

Caring for Dogs and Children

Growing up with a dog can be a wonderful experience for children, and the friendship between children and dogs can be enriching for everyone. Whether you are introducing a new dog into your family with children, or welcoming a new baby into a home with an existing dog or dogs, there are some key principles to take into account to ensure everyone's safety and comfort.

The foundation for successful child dog relationships is **management** and **supervision**, and good relationships are maintained by reinforcing good behavior on the part of both the dog and the kids.

Expectations

Just as children need to be taught how to be well-behaved around other people, they need to be taught to be well-behaved and respectful around animals. They need to learn what kind of games are appropriate, how and where to touch the dog properly, how to interpret the dog's body language, and when the dog is not to be disturbed. When they're old enough to understand, kids should also be involved in the dog training process.

Even if used to children in the past, a new dog will not be used to your children and will need time to get to know them. Likewise for your children – they might have experience with other dogs, but will need to learn how to interact with this specific dog, as all dogs are individuals and will behave differently.

Start with plenty of **management** and **supervision**, and be observant of how the dog is reacting. To help prevent the dog from feeling overwhelmed, never insist the dog approach the children or the children approach the dog while he's resting or is otherwise engaged. Children should be standing still or sitting when the dog is first introduced. They can encourage the dog to come to them by sitting down and offering a treat. Have the child toss small treats on the ground as the dog approaches.

Help your kids get it right by coaching them not to reach toward, lean over, or hug the dog. Dogs do not always appreciate being hugged or cuddled by new or familiar people. It is a great temptation for children to do this, especially if they have been used to doing it to a previous dog. Instead, they can toss a toy or a treat to them, and sit quietly while they wait for the dog to approach with an invitation to pet.

MANAGEMENT

Through the use of management tools such as tethers, crates, gates, and pens we can have more control over the environment our children and dogs co-exist within. This allows us to maintain everyone's comfort and safety while still allowing for safe interactions.



SUCCESS STATIONS

A "success station" is any designated spot that a dog is limited to so that they have an increased chance to succeed. Success stations are introduced gradually in a positive way and are used for limited periods of time. This handout will cover four types of success stations new and expecting families find helpful as they include their family dogs. We strongly encourage practicing several success stations long before a baby's arrival. Success stations will need to be evaluated regularly for safety and will likely need to be adjusted as your baby reaches new milestones.

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TETHERING



Tethering can be a great way to include dogs in the daily routines with newborn babies. Many caregivers feel more comfortable with their dog in their success station especially during the Homecoming phase (first 3 months). Caretakers are able to move around and toss treats while the dog is able to observe the baby without any type of physical barrier. ***Once the baby is able to roll, crawl, or move, a tether is no longer a safe option and should be discontinued.***

CRATE



Crates can be wonderful, safe, cozy condos for dogs. There are many types of crates and we encourage you to find the right fit for your dog. It's important to consider your dog's emotional state while in the crate. Often a crate does not allow us to observe how our dog is handling situations. Carefully consider the location of the crate and keep in mind this may need to change as your baby becomes mobile.

GATES



Gates can really come in handy at times to set up a boundary between babies and dogs. Please consider the type of gate that you get. Many dogs can easily push the pedal or push gates open with their nose. Choose carefully which gate will meet your needs. Play yards may be a helpful option as well. Be creative and proactive. Proactively practice and prepare ahead with your dog by providing positive experiences with gates or play yards before you need to use them.

COMBO



Sometimes using two types of success stations together can lead to the safest option. This is especially true as babies become more mobile and curious. Preventing a child from approaching a dog in their success station is important and a combined option may be most helpful. For example, you may find it helpful to put up a gate in a doorway so your mobile baby cannot directly approach your dog resting in their crate. Combinations can help create "buffers" so your dog and baby are not coming into direct access with one another through a barrier.

This handout briefly describes four possible options we recommend. Always consider the individual needs of your dog. We suggest introducing success stations slowly to allow your dog to build a positive association and comfort with their special space. If you need other choices, please do not hesitate to contact a Family Paws Educator for individual guidance. Babies grow, dogs age and management must adjust at every stage.


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SUPERVISION

Supervising your dog and children does simply mean that you are in the same space as they are. Parents and pet parents know all too well that behavior can happen in an instant – if you are on supervisor duty, which means your full attention is on both the dog and your kids, otherwise you are implementing one of the management strategies discussed above.


THE 5 TYPES OF SUPERVISION

1	2	3	4	5
				
ABSENT	PASSIVE	REACTIVE	PROACTIVE	ACTIVE
Adult not in room with dog and baby/toddler	Adult in same location but distracted and not watching	Responding after dog or child is too close	Planning and preparing safe separation.	Full awake adult supervision
☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆	★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆

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Keeping these foundational principles in mind it is important to support both children and dogs in learning skills to interact with one another safely. Great resources to teach adults and children how to read and interpret dog body language can be found at doggonesafe.com, Familypaws.com, and livingwithkidsanddogs.com. These web sites are tremendous resources for getting everyone in the family on the same page with regard to how to interact with dogs.

“A common mistake parents make is to look only at their child's intentions and not the result. For example, child hugging a dog is intending to be kind, but often the dog will feel trapped or anxious. Good interactions are enjoyed by all participants”

-Colleen Pelar, CDDBC, CPDT-KA, author of, [Living With Kids and Dogs... Without Losing Your Mind](#)