



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

May I Pet Your Dog, Please?

By Trelle Dandridge - Mutts with Manners

We know you love your dogs—and your children love them too. Because of this, and thanks to the numerous calls, emails, and private lessons we've received, it felt like the right time to share an article on child and dog safety.

Recently, many parents have reached out about introducing a new baby to the family dog. For years, the dog has been "the baby." Then along comes little Mikey.

Mikey is grabby, squeals, cries, and carries all sorts of fascinating new smells. Fido is curious, and you're concerned.

The good news? Today's parents are increasingly *proactive*. They're calling **before** there's a problem, rather than after a bite or scratch occurs. That's a breath of fresh air. It's far easier to prevent problems than to repair them after an incident—and it protects both the child and the dog.

Remember: *There are no take-backs with dogs*. That's why it's so important to be proactive, preventative, and patient when introducing your dog to a new baby. This is not a race. You may need to manage Baby Mikey and Fido's relationship for years before you're comfortable with unsupervised time together—and that's perfectly fine.

Teaching Children Safe Interactions

Once children are old enough, teaching them safe and respectful ways to interact with dogs is just as important as teaching Fido new skills.

Children should always:

1. **Ask for permission.** Teach children to always ask before approaching or petting a dog. A great resource is the book "May I Pet Your Dog?", which helps kids learn this simple but vital step.
2. **Be supervised 100% of the time.** An adult should always be present to ensure kids respect Fido's space and signals.
3. **Give Fido autonomy.** Kids like having the power to say "no." Dogs deserve that same autonomy. Teach children how to recognize when Fido is opting in—or opting out—through his body language and vocalizations.

Children should never:

- Crowd the dog or ignore his cues.
- Climb on him, pull ears or tails, or grab skin and fur.
- Take his toys, food, or chew sticks.
- Play in his crate or bed (these are safe zones for Fido).
- Disturb him while eating or sleeping
- Chase him
- Get in his face, hold on to his head, or kiss him. Affection should be invited by Fido, not forced by Mikey.



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

May I Pet Your Dog, Please?

By Trelle Dandridge - Mutts with Manners

Did You Know?

77% of dog bites come from the family dog or a friend's dog.

Most of these dogs are not aggressive—they're simply dogs whose boundaries weren't respected. Their warning signals were missed, ignored, or misunderstood. By teaching children to be kind, compassionate, and respectful friends to dogs, we can dramatically reduce the risk of bites.

How to Teach Kids to Pet Safely

After a child asks for permission, here are the steps:

1. **Check Fido's body language.** Does he look interested or stressed? If stressed, say "no thank you."
2. **Offer a hand.** Have the child extend their hand fingers-down, palm curled, for Fido to sniff.
3. **Pet-pet-pause.** Show kids how to pet gently on Fido's side (shoulders to hips), two strokes only, then stop. Ask together: Does Fido want more, or was that enough?

Tip: Many dogs dislike being petted on the head or face. Teach children to stick to the sides and follow the direction of Fido's fur.

Special Considerations: Holidays & Gatherings

Celebrations can be overwhelming for dogs. New people, decorations, noises, and energy levels can push Fido's stress threshold.

Instead of feeling pressured to include him in the chaos, set him up for success:

- Give him a safe space in your bedroom with ambient music and a stuffed Kong.
- Consider day care or boarding if you know you'll be too distracted to supervise.
- Remember: even if Mikey has learned the rules, his friends may not have. Keeping Fido separate is a kindness, not an exclusion.

Final Thoughts

Children are never too young to start learning how to be safe, kind, and respectful around dogs. By teaching them early, we protect both our kids and our dogs—allowing them to grow up together as the best of friends.