

## A Game the Whole Family Can Play

### How to get your kids involved in training.

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#### Toddlers Can Help with Sit

Your toddler can learn that lifting a hand up to his chest makes your dog sit. To help your dog associate your toddler's gesture with Sit, instruct your child to feed your dog a treat every time she hears you click the clicker (which I recommend) or use a verbal marker. Have your toddler hide the treat behind his back if your dog jumps up and only give it to her when she sits. This teaches your dog not to grab the treat from his hand and teaches your child not to reward jumping up.

On your part, consistently and lavishly reward your dog for sitting around your toddler, so that she regards the behavior as a highly rewarded default behavior around the child.

#### Older Kids Can Teach More

Depending on individual maturity, youngsters age six and up can take a more active role, helping you teach new behaviors rather than just practicing known ones. Show them how you teach a new behavior, such as Lie Down. As soon as your dog follows your lure to the ground easily, let the child try it. You'll reinforce the kids equals treats concept in your dog's brain, teach your kids how to train, and teach your dog to respect and respond to your children, all at the same time.

You can give children 10 and older primary training responsibility with some supervision. Older kids can read good training books and train a new behavior. Have them check with you first to make sure it's not an undesirable trick, like jumping over the backyard fence.

If your child is interested, enroll her and your dog in a positive training class that encourages mature, responsible tweens and teens to be primary trainers. 4-H is another option, but make sure your local 4-H group doesn't use force-based tools and methods such as choke chains, prong collars, and leash corrections.

Involving kids with training has another valuable benefit: Your family will all use the same language with your dog and have the same behavior expectations. Consistency in training and management helps your dog learn good manners more quickly and thoroughly, ensuring her a lifelong home with a family that loves her.

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