

MONTGOMERY COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER

PET BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING SERVICES, INC.

BABIES, TODDLERS AND DOGS

Written by Pet Behavior and Training Services, Inc. for use by the Montgomery County Animal Shelter

The television commercial shows a little boy rolling around happily as eight puppies bound over him. These commercials, and some and some of our own faded-memories, would have us believe that children and pets instinctively know how to please the other. Contrary to all of the cute pictures of toddlers and puppies, small children do not necessarily work out well with young animals. You've probably noticed that when your young children decide to play with a toy, they simply pick it up; sometimes right-side up; sometimes upside down. They are very apt to do that with the puppy; grabbing the first available part, ear, tail, hind leg. The puppy has spent its first eight weeks playing with its litter mates, biting ears, tails, or any other convenient place. Put the two together and you will most often have a grabbing child with a nipping puppy on the other end. It takes a special person and lots of time and effort to teach both the young child and the puppy to play together—a saint comes to mind!

If you already have a dog and are expecting a baby, sign up for obedience classes. This way the dog will be much easier to handle and control before the baby arrives. Dogs often sense that something is different at home, especially during the last months of pregnancy. The reduced activity of an expectant mother and the increased focus of attention on her by the husband can make it very easy for the dog to feel rejected when the baby does arrive. Start now to reduce any frustration or feelings of competition by setting aside one period each day which is designated as the dog's "special time", to be continued after the baby arrives. What is critical is that the session be about the same time each day, preferably in the evening when things have quieted down. The session need only be about 10 or 15 minutes, but should include the greatest joys of the dog's life—his special treats, special games and quiet petting. The dog will quickly learn to anticipate this special one-on-one period.

Before the baby arrives you can get the dog used to activities and smells that will occur with the baby. Wrap a doll in a blanket, talk to it, rock it in a rocking chair. Use the doll to simulate changing diapers, don't forget the baby powder, etc. Wash the doll, sing to it. Don't forget to include the dog in these activities. Say, "Let's go change the baby's diaper", ask the dog to "sit" by the crib and reward with a treat and praise when he does. Offer a sterilized bone or a Kong with a little peanut butter or cheese stuffed in the holes

while you feed the baby. Keep a few in a bag in the fridge or freezer so they will be handy. This way the presence of the baby means good things happen to your dog.

Remember, as the baby matures the dog will need to be protected from the infants tendency to grab and hold the dog's hair, ear or tail. The young infant has no understanding that this causes pain.

As the infant grows to a toddler, set up a safe, off limits place for the dog where he can rest undisturbed. Often dogs will get up and move away when they have had enough contact with a toddler, discourage the toddler from crawling or walking after him. The dog's eating and drinking area should also be off limits to the young toddler. The dog should be allowed to eat without any interference. A warning snap or growl could turn into an accidental bite. Until a child reaches the age of reason, it is up to you to protect both the child and the dog. As the toddler grows he must be taught how to be well behaved and respectful around dogs. He needs to learn how to pet the dog properly and when the dog should not be disturbed (when he is eating, sleeping or chewing a toy). No matter how reliable any dog appears, young children should never be left alone with the dog. It is up to the adult to keep the child safe from the dog and the dog safe from the child. When he is old enough to understand, he should be involved in the dog's training, feeding and exercise.

Just remember that the puppy or dog is a family affair. Take your time, do your homework, be ready. Choose a puppy or a dog that suits your kids, your home, your lifestyle. Train and socialize your dog properly. Nearly two-thirds of all puppies acquired as children's pets are given away or turned into shelters within the first year because the adults were not prepared for normal dog behavior.

If you need more information or help, you may call us for an appointment, 937-293-5686. If you live outside the area, contact your veterinarian or dog friends for referrals to a pet behavior specialist.

Pet Behavior and Training Services, Inc.

Dayton, Ohio 45410

1407 Business Center Court

937-293-5686

A non-profit organization specializing in the behavior of pets

Montgomery County Animal Shelter

6550 Webster Street

Dayton, OH 45414

937-898-4457

