

## Dogs and Children

Children and dogs enjoy playing together but just as you would not allow a small child to play unsupervised near water, the same should be true when they play with the family pet. Play can get over zealous; a dog may knock a toddler over or a child might poke in the eye. If a child gets hurt in play it will either cry or lash out and a dog is no different. If a dog feels threatened, tormented or frightened, it will defend itself. Training your dog respect a child is not enough; we need to teach our children how to treat a dog as well. Dogs are pack animals and belong to a pack we call "our family". Each pack has a hierarchy which each pack member slots into. Your dog may see the child as a playmate or underling, and not above it in the pack order. Training a child is often easier than training a dog but the child needs to understand that a growl means, "Stop doing that!" The next step is the snarl: the dog bares his teeth, and raises his hackles to make himself look bigger and more ferocious. The snarl means, "If you don't stop I'm going to bite you! This is your last warning!" Children need to be taught how to approach strange dogs; their instinct is often to stroke a dog's head but a dog's instinct is to raise its head to follow the strange hand and if the child jumps back in alarm, the dog can see this as a form of aggression. Simple things like high pitched screaming or squealing and even running past a dog can seem threatening to a dog. Dogs chase runners. If you want your dog to follow you, get its attention and run the other way, chances are it will overtake you! Kids shouldn't touch a dog with a bone, chew or eating. They need to be taught to respect a dog's privacy when he is in his kennel or bed. Puppies need lots of naps during the day to give their body time to grow. Children have little comprehension of consequence; even in their late teens they struggle to understand that each of their actions has a consequence which could have predicted if they had stopped to think. To a child, climbing a tall tree to get an apple would hardly require a second thought; they never considered how they would get down afterwards because it was not a problem at the time. A child will see a bitch with her puppies and instinctively want to pick one up. Bitches with puppies are especially fierce and will defend their young; their instinct is that of survival so it is likely to be a "no holes barred" contest with the odds in favor of the dog. Once the dog and child understand each other, they will probably become the best of friends. Lonely children can benefit from having a dog to confide in because dogs keep secrets! Friends may come and go, but the dog always there, and loves us no matter what everyone else thinks of us. A dog can help a child through stressful changes, like moving house or changing school. It gives stability to life. The love that a dog can bestow on a child gives a child a positive self-image, and can help to ward off depression and anxiety. It can be helpful to talk to the dog instead of the child, "Come Lady, good dog, it's bed-time story time" can be more effective than ordering a child to get to bed. If the child sees the dog obeying they may respond favorably too!

When a child and a dog understand and respect each other they can both benefit enormously and it is hoped that the child will learn that a dog can be "man's best friend."

## About the Author

Alex is a contributor to the [Canine First-Aid Handbook](#) and the [Canine Diabetes](#) and can be contacted at [www.CanineFirst-aid.com](http://www.CanineFirst-aid.com) for reliable and free advice.

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