

Showing Teeth a Bad Sign

Use hyposensitization and counterconditioning to teach dog to tolerate grandchild.

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Q. I have a Siberian Husky mix that weighs about 70 pounds. I got Boo Boo from our vet when he was about 4 months old. I don't know what his life was like before I got him, but he will not go up the stairs to the second floor (our black Labrador Retriever will). He also shakes very badly if there is yelling going on around him. I have a 2-year-old grandson, and my Husky has shown his teeth when he has been around him. I want to know if I should slowly introduce them or put Boo Boo outside when my grandson visits. Thank you so much. A. To be honest, I am very worried that your Husky may bite your grandson. Please do not take any chances by letting him near him for now. It sounds like your dog may have had some traumatic episodes before you got him or is extremely high strung. It is hard to speculate why he will not go up the stairs to the second floor, unless this is very painful for him due to arthritis of the hips, for example. If he gets upset around yelling, it is important not to expose him to any excessively loud noises if at all possible. Now, as to the idea of introducing your Husky to your grandson: this can be done, but requires patience and caution. By keeping the Husky on a leash at all times when your grandson is around, you can prevent any kind of biting accident. You should use a combination of techniques known as counterconditioning and hyposensitization to help your Husky get comfortable with your grandson. With hyposensitization, you have your grandson spend increasing amounts of time near your Husky at each visit. Start with a very short time frame, about a minute for example, for the first visit, and add a minute or two at each visit. Keep your Husky on a leash at all times and have your grandson just be in the room with him. Your grandson will need to speak quietly during this phase.