

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Introducing Children to Dogs

Bringing home a new dog is a very exciting time for the whole family. To best set up the new addition for success, it is helpful to follow some guidelines, especially when children are involved. The goal is for the dog and the children to establish a positive, trusting relationship. Below are some steps you can follow to help achieve this:

- **Supervision is key!** Dogs (especially those who are new to the home) should never be left alone with children. An adult should always be awake and paying attention to the interactions between the children and the dog. This is both to make sure the child is not acting in a way that may frighten the dog (such as rough handling) and that the dog is not acting in a way that may frighten the child (such as jumping up or mouthing).
- **Provide the dog with a safe space.** This can be a crate, gated off area, or a dog bed placed out of the way that the dog can go to be left alone. Give the dog treats and chew toys there so that they learn this is a good area to be in. Teach the children that when the dog is in their area, they should be left alone. Just like people, dogs need alone time sometimes and giving them a place to have that time in is important. If the children in the home are too young to understand giving the dog space when needed, physical barriers such as crates and gates are recommended.
- **When children wish to interact with the dog, they should call the dog to them rather than approaching.** This gives the dog the option to come and interact and prevents the dog from being startled. They can call the dog in a happy voice and give the dog treats if they choose to approach. If the dog does not choose to approach, the child can toss the dog treats to help build that important positive relationship.
- **When children are interacting with the dog, the dog should always have the choice to leave.** If dogs feel trapped, they may become fearful, so it is important the dog not feel this way. Children can gently pet the dog with one hand. Frequent breaks should be taken in petting to give the dog the option to walk away.
- **If at any point during an interaction the dog displays any signs of discomfort (tensing, moving away, tucking the tail, growling, etc.) the interaction should be immediately ended.** If these interactions continue, professional help should be sought.
- **Children should not place their face in the dog's face, hug the dog, sit on the dog, or ride the dogs.** These are all things that can make dogs uncomfortable and can lead to the dog not wanting to be around the child. Adults need to make sure they are not modeling these behaviors by doing any of these things with the dog while children are watching as children are likely to copy behaviors they see adults doing.
- **Involve your child in positive care and training your dog.** Children can help in a variety of ways such as helping to stuff food in puzzle toys that will be given to the dog, hiding treats for the dog to use their nose to find, and helping teach the dog cue training.
- **Taking these steps will teach your children to be kind and respectful to dogs and help to establish an important relationship with your family dog.**