

Large Dogs, Small Kids: Introducing Your Child to Your New Dog



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Ever since humans domesticated the first dogs tens of thousands of years ago, our furry canine friends have remained “Man’s Best Friend.” When it comes to introducing our four-legged family members to our children, however, some families are left wondering whether it’s possible for the dogs to coexist peacefully with kids. Here are some actions you can take to reduce the chances of bites or injuries...

1. Prior to the Introduction

A common mistake some parents make is to not prepare the dog to meet their child. They might assume the dog has already been socialized to children, or they might be unsure of what to do. Ideally, the dog should already know some basic commands like “sit” or “come” - which you can practice with the dog beforehand while your child is not around. Once the dog has mastered those basic commands, you might want to mimic some possible child behaviors around the dog. Reward the dog’s tolerant behaviors with a treat.

Depending upon the age of the child, it’s also a good idea to practice skills for how to interact with a dog prior to that first meeting. Make sure your child understands that dogs are not toys. They’re living creatures with feelings. You might see if any of your neighbors or friends would allow your child to spend some quality time around their dogs or become a [dog walker](#) so that your child can get comfortable being around a variety of dogs. Another idea is to use a stuffed animal toy as a prop for teaching the child how to properly pet a dog. Not only could tugging, pulling, or poking hurt the dog, but those behaviors could also cause the dog to bite the child.

2. During the Introduction

For safety's sake, make sure all playtime is supervised. The child and the dog should never be left alone together - especially if the dog has never been socialized to children. During the first introduction, let the dog approach the child first. Never allow the child to rush at the dog, as this could create fear and possibly cause the dog to act out towards the child.

Time out is a technique that works for both children and dogs. Believe it or not, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) recommends placing the dog in a 30 second "time out" by isolating it in a separate room anytime it growls, bites, or shows other signs of aggression towards the child. Whenever the dog is patient, tolerant, and refrains from showing aggression towards the child, immediately reward the dog's behavior with a treat.

3. After the Introduction

World-famous dog trainer, Cesar Milan, recommends teaching your child the signs of dominance in your dog. That way, when the dog bares its teeth or changes its [body language](#), the child will know doggie playtime is over. Continue modeling positive behaviors for your child each and every day, so the child can gradually learn what behaviors are acceptable when interacting with the dog. As your kids grow older, have fun teaching them how to train the dog. Many children enjoy teaching their dogs new tricks, such as "fetch" or "roll over."

Dogs and children can definitely exist harmoniously. How else would you explain nearly half of all American families owning [pet dogs](#)? Following the advice listed above will help ensure the introduction between your favorite dog and your favorite little human goes as smoothly as possible. With patience, care and training, you can start the relationship off on the right paw and your new dog will eventually become "Kids' Best Friend."