

## **Puppy Proof your Home Child Proof your Puppy and Dog Proof your Child in a Nutshell!**

**By Maureen Ross, MA, CPDT-KA**

Children and dogs can positively learn and grow together with supervision, compassion, patience and boundaries. Growing up with a family dog can teach values about responsibility and other species / cultures. It can give a dramatic boost to a child's esteem. Conversely, it can turn family life into overwhelming chaos.

Learning to respect, understand, care for and successfully manage a puppy or a "getting to know you" adopted dog takes time, planning and a willingness to open your mind to new and realistic possibilities.

The emotion that goes into getting a puppy that children quickly become attached too is a strong consideration. We should all know by now that dogs are not "try-ons" like a pair of shoes or disposables. They are not objects. They are living beings and part of the family.

If you are reading this I'm guessing you are planning to or already have a puppy or adopted dog. You realize that cartoon/movie dogs are fantasy or highly trained (Lassie, Scooby Doo, Benji and Chance).

For a dog's well-being and to become a well-behaved, enjoyable family companion, they require regular Veterinary care, healthy nutrition, grooming, attention and gentle training.

A puppy quickly turns into an adolescent long before a child becomes a teenager. Behaviorally, a 1-year old dog is equal to a 15 year old teenager. By six-months old, most puppy behavior is shaped. It now needs re-shaping. Keeping this in perspective can save the family a lot of heart and head-ache in the future.

Puppies are usually whisked into human families at about 8-weeks old. The puppy becomes the hit of the family, especially among children, until they make their first mistake of peeing on a carpet, biting a child, knocking over grandmother or goosing the cat.



It is vital that the puppy / dog are given a fair amount of time to absorb new surroundings. Children who haven't had dogs need to learn respect and careful handling. Puppies need to be taught sit and gently. There is no such thing as NO BITE. Reality is that dogs will mouth, but can be taught to do this gently to humans.

Building confidence in the puppy and the child is vital and requires adult supervision. It takes a nano-second bite to damage a child / dog relationship.

**Children under 12 are littermates**, not pack leaders to dogs. Puppies will play with them in the same way they did with their own species. Puppies bite and growl. Humans laugh, saying how cute, thus reinforcing exactly what they don't want! Strive for neutral / straight face.

Children and Dogs can participate in activities that are age appropriate. Ask yourself, can they handle this? With larger breeds, I strongly suggest two leashes, one for the child and the other with a responsible adult. An 8-year child can't successfully take a 4-month old Malamute pulling puppy for a walk. A precedent is set. Setting both up for triumph is the key to a long-term behavior success in the relationship.

### **Puppy Proof the Home Environment (Safety)**

Okay, you did your homework and are picking up your pup. Guide this and the children like you would a vacation overseas or play with scenes and acts. Be the director!

Be mindful that puppies are learning and deserve the same compassion that we would want when thrust into a new and strange environment.

If both parents work, who will be available in the day time to help take care of the puppy? What age-appropriate activities are the children going to be involved with? Schedule ahead, with flexibility, for feeding and outdoor time. Play time should be short, especially for puppies. Puppies need rest and this will avoid accidents.

An 8-week old puppy will need a safe, quiet place to rest. They will need to be brought out every couple of hours, after eating, before going to bed and first thing in the morning. This could take months or more (see housetraining at a glance and post it on your refrigerator).

Crate and/or some kind of confinement (see Crate Haven) is necessary to give the pup a haven to rest, sleep and prevent accidents (soiling, chewing, biting and knocking over children). Stuffed Kongs work well for the puppy to expend energy in safe place like his crate. Place a warm blanket a few chew therapy, indescribable toys.

Your home may have to be temporarily rearranged protecting the puppy from poisonous plants, electrical plugs, toxic cleaners, and any toy or item that doesn't belong to the puppy. This includes your underwear, slippers and shoes. Prevent the preventable by watching.

## **TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO ACT AROUND DOGS**

Children will do everything possible to excite dogs into chasing and playing roughly. It's fun! The rapid, uncoordinated movements -- running, jumping, skipping, bouncing, spaghetti arms, grabbing, squeezing, tugging and high pitched squeals may scare the pup. Eventually, a pup will get use to this, but in the beginning, smaller doses are recommended.

Rather than instructing children and dogs not to do this and not to do that, it is better to teach them what to do like speak softly, move slowly with hands by their sides and don't pat roughly, massage gently. Games should be short and controlled like any sport (get your stuffed toy). Imagine baseball without rules?

Children should be taught that there is only one safe way to approach an unfamiliar ... DON'T. Ask first (see Children and Dogs ... SAFER). Approaches for familiar puppies or dogs are sideways and from a distance, unless you know the dog very well.

Children playing on floors with toys are bait and littermates. Teach the puppy and children which toys are theirs, Keep the rest in toy boxes to get out and put back for supervised play time.

Children 12 and over can be taught how to walk the dog and teach basic requests like sit, down and come. Off-leash lure-rewarding, using the dog's food for training, is easily integrated into daily life. If you feed your dog 2X a day, you have 14 training opportunities a week (see Doggy Diner).

Older dog or cat living in the home? Prepare ahead of time. Do not expect an older dog to automatically accept a new pup. If you have watched your dog with other dogs, good for you, but there is no guarantee.

Neither should be forced on one another, especially if an older dog has arthritis. The new puppy will likely get more attention, while the older fellow watches. Try to keep the older dog's life as similar as before. Neutral territory, like the driveway or a parking lot may be a better first meet / greet. Giving both a place to escape for rest and time-outs is important. Feeding should be separate. Older dogs should not have to COMPETE with a pup.

Cats are relative. Most will find their way around dogs. A puppy may become best friends with a cat. Cat proofing your dog means letting the cat have escape routes and higher tree houses unless you are sure they get along. Baby gates work wonders in strategic locations.

By 4-months old, all dogs should enroll in a positive reward based training class where they can socialize and desensitize. Safely, from a distance first, introduce them to a broad variety of sights, sounds, smells, people, places and things, directing the interactions like the good puppy parents that you are.

At [www.dogtalk.com](http://www.dogtalk.com), there are many good articles, that can guide you along the way as you live and learn with your dogs.

Highly recommended is Train Your Dog, Change Your life. For some great free downloads, journey to [www.dogstardaily.com](http://www.dogstardaily.com), for Dr. Ian Dunbar's Before and After you get your Puppy.

Embrace and enjoy the experience. In their short time with us, we learn a lot about ourselves!