

CHILDREN AND PUPPIES

Excerpted from Puppy Primer

By Patricia McConnell, PhD

The following are reminders when children and puppies/dogs interact:

- Children and puppies should not be together unsupervised. PERIOD.
- Children don't know what hurts or scares puppies. So if you don't protect your puppy from children, you'll be forcing your puppy to protect himself.
- Puppies will tolerate a tremendous amount that they later will not tolerate as adults. Don't let the fact that your 5 month old puppy tolerates certain types of behavior from children now lull you into thinking that he always will.
- Involve children in the training of your pup as soon as they are able, but you've got to monitor them. Children tend to go to extremes with their commands, almost universally. Kids repeat commands endlessly and don't follow through, so your pup learns to ignore commands.
- Teach children the right way to approach and pet your puppy. In general, they should be kind and gentle to the puppy. It's up to you to show them how. Teach them to pet the pup on his chest and cheeks rather than slapping him on the top of his head or back.
- Avoid picking up puppies whenever possible. (For one thing, they need to learn how to walk with you from place to place rather than being airlifted the rest of their lives. Adults with small dogs, this means you too.) Don't let kids carry your puppy around either. Puppies can develop a real aversion to this(being grabbed, squeezed, smushed and carried), and it may elicit defensive aggression from them as they mature.
- Don't let your puppy play chase games with children in which the puppy chases the kids (or the kids chase the puppy). Running, giggling, screaming kids are just too much for most puppies, causing the pup to become inappropriate with the kids. Instead put the pup in another room or his crate for a little while, or leash him to you. (Supervised "come" games where the child stops as the puppy approaches are fine as long as the pup isn't using his mouth when he gets to the child.)
- Teach children to play appropriately with your pup. Hide and seek, catch, fetch, find Mom or Dad or a particular toy, or agility exercises can all be good games for children to play with puppies. Limit the amount of time the kids and pup are allowed to frolic together, they can both get carried away if left together for long periods. It also helps to have the pup burn off a little energy before playing with children.
- Keep in mind that if a pup spends an excessive amount of time running around and barking in the house now, he will be rowdy in the house as an adult. Don't encourage rowdy behavior in the house from your pup anymore than you would encourage your children to play softball in the dining room near the family's heirloom china.

- You can help your children teach the puppy a different trick. But again supervise the training as well as the use of the trick(no dog wants to rollover 57 times in one day).
- Dogs need times to be left alone and kids must be taught that sometimes one should "let sleeping dogs lie." The same boundaries that children have to observe in school with other children, need to be observed at home with your dog. No one likes to be jumped on when sleeping, nor have your nose, ears or tail pulled or twisted. Although your dog needs to be socialized, he also needs his own space and quiet time. The other extreme is not good either; where no one dare bother the "dog". You may end up with problems later. There needs to be a happy medium as well as an adult monitoring children.
- It's critically important to *teach children never to approach strange dogs* without permission from you and the dog's owner. Not all dogs may be as friendly as your dog and even friendly dogs may be frightened by children running up unannounced and hugging them.