

DOGS AND CHILDREN

WHO TO ADOPT

When adding a companion to a family with children, there is no perfect size or breed of dog. We advise that you focus more on personality and less on breed when choosing a pet for your family with kids. Do your children need a calm and gentle dog, or would you and they prefer a more active dog? Look for a dog who seems friendly and pretty outgoing. Families with children may want to avoid introducing a dog to the household who is overly energetic, jumpy or mouthy, or alternately, who appears especially fearful or shut down.

Remember that dogs often behave differently in a shelter setting than in a home environment, so give them plenty of time to adjust to their new surroundings and show you their true personality. Consider investing in training classes for your new dog so that he can develop good manners. And training classes are a terrific way for the whole family to bond with a new companion.

INTRODUCTIONS

When you first bring your dog home, give him time to acclimate to his new surroundings before inviting friends over to meet him. At first, keep things calm around the house and start to introduce good manners right away. Ask the kids to be calm around the dog and give him time to get used to the children before adding in lots of playtime.

INTERACTIONS

Teach the kids to interact with your new companion respectfully. Let a dog approach your children to solicit petting or playtime. Teach the children to never bother a dog when the dog is sleeping, eating, or chewing a toy. Dogs do not communicate affection in the same way as humans. Children should not hug or lay on dogs. While the child may consider this friendly, these actions are often misinterpreted by the dog and may be perceived by the dog as scary or annoying. Also, parents should make sure that children never poke, sit on, pull on, or tease a dog. If the dog ever has something he shouldn't, children should find an adult to help retrieve the item.

SAFETY

It's good for the whole family to learn a dog's basic body language. Dogs do not communicate or see the world in the same way that people do. If you remember that loose body language is good, and stiff body language is bad, you will understand most of what a dog is trying to tell you.

If a dog approaches in a loose manner, a bit to the side, he wants to interact with you. A dog will ask for petting by leaning, offering their hind end, or sitting on you.

Children should be taught that if a dog is stiff, growls, or shows teeth, the children should stop what they are doing and calmly move away from the dog. Most of the time when a dog gives a warning such as a growl, he simply wants something to stop or to go away and won't bite if the warning is respected.

Teach children that if a dog scares them, they should "think like a tree" – stand still with their arms tightly against their chest. If a dog knocks them over, they should "pretend to be a rock" – curl up in a ball with face, arms, and legs under their bodies. They should remain in this position until the dog goes away or an adult arrives to help.

Ispeakdog.org is a great resource for learning body language. The website <https://www.thefamilydog.com/stop-the-77/> has great information and videos to help children learn how to safely interact with dogs.

TRAINING

Training is a great way for your new dog to learn to understand his new family. Even if the dog has had some training in the past, he needs to learn to interpret what his new family is asking. Children are welcome to attend Richmond SPCA training classes along with their parents or guardians. We recommend the whole family comes! Start with a manners class, such as Canine Manners or Surviving Adolescence, and then try out Tricks or Agility together!

PLAYTIME

Different children can handle different types of play with dogs depending on their size and age. Also, different dogs enjoy different games. Here are some tips for playing with dogs. As a general rule, do not initiate play if the dog is bouncing around and barking. Instead, initiate the game when the dog is either sitting or has four feet on the ground. Please be aware that when children squeal, run, and make fast or flailing movements that this is often interpreted as play by dogs and can get them quite revved up. Dogs rarely mean to harm children when they are in play mode, but small children can find dogs in this mode overwhelming. Playtime should be kept structured and always supervised by an adult.

- Tug - Tug tends to get dogs very excited, so it's best not to play for extended periods without specific training. For a basic game of tug:
 - Have designated toys that are the only items to play tug with. They should be long enough to safely have a hand and the dog's mouth on it at the same time, with at least 3 inches of space between them.
 - Tug three times then stop; let the dog calm down; tug three times then stop; then repeat.
 - Never fight the dog for the toy; simply drop it when you are done playing.
 - If the dog climbs or misses the toy, immediately stop the game and walk away.

- Fetch (or Chase) - Some dogs fetch, others simply like to chase items as they are thrown.
 - Never reach for a toy in which the dog is interested.
 - Have two similar toys; when the dog is interested in one, pick up the other.
 - Trade and repeat.

- Nose Games
 - Hide toys, kibble, or treats in the house and yard, and help the dog find them.
 - Make scent trails through the house and yard with a yummy surprise at the end.

- Hide and Seek
 - The child runs and hides, and the dog gets playtime or a food reward when the children find him. This can also be turned into a great recall game where the child hides and then calls the dog.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://liamjperkfoundation.org/lets-talk-dog/dog-body-language/>

Living with Kids and Dogs . . . Without Losing Your Mind by Coleen Pelar

www.ispeakdog.org

<https://www.thefamilydog.com/stop-the-77/>

<https://www.ddfl.org/resource/children-and-dogs-important-information-for-parents/>

<https://www.ddfl.org/resource/why-dogs-bite-a-guideline-for-children/>

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/dog-care/dog-bite-prevention>