

# DOGS & CHILDREN



Babies and children should never be left unsupervised with puppies or dogs. Learning to respect, understand, care for, and successfully control a dog gives a dramatic boost to any child's self-esteem. But these benefits do not come by magic. Children and parents alike must realize that cartoon dogs are fantasy, and Lassie was several well-trained dogs. Both Lassie and Timmy were acting. In the domestic environment, both dogs and children must learn how to act around each other. All dogs must be taught how to act around children, and all children must be taught how to act around dogs.

## Teaching Dogs How to Act Around Children

To improve children's confidence and self-esteem, it is vital their puppy- and dog-training exploits succeed. Success depends upon adult planning, participation, and direction. First, adults must teach the puppy or dog how to act in a controlled manner, and second, adults must teach children how to control the now mannerly puppy or dog.

Adults should use kibble to lure-reward train the puppy to come, sit, lie down, stand, and roll over. "Come," "Sit," and "Lie down" are the basic control commands, and "Stand" and "Roll over" are the best commands for examining the dog's body. Additionally, adults should handfeed kibble while cuddling (restraining) the puppy and while stroking and fondling (examining) his muzzle, ears, paws, belly, and rear end. The puppy will soon learn to positively associate restraint and examination with food.

Provide children with tasty treats (in addition to kibble) and instruct them how to lure-reward train the now easily controlled puppy. The puppy will quickly learn that training is fun and being trained by children is especially fun. Families without children at home must invite children to meet, handfeed, and train the puppy during his first three months in his new home. Young puppies are impressionable, cute, and non-threatening. Invite family, friends, and neighbors with children, i.e. children the puppy is likely to meet as an adult.

Instruct the children how to use kibble and treats to lure-reward train the puppy or dog to come, sit, lie down and roll over. By approaching and sitting close, the dog voluntarily accepts and enjoys the child's company. By sitting, lying down, and rolling over, the dog acknowledges and respects the child's requests. In other words, the child asks and the dog agrees. Or we could say, the child commands and the dog willingly complies. Moreover, by rolling over on request, the dog shows voluntary and happy appeasement. Quite frankly, willing compliance and happy deference towards children is the only workable solution for pet dog training.

Additionally, as a major beneficial side effect of lure-reward training, the dog grows to like and respect his trainer: "Wow! Children are fun; they give lots of treats. Of course, you have to sit to receive them...but then that's just common canine courtesy!"

All owners should seek family puppy training classes, in which both puppies and children are allowed to interact off-leash.

## New Baby

All dogs must be taught to thoroughly enjoy the presence and actions of babies. The solution is classical conditioning. From the outset, integrate your dog into all new baby moments and routines. When feeding the baby, sit down comfortably, and handfeed kibble to your dog at the

same time. Pick up the baby whenever he cries and then call your dog and offer a treat as you cuddle and shush the baby. (You will find the baby calms down more quickly if you are slightly distracted by talking to the dog.) When changing the baby's diapers, handfeed freeze-dried liver to the dog. (Keep a treat jar on the diaper-changing table.) In no time at all, your dog will form strong positive associations with the baby's feeding, crying, cuddling, and diaper-changing. You may find your dog adopts her baby-minding role with great enthusiasm. Your dog may promptly alert you whenever your baby cries, or messes his diapers. Yes, you will have trained a Dirty Diaper Detection Dog.

## Teaching Children How to Act Around Dogs

Learn how to teach your children how to teach a puppy or dog *before* you get a puppy or dog. Observe a puppy class so your children may learn training skills. Many class instructors will welcome children's participation, since socializing puppies with unfamiliar children is a major reason for puppy classes. Additionally, observe an adolescent or adult dog class, so you can preview the predictable problems you are going to encounter (or better, prevent). And most important, make sure your children have ample opportunity to test-drive a variety of puppies and adult dogs. See if your local Humane Society has a volunteer program.

When selecting a puppy or dog, make sure all family members, especially including children, love the dog, feel completely at ease around the dog, and are able to easily control the dog before you decide to welcome him into your home. Teach children to train and control the dog using training techniques they can master—classical conditioning, lure-reward, and reward-training techniques. By using brain instead of brawn, even three- and four-year-olds can master these exercises.

Sit with your children, hold the pup's bowl, and jointly handfeed her first few meals. Instruct your child to occasionally offer treats (tastier than the dog's kibble). Your puppy will soon learn to love the presence and presents of children.

Warn children never to approach any dog without supervision. Teach children how to train puppies to approach them. Instruct children to stand still, to always speak softly, and to keep one hand in their pocket while luring and rewarding the dog with the other hand. Any child who cannot get a puppy to come, sit and lie down, should never be allowed to play with that pup unsupervised. A single child (or adult, for that matter) with no control can ruin a good puppy within minutes. Insist on training before playtime. And in no time, the child will be play-training the puppy.

Children feel great because they can control puppies with verbal commands and handsignals. Puppies are ecstatic because they have discovered that sitting is the secret command that trains children to stand still and deliver treats on cue. And adult owners feel relieved and deservedly proud to know that their soon-to-be adolescent dogs are congenial and compliant with children.

For more information, please watch *Dog Training For Children, Every Picture Tells A Story*, and the *SIRIUS Puppy Training* DVDs and read *Raising Puppies & Kids Together*—all available on-line from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). To locate puppy and dog classes in your area, contact the Association of Pet Dog Trainers at 1-800 PET DOGS or [www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com).

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