

Placing Dogs with Children
Warning Signs of Possible Aggression in Newly Adopted Dogs
(Adapted from “Placing Shelter Dogs with Children” by Sue Sternberg)

L.E.A.R.N. puts each foster dog through a thorough temperament and behavioral evaluation. We try to screen all our dogs for potential problems, especially aggression. It is important to understand that if a dog has teeth, he can bite. The only dog incapable of biting is a dead dog. What we are looking for in Labs that we consider placing into homes with children is a dog with very high thresholds for all types of aggression. We want dogs who are going to live with young children to have long fuses. We aren't just looking for a dog who is merely tolerant of young children, we are trying to match you with a dog that adores children, in fact, almost prefers them to adults. The reason for this is because all children, even very well-behaved and well-supervised children, will eventually do something to the dog, relentlessly, invasively, past the point of what may be considered fair or tolerable, and we at L.E.A.R.N. desperately want to make sure your child does not get bitten or hurt at that moment. We want your dog to be as happy with your family as your family is with your dog.

Positive, loving relationships with pets at a young age promotes responsible, respectful, humane and caring adults. Children who are bitten by dogs are scarred not just physically, but emotionally as well, often for life.

While temperament testing can lower the risk of new adopters encountering aggression, it by no means guarantees against it. Our foster homes try to test for as many situations as they possibly can, but they can never duplicate every situation that a dog would encounter in your home, with your family and friends.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE PARENTS OF THE NEWLY ADOPTED DOG:

1. Never, ever leave a child alone with your new dog. Not even for a second to turn your head and answer the phone or get the door. The type of relationship we see on TV between children and dogs is a fantasy and not a reflection of what real dogs can be like with children.
2. No one in the family should encourage rough play, wrestling, or allow the dog to play with her mouth on human body parts or clothes. Even if only the adults play like this, the dog may be stimulated to react in a similar rough way when children play with the dog.
3. Your dog should be fed her meals in an area completely protected from and away from children, both for peace and privacy and to prevent guarding behaviors. The dog should be fed portions that can be quickly finished so that there is nothing for the dog to guard. Empty bowls should be taken up and put away so the dog won't consider guarding the feeding area.
4. Most children are not bitten by their own dog, but by a friend or neighbor's dog. This means two things. First of all, watch your own dog closely when children are over for a visit. Secondly, go over and meet any dogs at your children's friends' houses before allowing your child to visit. It is a good idea to see the size and general nature of your child's friend's dog, to check to see if the owner of the dog allows unsupervised interaction between the children and the dog, to find out where the dog is fed, to check if there are any “valuable” chew toys or bones laying around, and ensure that their dog

has no possessiveness problems, or, if he does, that the problems are managed when children are around.

5. Any dog over 5 months of age should not be using his mouth to play, no matter how gentle this appears to be. A dog can be taught, using positive reinforcement methods, not to use his mouth to play with or control humans.

6. Carefully watch your dog if she cuts between you and your child during hugging or other affectionate actions. This could indicate jealousy, rank issues, or guarding the owner from others. Should this happen, contact L.E.A.R.N. or a dog trainer immediately.

7. "Let sleeping dogs lie" is a saying created by someone who really knew dogs. Teach all children who have access to your dog to NEVER startle, awake, or hug a sleeping dog. Also, dogs by nature are grouzier at night. Put the dog in another room or in his crate at night if s/he is prone to falling into a deep sleep, in order to prevent an accidental startle or waking of the dog.

WHEN TO CONTACT L.E.A.R.N. OR A TRAINER FOR ADVICE:

- Any signs of physical rough play or rough, physical strength from the dog toward the child.
- Any growling, snapping, or nipping – even during play.
- Any humping or mounting of children OR adults.
- Any avoidance of physical contact (i.e. the dog backs away or leaves the room if the child hugs, pets, or approaches the dog)
- Any sign that the dog is guarding his food bowl, bones, toys, stolen items (dog may tense up, freeze, stiffen, growl, snap, show teeth, snarl, or just give a "hard eye" to anyone approaching the dog and/or item)
- Your dog seems out of control or wild with children who are playing or running around.

It is important that your dog truly adore, worship, and almost prefer children to adults. This is because no matter how well behaved and gentle your child is, there will come a time when a child will push a dog to its limits. A dog who starts out with a huge buffer of love, affection, and adoration of children is apt to tolerate much more before reaching that threshold. Likewise, a well-behaved, well supervised, gentle child is less apt to push a dog to its limits.

During the first few days and weeks of the adoption, we would like you to be vigilant and very observant of the developing relationship between your child/children and your new dog.

We can help prevent, thwart, and re-direct many potential problems IF WE HEAR FROM YOU AS SOON AS YOU HAVE A QUESTION OR SUSPECT A PROBLEM.

Your child's safety is of the utmost concern for us.

Should you need to contact L.E.A.R.N. the phone number is: 847-289-7387 (PETS) or email the behavior consultant directly at behavior_question@labadoption.net.

This publication is available in its entirety through:
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