



CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE DOG FOR CHILDREN

Taking an active role in choosing which dog is appropriate for your children is one of the best decisions you can make regarding your next dog. Decisions as important as this should not be left to a child's whims. Most of us tend to choose a dog we like, usually based on breed or appearance, not based on whether the breed/dog can be reasonably expected to do well with our children.

The most important question you should ask is: Will the dog be patient and tolerant with occasional abuse, whether deliberate or accidental, from children? Statistics show children are the victims of dog bites and attacks more often than adults. There are reasons for this. Children are physically closer to the height of a dog and will sometimes tease a dog. Dogs may think they can dominate a child for a variety of reasons.

When considering a breed, consult breeders, animal behaviorists, veterinarians, and trainers to learn about the breed's characteristics, including how well it tolerates children. One helpful book you may want to consult is Lynette and Benjamin Hart's, *The Perfect Puppy*. They used surveys to rate purebreds on their potential for "snapping at children." Remember, however, that there is more variation in behavior within a single breed of dog than across all breeds of dogs, and that mixes can make excellent pets also!

Even more important than the breed of dog you select, is that you educate your children on how to properly interact with dogs. Children must understand that they should not approach a dog if it is asleep, feels bad, is eating, or if it is playing with another animal. In addition, children should be taught not to tease, torment, or throw things dogs. PROVIDE EXAMPLES to make sure so they understand what these words mean.

Another consideration is whether you want a puppy or a full-grown dog. There are advantages to both.

If you choose a purebred puppy, and get it from a responsible breeder, you can, within reason predict what the adult dog will look like with regards to size, coat, and, to some extent, personality. Be sure the mother is a gentle, nonaggressive dog. If possible, you should make sure the father's disposition is good as well. The breeder should socialize the puppies to children. Do not select a pup that is less than seven weeks of age. A puppy goes through some critical learning periods up to that time that can, if interrupted, negatively impact your dog's personality as an adult.

If you choose an adult dog, it may already be housebroken, possibly trained, and, usually, will be more manageable. However, before adopting a dog, especially if you have children, it is essential that you know something about the dog. Proper socialization to children when the dog is young is important; however, if you are adopting an older dog, its history may not be known. You can and should ask if the dog was ever teased by a child, has ever bitten a child, or, if the dog is good around children.

Another consideration is sex. Generally speaking, females are less aggressive than males and neutered males are less aggressive than intact males.

Finally, it is not necessarily a "good" thing for children to get anything and everything they want. While letting your child pick a dog may, especially if you are getting the dog for the child, seem like a good decision, it may not be the best choice from a safety perspective. Obviously the younger the child, the more critical your influence will be.