

# Your Dog & a New Baby



The addition of a new family member can be very stressful for a dog and although jealousy is a human characteristic, some dogs seem to exhibit behaviour which we could describe as jealous. A new baby in the family may be seen by the dog as an intruder.

There are some simple guidelines to follow; however always maintain supervision.

Before the arrival of a new baby your dog should be taught to spend time without your attention. Other members of the family should take an interest in the dog so that it will always have someone to turn to for attention when you are too busy with the baby. Create an environment that will exist when the baby is there so that the dog gets used to the different sounds and smells. Introduce things like baby powder, baby oil, dolls and pushchairs and play a recording of a baby crying. Encourage friends with young children or babies to visit.

When the baby is brought home the dog should be constantly monitored and never given any opportunity to be alone with the baby. As often as possible, when the dog is fed, watered, exercised or even patted the baby should be present. This way the dog associates all the good things in life with the new baby.

It is important that a healthy relationship is developed between the dog and the child. If you solely rely on keeping the dog isolated from the baby then you run the risk of one day making a mistake.

Continuously supervise any interaction between the dog and the baby and be careful that the dog does not take over the role of 'minder'. This could result in the dog becoming too protective and attacking anyone who comes too close.

Don't rely on obedience training as being a "safeguard". Obedience training teaches behaviour; however it doesn't always deal with misbehaviour.

If you are concerned about how your dog would react around a new baby in the first place this should be an early warning signal that you, your family and your dog may have an unhealthy relationship and you should seek professional advice.

Surgically sterilised dogs can be more even-tempered and less likely to bite; however again this is not something that can be relied on as a "safeguard".

# Children & Dogs



**Pets can play a vital role in childhood. The relationship teaches children things like responsibility, love, empathy and respect and it helps them develop many life skills.**

Children that develop empathy for pets are likely to develop empathy for people. Unfortunately we sometimes forget the potential every dog has to suddenly “turn” and “bite” for no apparent reason.

In many cases when a child is injured by a dog, it is the child that has ‘triggered’ the attack. However, there are many motivations for aggression. Sometimes it is difficult to determine what may have caused a reaction. What we do know is that the potential is always there, despite previous unblemished behaviour, despite size, age or breed and despite how well you think you know the dog.

Children have a high vocal range, they move very quickly and they are unpredictable. This can sometimes trigger a ‘prey’ response from the dog.

Because we become so attached to our dogs we tend to treat them as if they have morals.

**Parental Supervision** - In most serious attacks on children there were no adults present. It is important to always maintain supervision between dogs and children and to teach children how to behave around dogs. Children are represented highly in dog attack statistics. Never leave children and dogs unsupervised, even for a few minutes. If you have to answer the phone or go to the bathroom, you must secure the dog away from children first. Don’t allow dogs the ability to access the room of a sleeping child.

**Eye contact** - Direct eye contact intimidates or challenges a dog and may be the main trigger to ‘face biting’. Parents have confessed that prior to the child being bitten on the face they were playing a staring competition game with the dog.

**Handling Puppies** - Teach children how to handle dogs especially puppies. Puppies are delicate and must be handled gently.

- Always lift a puppy with both hands for support.
- Never allow a child to lift a puppy by the scruff of the neck.

**Time out** - Create a child-free zone where the dog can retreat to. Teach the child that this is a ‘no go’ zone.

**Pain motivated aggression** - Often children cannot comprehend the level of pain they may be inflicting on a dog. Pulling a dog’s tail or ears may soon result in retaliation.

**Teasing** - Most children will test the boundaries to see just how far they can go. This is perfectly normal behaviour. However parental guidance keeps our children safe. Being bitten by a dog is too high a price to pay to learn to respect animals. As a matter of principle all children should be taught to respect other living entities. It is cruel and unacceptable to tease any animal. Older children that intentionally tease or hurt animals need to be properly reprimanded so that they understand this behaviour is wrong. Teased animals usually bite out of frustration. Unfortunately then it is the animal who suffers the consequences.

**Running & Screaming** - All dogs (and cats) are born with “predatory instincts”. The reflex to chase a swift moving object is almost irresistible. Teach children to stand still if approached by a strange dog.

**Teddy bear syndrome** - A few adults suffer from this as well as children. Big cuddles around the face and neck can be smothering and can cause the dog to respond aggressively. It can also result in close eye contact, resulting in a threat or challenge.

**The approach** - Youngsters know no fear and walk straight up to a dog without hesitation. A tethered or leashed dog does not know the intent of the child and a tethered or leashed dog cannot escape. The dog often lashes out in self-defence.

**Ask permission** - If you want to teach your child to get used to dogs, ask the owner if it is okay to pat it. However be cautious. Some dogs may not have been brought up with children and they don’t know how to react. Also, some dog owners may not understand their dog’s potential.

Unfortunately many dog owners appear to be in denial about their own dog’s potential because of their emotional attachment. This can make them relaxed and careless. A child bitten by a dog often carries a physical and mental scare for life. Parents must always maintain supervision; even short periods of exposure can be fatal.