy when unable to supervise. This can also be used if the dog appears stressed, if the children are playing a game that the dog can't be part of, or during meals.
- 4. Control your dog's resources.** Many dog's have a favorite toy or sleeping space. Sometimes a dog may feel the need to guard its belongings, especially those it considers high value. When giving the dog a high-value item, especially a chew item, rawhide or stuffed Kong, provide the treat in its crate or quiet place. Many accidents happen when a child gets too close to a dog's resources. Always feed the dog in quiet place where it can eat undisturbed. In addition, teach children to leave the dog alone while it is sleeping.

- 5. Use a leash when necessary.** Some dogs may want to chase children and join in the game, especially when they are running, roughhousing or making high-pitched sounds. Until the dog has learned manners and impulse control, use a leash to prevent the dog from chasing and potentially nipping the children. This is a good time to practice manners or Relaxation Protocol. Have the dog's favorite treats and ask for trained behaviors while the children are playing. This is also a good idea when visiting children are present. Remove the dog from the room or yard if it needs to be left unsupervised. Young children should never be left unattended with a dog.
- 6. Make use of a "timeout."** A timeout can be used to help manage a dog who becomes overly excited around children. If the dog jumps up or becomes too excited or mouthy, removing it from the situation gives everyone a break. Interrupt the unwanted behavior and ask the dog for a more appropriate behavior such as "sit" that can be rewarded. If the dog is too excited to comply, put it in his crate or quiet place until it settles. At this point the dog can be given a favorite chew or stuffed toy to help calm down.
- 7. Don't let bad habits start.** Most bad habits start due to lack of management. Be consistent about the rules that the dog needs to follow involving the children. If the dog is not allowed on the furniture, don't allow the children to coax the dog up. Prevent the dog from developing the habit of harassing the children for food by confining it at mealtimes with its own stuffed Kong or favorite chew. Immediately interrupt unruly behaviors such as jumping up or chasing the children with more appropriate, rewardable ones such as "sit" or "down."
- 8. Teach your children well.** Managing the new dog is only half of the equation. Children must also be taught the rules. Teach children why it is important to pet a dog gently, to leave a dog alone while it is sleeping or in its crate, to never approach the dog while it is eating or chewing a bone, and to never force attention on the dog. Once the dog has some training, incorporating the children into the training process is good way to create a lasting bond. Positive reinforcement training, especially clicker training, is fun and easy for children to do.