



Children and Puppies

Please adhere to my words of wisdom and 30 plus years of puppy experience. This is directed at parents/grandparents of those with children/grandchildren who are 10 years old and younger. I actually know several breeders who absolutely will not place a puppy in a home with children younger than 10 years of age. The following tips/guidelines/rules are the valid reasons why. I have turned down homes with children who I felt were not able to handle a puppy. Some of them have been parents who could not control their own children, much less supervise and properly handle/train a very young puppy.

I bring these beautiful puppies into this world and into your lives so that you will have a wonderful family companion to hopefully enrich your lives, and that of your children. I birthed these precious babies, nurtured and cleaned up after them, and socialized and LOVED them for the past 8 weeks. I vowed to protect and keep your puppy out of harms way at all times, just as I would my own newborn child. I am asking the same of you and soon I will be Passing The Torch of Responsibility onto you, the ADULT. This puppy should be handled in the same manner as you would your OWN newborn child.

Supervision / Supervision / Supervision - - The two fastest things on Earth are children and puppies, and BOTH can get HURT in the blink of an eye. The balance of teaching both your children, and the puppy, will ensure that your child/children will have the best buddy in your soon-to-be grown puppy.

Children need to know that the newest four-legged family member may be NERVOUS, overly excited, and even scared, after leaving its mother and littermates and going to your new and strange environment. Loud, quick-moving children can intimidate a puppy. Explain to your children that first impressions are important, and if the puppy's first impression of them is fear, the new puppy may not want to play with them.

Children need to approach a new puppy quietly, slowly, and with GENTLE VOICES. Have the child SIT on the FLOOR, and let the puppy approach the child. A child should never be allowed to handle a puppy while they are standing, or sitting on a couch or bed. Puppies are wiggly and it is very easy for a child to lose control of the puppy if it is trying to get away. The puppy may also use their sharp little teeth if they are being held against their will, and if the child lets go quickly, the puppy could get injured if it falls, breaking a leg, their neck, or injuring its back. I have seen ALL of these scenarios happen at my job.

Treat your puppy JUST LIKE YOU WOULD YOUR NEWBORN BABY. An 8 week old puppy is the same as an 8 week old newborn baby, only with 4 fragile legs and some fur. Would you let your 5 year old Pick-Up / Feed / or play with a newborn baby WITHOUT the Mom/Dad supervising?

Children need to be taught to handle the puppy GENTLY – No picking up the puppy and carrying them around. No Ear Pulling, No Tail Pulling, No Hitting, No Slapping. You, as the adult, need to go over these “puppy rules” before bringing the puppy home. They need to be repeated as often as you feel is necessary, to ensure that your children fully understand these “puppy rules.”

MAINTAINING CONTROL OVER THE SITUATION IS IMPORTANT SO THE RELATIONSHIP STARTS OFF ON THE RIGHT PAW.

1. **Walking the puppy on a leash** – Only responsible adults should hold the leash with your puppy/dog attached. The best way to get your puppy used to a leash is to attach it to the collar and let it drag the leash around the house or yard with NO ONE holding onto it. Do this for several long periods of time, while you are supervising, and do it a few days in a row. Be sure that the puppy does not chew on it. Soon, your puppy will not think that a wicked snake is trying to chase it. Be SURE your CHILDREN do not think this is a game. They should NOT chase the puppy (ever) or try to step on the leash at any time it is attached to the puppy, and especially if it is running. Again, this is a good way to break their neck or damage their windpipe, or their back.

I have seen many times over, a parent who comes into the Vet’s office and they have allowed the child to not only HOLD the leash of a puppy, but the child has Pulled/Tugged/Dragged the puppy along. DO NOT use a leash to “walk” your puppy until it has mastered walking in your yard alongside you, without resisting or balking.

I have also seen a parent leave their puppy on a bench WITH the child, and the parent walks away. Many times I have sat with that child and held their puppy until their very irresponsible parent returns. Some things seem like obvious common sense, but I have seen everything but, when it comes to raising puppies and especially where young children are involved.

2. **Flexi-Leads**-I covered this in another article on leashes, but here is my take on flexi-leads again. Never use one in an area populated with people or other dogs. You cannot control YOUR dog if it is on a long flexi lead. You also have NO control over another dog if your dog has free reign on a flexi lead. Dog parks and vet clinics are NOT the place for flexi leads. In fact, many clinics have signs on their front door stating they are not allowed in their facility.
3. **Stairs and Puppies** – A puppy's sense of balance is still being formed at this age and they do not know that tumbling down the stairs can hurt them. (Think of your toddler falling down the stairs). (**Child Gate for Stairs**) They also aren't aware of their surroundings enough to know that stepping off of a couch, bed, stairs, or anything not on level ground, will send them tumbling in a hurry.
4. **Vision**-At this age, puppies will still show signs of limited vision, as it is not yet fully developed. That is why, when you roll a ball even just a short distance away, they will not and cannot follow it and go after it. Their distance vision is still forming and they use their strong sense of smell, and their hearing, to locate you and other articles.
5. **Correction/discipline**- Children should be instructed from day one, that they are not the disciplinarians and ARE NOT to punish or correct the puppy at ANY time, in any way. Adults should be the only one to correct the puppy with "positive" reinforcement to direct a puppy away from the undesirable behavior. If you don't know what positive reinforcement is, or how to redirect a behavior, let me know. This is also the reason I REQUIRE you to take a puppy kindergarten class as soon as they go home. DO NOT WAIT until they have had all their vaccines; by then, the bad behaviors (yours and theirs) will already be set and harder to retrain.
6. **Supervision**-Children should NEVER be left alone with a puppy, EVER. Not for ONE second. If a responsible adult cannot watch the puppy or needs to go out of a room where the puppy is, take it WITH you and/or put it in a crate. You may trust your children completely, but you never know what can happen the moment your back is turned. This goes for leaving the puppy with another child OR another dog. THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT guideline I can give you. PLEASE adhere to my words of wisdom, KNOWLEDGE and experience.

7. **Furniture**-If you do not want your large, hairy, golden retriever on your furniture, do not allow it there as a puppy. Not even ONCE. Set the tone and the ground rules early, from day one, if this is the case. That means that no one holds the puppy while seated on the couch, only on the floor. Once the puppy learns it is okay even for one minute, you have lost the opportunity to teach it otherwise, from the beginning. Naturally, this goes with ANY type of training. Start on the right foot to begin with and you will have a much better behaved puppy, and you will be much less frustrated, which will also promote a happier, calmer puppy.

Puppy Proof your Home the same as you “Child Proofed” when your children were born.

1. Gates for Stairs
2. Electrical Cords / Speaker Wires
3. Find & Block Areas where a Puppy can “Get Stuck”
4. Instruct your children to ALWAYS pick up their toys, socks and other clothing. These are the number one reasons why we operate on puppies/young dogs! Blockages from foreign objects are LIFE THREATENING, not to mention EXPENSIVE to retrieve. Toys/clothing are very enticing to puppies but especially to retrievers. In fact, until your puppy is housebroken, it should be kept in a safe and securely blocked off area and not allowed full access to your home!

An ounce of Prevention NOW – will save you from Emergency Visits to the Vet.