



# Dogs and Children

Many people regard the relationship between kids and dogs to be as natural and idealistic as Lassie helping little Timmy out of danger week after week. Sadly, this is not the case for many dogs and children. Bites inflicted from dogs remain one of the leading causes for facial disfigurements in children. It is crucial that adults in the home make every effort to first and foremost teach children how to properly interact with a dog.

As a society we are constantly bombarded by stories about dogs with such great temperaments that children can climb all over them, pulling on their ears and tails. While many dogs have and do display very high tolerance to children and their antics, this is not something you should expect from your dog. Each and every dog is capable of biting no matter the breed, size or personality—it is just a matter of having the necessary combination of factors. What if the dog developed an ear infection or injured his tail unnoticed by you? The next pull or poke from your child could be more than any animal should be expected to tolerate. Your dog is just that—an animal, not a human. Dogs have a completely unique way of expressing their emotions. Growls, teeth baring and snapping are all ways a dog is telling you that they are not comfortable with the situation.

Do these behaviours mean you have a bad or dangerous dog? Absolutely not! But it does mean you have to make serious decisions to either manage or learn how to change the offending behaviours, before they lead to a bite.

This does not mean that your children and your dog will never become the best of friends. Dogs can live in very intricate social circles and learning how they communicate is important. Almost every dog will give warning signs before a bite occurs. Know what to look for and what signs to heed.

## Do's and Don'ts

- ❖ Do stand quietly and allow the dog to approach first.
- ❖ Do wait until the dog sniffs the child's outstretched fist (hand).
- ❖ Don't stare at, lunge at or chase your new dog.
- ❖ Don't squeeze, poke or pull on any body parts.
- ❖ Don't approach or disturb a dog that is eating or sleeping.
- ❖ Don't approach a dog when they are with their favourite toy or any other item that may be of high value in the dog's eyes.
- ❖ Dog bites ARE preventable! Know your warning signs:
  - A dog that is barking or growling
  - A dog that is showing the white's of their eyes
  - A dog that is baring or showing their teeth
  - A dog with ears hung low and tail between legs
  - A dog that is stiff like a statue

Until your dog becomes comfortable with all the members of the family, new people and especially children should follow some basic guidelines:

- ❖ Stand quietly and allow the dog to approach first.
- ❖ Do not stare directly into the dog's eyes.
- ❖ Wait until the dog sniffs an outstretched fist (hand).
- ❖ Gently pat the dog's cheek.

With children in the home, it is also good for your dog to have a safe spot. A crate is ideal but this can also be accomplished with a bed or blanket that is placed outside of the main traffic areas in your home. When your dog is in their safe spot, all family members are to respect that and leave the dog alone.