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**Nebraska Humane Society
Training and Behavior Department
Behavior Helpline**

402-444-7800 Ext. 221

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Introducing Dogs to Children

Good relationships between children and dogs don't just happen; parents need to make sure things go smoothly. There are many benefits to children having pets, they may enhance their self-esteem or help them learn empathy.

A dog can be a child's companion, playmate, guardian and confidant. A dog can teach a child valuable lessons about nurturing and responsibility.

Selecting a Dog:

Before you bring your new dog home, explain to the children that the dog can't be handled and played with constantly. Show them how to love, respect and care for their new pet.

Small puppies aren't always the best choice for families with small children. Puppies can easily injure a small child or be injured by the small child that doesn't understand how to handle the puppy. Adding a new puppy is similar to having a new baby. Puppies require lots of time, patience, training, socialization and supervision.

Dogs that are 6 months and up can usually do fine to being around children with help from you.

Any new dog is going to require training and supervision, but not as much as a young puppy.

Breed Size and Type:

Size – small breed dogs are generally not good with young kids. They are more easily injured and frightened by a lot of activity. Frightened dogs tend to snap or bite to protect themselves. Larger breeds are usually better able to tolerate the activity of young kids.

Type – Retriever types generally do well with young kids. Herding type dogs have a tendency to "herd" children by chasing and nipping at their heels. Breeds that have been bred for protection like Rottweilers and Chow Chows have may have difficulty dealing with the commotion of children and their friends coming and going. They may perceive them as territorial intruders. With any breed each dog is an individual with its own personality. It is best to bring the entire family when meeting a new dog to determine how well the dog will fit into the family.

Who will care for the dog?

It is unrealistic to expect children to have all the responsibility of caring for the new dog or puppy. Teenagers have other things on their minds like friends and school and not much time to worry about properly taking care of a dog or puppy. It is wise to involve the children in the care of the dog, but not to expect them to do it all.

Here are some helpful tips for introducing a new dog/puppy to children:

Introducing a dog or puppy to a child will take plenty of patience and supervision on the adult's part. Children act and move differently than adults and this could lead to problems. Children have high-pitched voices and have jerky movements while walking or running. Dogs don't always understand this and need to be supervised so children aren't knocked down and injured. Children must play quietly around the new dog until they become used to each other.

Keep the dog on a leash. Watch for any hesitance on the dog's part. Stop the introduction if the dog is hesitant.

Never let a child hug a dog. The dog doesn't understand that it is a gesture of affection and may accidentally nip or growl at the child. It is best for the child to pet the dog under the chin rather than on top of the head.

Dogs can be possessive around food, toys, treats or their space. It is NEVER acceptable for the dog to growl, but children must learn to respect their dog and not to bother him when he's sleeping or eating. If the dog snaps or growls at children for any reason and at any time, this needs immediate attention, call the Behavior Helpline.

It is best for small children to sit on the floor with a puppy. Puppies can wiggle or jump out of hands and may injure themselves if they fall. Having treats is a good idea for the puppy to learn that children are ok. Children can also sit on the parent's lap when being introduced to a larger puppy or dog. The parent will be able to control the child if they get carried away and get too rough with the dog. The parent is also there to teach the dog to behave nicely around children.

Teach children that when a dog or puppy is in its crate that they must leave them alone. Dogs will soon learn that their crate is a refuge when they are tired of playing.

Teach children the proper method of handling. A puppy should be held with one hand under the chest and one hand supporting the hindquarters

NEVER leave very young children alone with a pet, even after the animal has lived in the home for some time.

Question? Call the behavior helpline at 444-7800 ext. 221.