



How to Help Your Dog When there is a Toddler in the Home

Toddlers can be a dog's worst nightmare or their best friend—it's up to the adults to ensure that they become best friends. If you can't be watching their interactions, then your child and your dog need to be in separate and safe areas AWAY from each other. Toddlers can be very quick and can easily upset your dog. Even a dog who appears to be very tolerant of interaction with your children can quickly reach a point where they have had enough.

Your toddler is learning about the world by grabbing, throwing and touching everything. They have also discovered the joy of being mobile. This is a happy time full of squealing, laughter and shrieks. But it also can also be a frustrating time with crying and temper tantrums. As a parent it is exciting, unpredictable, and exhausting... **from a dog's perspective it is scary, overly stimulating and exhausting.**

There are a few things you can do to help your dog adjust and survive the toddler stage:

- If you have not recently gone to a **positive dog training class** with your dog, now is the time to go and strengthen your bond with him. Even if your dog has a perfect obedience, the classes will help put order into his world and deepen his relationship with you.
- If your dog is not **crate and/or gate trained** please, please, please, do it now. There will be times when you need to separate the toddler and the dog and/or visitors and the dog. Your dog should see this separation as a happy safe place where he can take a much-needed break. This area needs to be associated with fun things to do and yummy things to eat. It is his place with no toddlers allowed. The more things you do to help him enjoy the area, the more he'll learn to take himself away when he needs a break.
- Work on your dog's **polite greeting skills** when people enter your home. There will be more and different visitors to your home as your child gets older. Even if your dog loves toddlers, children visiting your home may be afraid of dogs. If your dog is excited or afraid when people enter your home, then use your crate and gate training skills. Once the people are settled you may bring the dog out on leash. If your dog and visitors are comfortable, allow a greeting. If your dog looks at all wary, give him crate time with a yummy stuffed Kong instead. He will thank you. It is not necessary for your dog to greet everyone that enters your home.
- Keep up with your dog's **exercise**. Every dog needs mental and physical exercise every day. This can be a welcome relief to the stress inside the house and allow the dog to be more accepting of his separation and increased need to be well mannered around the baby. It's also a wonderful time to work on those obedience skills you are learning in class.

Management to Keep Everyone Safe and Happy

Assess your house for **growl zones**. These are places where a dog can feel trapped with no place to go. In order for dogs to feel safe they must have an escape route. One example of a growl zone is the tight space between the coffee table and the couch. This space is often used by toddlers for furniture surfing or playing. The Family Paws website (see web link below) has an excellent free video with examples of growl zones and how to limit them in your home.

Many toddlers love to follow or chase the dog. Please teach your toddler that if the dog walks away that they should not follow him. **This is one of the single most important lessons that you can teach your toddler.** If you see a tail, then let the dog leave. If the dog approaches looking eager for attention from the child then they may pet the dog while being supervised; if the dog turns to avoid the child then just let the dog walk away.



Your toddler is going to have toys that the dog may be interested in or ones that can be mistaken for a dog toy. The opposite can also occur, and your toddler will become interested in your dog's toys. Both need to respect each other's toys. Teach your toddler that they must not play with the dog's toys. Teach your dog a leave it and a trade me (again, another reason for taking that positive training class) so that the dog understands that toddler toys are not dog toys.

Dogs may become possessive with their food, water bowls, crates and beds or areas they like to rest. Do not allow your toddler to play with the bowls, go inside the crate or sleeping areas.

When a dog is resting or sleeping this is not a time for the toddler to interact with the dog. Let sleeping / resting dogs lie.

Hugs are a human expression of affection and are stressful to dogs. They also do not like to be pet on the top of the head. Teach your toddler to pet a dog by giving it a rub on the chest or gentle touches on its back. Older dogs or dogs that are not feeling well can be very touch sensitive.

Toddler and Dog Fun

- ❖ Fetch is a fun game for dogs and toddlers. Dogs should be taught to sit patiently for the object to be thrown, (not grab at the object) and nicely drop the returned object. This, as with all interactions, must be actively supervised.
- ❖ Toddlers love to sing songs and most dogs love to be sung too.
- ❖ Telling dogs stories and including them in reading a book is also a way to bond.
- ❖ Dogs do love to be pet by toddlers that have learned to pet them nicely. Dogs need to be able to walk away when they have had enough.
- ❖ Toddlers can draw many pictures of their dogs.
- ❖ They can also help bake dog biscuits.
- ❖ Going for a walk in your stroller and taking a well-mannered furry friend along is always fun.

References

Websites

www.familypaws.com

www.doggonessafe.com

Favorite Book: [Living with Kids and Dogs without Losing Your Mind](#) by: Colleen Pelar