Prevention – Children and Dogs

Dogs and their Body Language:

Dogs have their own body language and understanding the body language can help prevent inappropriate situations among dogs and kids. Monitor your dogs and kids when together. A dog exhibiting calming signals (head turned away, white of eye visible, yawning, lip lick, moving self away are all signs to watch for when your dog is around children. If you see a dog exhibiting the body language your dog wants the child to move away. Dogs do not like hugs and kisses so watch for the signs if a child is hugging or kissing on your dog.

- *See Dog Body Language Photos under Prevention on the website.*

Family Interaction Time with Young Children

If an adult is unable to supervise the child and dog together, suggest placing a fence between both the child and dog for safety. A fence in a common area if you are near but not able to pay specific attention to both. Provide a settle spot for your dog with an interactive toy.

During supervision use the time to do a little training for both child and dog.

Sit Down:

With your child on your lap in a chair or on the floor. Sitting down lowers the center of gravity and makes stumbling or lurches less likely. It always lowers the child's arousal level and helps the child to make good choices vs grabbing or running towards.

Inviting your Dog:

- Teach your child to invite your dog versus going up to your dog. This reduces your child disturbing a sleeping dog or a dog with a toy.
- Teach your child to calming pat their leg or to stick out their closed fist and say "dog, say hi". Let the dog choose if he/she wants to interact.
- Teach your child if the dog does not come to interact the dog is saying "no thank you". *See Dog Body Language Photos under Prevention on the website.*

Petting:

- Have your child place one hand in their lap and one hand to pet your dog. This prevents grabbling, putting or hugging.
- Teach your child to pet dogs on their sides and back versus around their face.
- Teach your child to pet with their palm and fingers extended. This reduces grabbing and pulling.

*Suggest practicing with a stuffed pet dog first.

Teaching your Child to Avoid the Dog:

Teach your child to avoid the dog when he/she is on a mat, laying down or in a crate.

Safety during Play:

Be a Tree:

- Teach your child during play or if your dog is excited a jumping up to “Be a Tree”
- Plan practice exercises with your child running around, stopping, folding hands in crisscross across chest, head-up, count to 30, without giggling, talking or moving. Dogs chase children because of their movement and attention. If your child becomes a stiff tree and folds their arm limbs in typically the dog becomes bored and moves away.
- After this is reliable, teach your child how to then go to the dog and say sit, pet or give a toy. With consistent practice, your dog will learn the only attention comes from a sit.

Be a Turtle:

- Teach your child if they fall to look like a turtle. (If they are on the ground playing be a turtle or stand and be a tree.)
- To be a turtle your child should pull their needs in, touch their head between knees and cover their head and neck with their arms and hands. They should count to 30 without talking, giggling or moving.
- Again the dog should find this boring and move on.

*Both exercises will help with a puppy that likes to mouth (they explore with their mouths and are teething), an excited dog at children’s movement, etc.