

## Dogs in Households with Children

**Dogs that have not been raised with children require supervised introductions.**

*Brian Kilcommons*

Q. My husband and I have two Sheltie's, aged 10 and 11. Both were "rescues" from ads in the paper, and we got both of them at about 1 year of age. They have been good dogs, and have given us much joy. The older one is the dominant of the two. We recently adopted a little girl who is now 15 months old. (We have no other children.) Initially the dogs both seemed to accept her, but recently our younger dog has growled at her a few times. This has occurred since our daughter started actively crawling at age 11 months and approaching the dog. How do I find a professional who really knows how to deal with this problem?

A. If we go by dog years, you have two dogs roughly the ages of 70 and 71. Whether dogs or people in this age group, a 15-month-old of any species can be a challenge. Take both dogs to the vet to ensure they are healthy and that arthritis or a thyroid issue is not a concern. If the dogs are uncomfortable, it will show in their behavior(s).

Most dogs that have not been raised with children have no concept of children. As you know, the baby has no clue either other than the dogs are interesting and need to be investigated-touched in all the wrong places. You should be touching your dogs as a child would, especially when it is not expected. Make a point to give the dog(s) the majority of their attention from you when the baby arrives on the scene. Link the baby entering the room with verbal praise and treats. The dogs can understand that simple equation: baby = treats.

The dogs should have a safe place they can retreat from the baby. A baby gate works well. Make sure your dogs are taught to "Move" or "Give ground" when approached by the baby-praise the dogs as if it was their idea.

Ask your veterinarian and local humane society for trainer/behaviorist recommendations. Ask the trainers for references of other dogs they have worked with where young children were involved. Follow your intuition and research the trainer. Does their advice and approach make sense? Are you seeing progress with the dogs after the first session? Are you comfortable with the way they teach? When in doubt, assume the dogs will bite; this will help prevent it from ever happening.