

# dogs and children safety

## *dog training basics*

The relationship between a dog and a child can be magical, but it's not automatic. Prevent upsetting or tragic situations by teaching your children and your dog how to behave together.

### **How training works:**

Proper training is essential for a long, happy and safe relationship with your dog, setting the foundation to ensure your dog stays physically fit, mentally alert, socially engaged and emotionally happy. To make dog training an enjoyable and fulfilling activity, a great choice is to use a positive reinforcement approach that is rewards-based, fun and effective. Dog training based on using positive reinforcement helps pet parents understand how dogs think, learn and communicate. In turn, the pet parents will understand how to encourage and reward appropriate and polite dog behaviors for real-life situations. This builds and nurtures the bond between the pet parent and their dog.

It is scientifically proven that animals will learn a new behavior faster and more successfully if they are allowed to voluntarily participate in the learning process and are rewarded for preferred behaviors. Families have the best relationships with their dogs if they act as kind, benevolent influences for the family and help their dogs understand their role in the household. Dogs feel safest and most confident knowing their pet parents are making the decisions and setting boundaries. Puppies that work for all the good things in life are more confident, attentive, polite, respectful and connected to their family.



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

### **Children and the family dog:**

Teach your children to respect dogs and realize that the family pet is not a stuffed toy. Your dog is a live animal that feels pain when hurt, has emotions and has physical needs that must be met. Kids may unknowingly tease a dog by waving a toy around and snatching it away. Hitting with a stick or pinching an ear may cause a dog to snap, even though the child didn't intend to hurt it. As a rule of thumb, don't allow children to do to a dog what you would not allow done to a toddler.

At the same time, the dog must learn manners and learn not to play too rough, put their mouth on an arm, jump up or knock kids over. Avoid games of tug-of-war and keep-away. Good games for children and dogs are fetch, learning tricks and practicing training cues.

Set up the crate as a "safe haven" for dogs and teach children that when your dog is in the crate, your dog wants to be left alone. Protect your dog from children who do not treat them gently or follow your rules. Your dog should be allowed some alone time to rest on a regular basis. Make sure that children understand that the crate is your dog's private area. Do not allow children to play in or on your dog's crate, and never allow a child to crawl into the crate with your dog. This could cause your dog to feel trapped and snap at the child out of fear.

Teach children to always speak to sleeping dogs before touching them. They might bite to defend themselves before they realize who you are.

Children can help feed and clean up, but don't expect them to take sole responsibility for your dog's care. Dogs are family pets, and everyone should be involved in their care.

### **Children and new dogs:**

Establish the house rules and enforce them from the day your new dog or puppy arrives. Be sure the entire family is consistent and uses the same rules. Eventually, even young

children should be able to give cues for behaviors your dog knows. A child should never be left alone with any dog. Allow them to get used to each other from across the room or yard. Your children may act differently than other children have acted with them. Allow your dog to keep at a distance until they are comfortable rather than letting kids corner them or force them to be petted or hugged.

If you are going to have a toddler in your life, prepare your dog now. When children are not present, take some treats and practice body handling. Gently hold your dog's tail for a moment, then as you release praise and give the dog treat. Hold a paw or an ear the same way. This way your dog will associate such actions with good things.

### **Children and new dogs:**

Don't relax your supervision because things are going well. Your new pet will go through an adjustment period of several weeks. Once your dog settles in, you may notice different behavior. Make sure to spend interactive quality time as a family so everyone can build and nurture a bond.

### **Children and unknown dogs:**

The majority of dogs are friendly, wanting petting and interaction. But not all dogs are friendly, and it's important for your child's safety to know what they should do when encountering an unknown dog.

Prepare your children for an encounter with a strange dog. Talk about and act out different situations. Teach your children how to approach and pet a dog. Use a stuffed toy and guide their hands at first.

### **Introduce yourself to pet parents and dogs:**

When children meet a dog they don't know, have your child ask the pet parent, "May I please pet your dog?" If the pet parent says yes, it is often better to scratch the dog's chest rather than petting the top of the dog's head.

If a dog seems afraid or backs away, leave the dog alone. Let the dog approach you,

and don't force the dog to be petted. Don't allow kids to put their faces right in front of any dog's face. Never try to kiss a dog.

### **Know what an angry dog looks like:**

Barking, growling, snarling with teeth showing, ears laid flat, legs stiff, tail up and hair standing up on their back. When you see a dog like this, keep your hands in your pockets and slowly walk away sideways. Don't look in the dog's eyes, and don't run. Screaming and waving your arms around (a natural response for a child) will cause the dog to chase. If a dog attacks, curl up in a ball on the ground and protect your face with your hands.

### **Know when to stay away:**

Keep a safe distance from a dog that is eating or chewing on a bone. Some dogs will snap if you get too close because they think you will take their food away.

Don't go near a mother dog with puppies. She will try to protect them from strangers, and even a normally friendly dog could bite.

Stay away from a dog that is chained or in a fenced yard. Dogs may bite to protect themselves because they can't get away. The dog doesn't know you won't hurt them. Don't shout, run around or reach at dogs through open fences or windows.

Never try to break up a dog fight. Teach your children to stay away from the fight and find an adult to help.

### **Know what to do when bitten:**

If bitten, your child needs to tell an adult right away. Try to remember what the dog looked like, if it had a collar on and where it went. Wash the wound with soap and water. Take your child to a doctor. Bite wounds can easily get infected.

**Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please contact your veterinarian.**