



Kids and Puppies

by Angi Lenz, APDT, AHT

Kids and pets are a wonderful combination -- if the children are educated about and prepared to have a pet. If children don't know how to properly treat a young animal, one or both may become seriously injured. Be sure you are not bringing a new pet into your home to teach your children about “responsibility”. Be realistic of your expectations about what your children can actually be expected to do. More often than not, the pet care will fall on the parents shoulders.

Here are some tips on how to accustom your children and new pet to one another:

Read easy-to-understand books about animal care, safe handling, and dog behavior to your children prior to getting a pet. Discuss what you have read with your children.

Demonstrate how to properly handle a young pup or kitten by using a stuffed toy. Have your children practice with the toy animal.

Have a family meeting and set the ground rules for bringing up new pet. Children need to agree to follow these rules before and after new pet comes home.

Make puppy or kitten his own little home-within-a-home as a safe haven. Involve children in setting-up this space. Pick a warm, comfortable location for puppy's crate. Enclose an area around it with an exercise pen , and line the area with newspapers. Place pup's toys, bowls and bed in this area. For a new cat or kitten a 2nd bedroom or bathroom works well.

Keep very young children and the new pet separated. ALWAYS supervise small children and pets. Be sure that older children are treating the pet appropriately.

When pet's and kids meet for the first time, it should be done in a calm manner. An adult can hold the pet while children slowly and quietly approach and allow the pup to smell the back of their loosely closed fist. Then they may gently pet him.

Children must not be allowed to hurt or roughly handle a pet. Don't allow them to pinch or poke the puppy/kitten or pull tail or ears. Be careful not to let them step on or drop the pet, or to squeeze him too tightly. And never tease or torment him.

Never let a child hit a pet.

Dogs and Cats may be afraid of squealing, yelling, running stomping children. Keep pet in his space when they are playing, or have them play quiet games when pet is out in the house.

Children should not play chase with the puppy -- regardless of who is chasing whom. They should also refrain from playing dominance-establishing games, such as tug-of-war. Teach children not to stare, bark or growl at pup as part of their play as this may make puppy feel threatened.

Teach children not to sneak up behind or startle pet, and, to leave him alone when he is eating, resting or sick.

A curious and affectionate pet can unintentionally harm a baby. Pets can accidentally scratch or push your child down, be sure to discuss this with your children before it happens so they know the proper way to react.

Do not make a child responsible for a pet's care. When children are old enough, involve them in the animals daily care and overall training.

Teach children to nurture, love and respect the pet; teach them by example.

Pets and Puppy

If introductions are not properly done, the fur can fly if you already have another pet and add a new puppy to the household.

Here are some steps to help your new and old pets adjust to one another:

If you already have a pet that will not be able to accept or get along with a puppy, don't get a puppy.

If there is more than one other pet at home, introduce the puppy to them one at a time, beginning with the alpha (head) dog or cat. Introduce them first through the crate, allowing them to see and smell each other. After a few days, let them meet without the crate between them, but have one person hold or restrain each animal.

Hold introductions in a neutral space if possible, such as in the yard or family room.

Don't do introductions at meal time and always separate when feeding.

Each pet must have their own food and water bowls, bed, toys and crate or space. Show the existing pets that they will still get sufficient food, and still have their own possessions that the new puppy may not have.

Keep the puppy and other pets separated until they accept each other's presence. ALWAYS supervise all contact until their relationship is reliable and they get along well.

Put a small towel on each (new and existing) pets beds. Swap those towels every other day... but put existing pets towel UNDER new pets food bowls (and visa versa) they can now experience each others scents and have a positive association with them (eating!)

The adjustment will not happen overnight. Give the animals sufficient time to accept each other. Introductions should be done slowly, over a period of at least one to two weeks.

Let the existing pets know the new member of the "pack" is here to stay and should be accepted. Let the puppy know he is the new kid on the block and should learn to become part of the pack.

Give sufficient attention, first, to older pets, then to the new puppy.

Owner should continue to support the existing hierarchy of the pack prior to pup's arrival, but don't show favoritism to one animal over another.

When old and new pets can be together (supervised of course), play as a group and show them that they can have a good time as a larger pack.

