

Play Nice!

Strategies for helping kids and puppies get along.

Maryann Mott

Posted: Wed Mar 2 00:00:00 PST 2005

Jan Wall, a former elementary school teacher and creator of the educational Web site, loveyourdog.com, says parents can help children develop a better understanding of their pet by simply comparing feelings. For example, ask your children how they would feel if hit or not given food. They'll probably respond with the words hurt or hungry. Explain to them that the puppy would feel the same way. If they don't relate those things as being the same as how they feel, the dog is just a toy that they're going to be sick of in six months, says Wall, of San Diego. Here are a few ground rules to cover with your child:

Treat the pup nicely. Don't hit, kick, or tease him. No yanking on his tail or pulling at his ears. Dogs will lash out if provoked or hurt.

Speak in a normal tone of voice. Don't yell or scream in the puppy's face. His hearing is more sensitive than ours.

Don't hug or kiss the puppy. Humans show affection this way, but in the canine world, it's threatening. If the puppy walks away from you, don't follow. This means he doesn't want to play anymore. (Establish a place in your home where he can rest without the kids and their friends disturbing him. Teach your child to respect the puppy's resting place.) Don't bother the puppy when he's eating or sleeping. These are times when dogs don't like to be pestered. Only two hands on the puppy at once. It's overwhelming when several kids swarm around him. A frightened dog may bite.

Kids will test and retest a boundary. That's why supervision is mandatory to keep both children and puppies safe. By watching all interaction and teaching children how to properly act around the puppy, things will go a lot more smoothly.

That's what Cruz did. She told her young daughter to stand still and ignore Chloe, the playful pup, whenever she nipped at her legs. The simple solution paid off. Now they play nice together, she says.