

Statistics

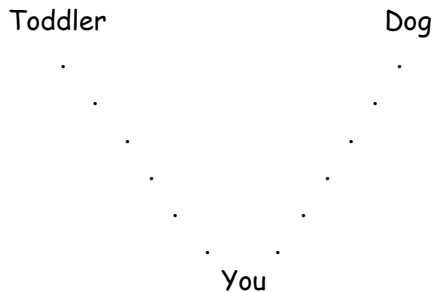
- Two thirds of our children will be bitten by dogs sometime before age twelve. Most of these dogs will be known to the children - their own dogs or dogs owned by family and friends.
- While most of the estimated 2.6 million bites per year will not leave lasting physical scars, some will be serious maulings resulting in death or disfigurement. Seventy-seven percent of bites to young children under four will be to the face and head. Every single bite will cause emotional distress for the family and most often trigger the dog's one-way trip to the animal shelter.
- Parents are left wondering, "Well, what's it going to be like for me? Is my dog a danger to my toddler? What about other people's dogs? How do I keep both my young child and my old 'baby' safe and happy? After all, our dog is part of our family, too."

What All Parents and Dog Owners Need to Know

- What you know may not be what you need to know! That is, what "everyone" knows to do with dog and kids is not working for 2/3 of our children.
- Normal dogs don't "turn vicious" or bite out of the blue; there will be warning signs.
- Most owners will not recognize these signs (but you will!).
- Toddlers and dogs do not have the moral reasoning power to make good decisions and thus cannot be expected to be "friends" until the child is at least around age five.
- Success comes from your work with your dog and your work with your child. It is never about the relationship between the dog and the baby/child.
- Lassie and Timmy were both actors.
- Times have changed! Parents no longer respond to dog bites by asking the child, "What did you do to the dog?" Instead, lawyers are called.
- Dogs with even a single bite to a child (regardless of provocation) have a reduced chance for adoption to another home.

Even with all this, you CAN have your happy ending. How? By building your *Foundation for Safety and Friendship* and keeping that foundation in good repair.

The Foundation for Safety and Friendship



This most important part of this foundation is between you and your dog. Your relationship with your dog and the level of communication you share is what makes it possible for your children and your dog to become friends. So many common dog/toddler problems can be prevented with dog training that's simple and fun to do.

Next step is between you and your toddler. Left to their own devices, toddlers will NOT choose appropriate, safe behavior with dogs. That's just not what they do (see below). Parents are in the middle between dog and toddler, working with both to learn how to foster friendship and live in peace. They do this by *preventing* bad experiences and encouraging goodwill and tolerance between child and dog.

When toddlers get close to age 5, they can begin to build a bridge to the dog, offering more predictability and the start of true friendship. As the dog feels safe with the child, he also builds his bridge towards the child, meeting in the middle and forming a relationship all their own.

Here's to that happy ending we are all looking for!

Who Really Wants to Live With a Toddler?

Remember - toddlers and children are not the same creatures! Most of our memories and mental pictures of kids growing up with dogs are geared towards older children. Here are just some of the things toddlers do every single day:

- Throw things
- Scream and yell
- Walk unsteadily, fall often
- Stare
- Play with obnoxious, loud toys
- Hit, kick, pinch and grab
- Throw tantrums
- Run, run, run!

Who in their right mind would CHOOSE to live with someone like this? Dogs don't get the benefit of frantically paging through the parenting books to see when each new challenging stage will be finished.

There is very little a toddler has to offer a dog that a dog would enjoy. We love the little monkeys because they can be so cute and funny and we know that this time will not last forever. In fact, your dog doesn't know that toddlers will *ever* grow out of this stuff and they aren't swayed by any of the cute little things toddlers say to melt your heart.

Can you imagine how tough this can be for your dog? Sympathize with your dog's perspective while you remind yourself, "This too will pass." Soon enough, your toddler will become a child and his or her behavior will be more predictable and safe to your dog. Until then, the trick is to get through this period without any harm done.

Dogs and Toddlers At Home

Overview

Picture yourself regularly taking a commuter train to work each day. You see many of the same people every day. Most are people who read their papers and nod politely to each other. One person, though, is a bit of a weirdo. He stands too close, babbles to himself, stares at you and gets in your space.

All of a sudden the train jerks to a stop and people fall onto each other! If one of the paper-readers falls on you, won't you both smile awkwardly at each other and simply brush yourselves off and get back to what you were doing? Now consider, what if it was the weirdo who fell on you? Feel any different about it? Are you likely to react differently?

Here's another scenario. New neighbors are moving in next door. You look out and see it's someone you recognize from your train. Don't you think you'd go over and say hi if it were one of the paper-readers? Would you EVER be friends with the weirdo?

Moral of the story: Don't let your child be the weirdo in your dog's eyes. Far better to be polite acquaintances living uneventfully together until the child is old enough to be a friend to your dog.

<p><i>The best way to keep your toddler safe from your dog is to keep your dog safe from your toddler.</i></p>
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Basics for The Toddler Side of Things

- Bites do not "come out of the blue." If you regularly describe your dog as "great with kids," take a step back and consider what makes you think this. Usually people say something like, "Because he lets the kids do _____" and list several things generally uncomfortable for dogs. Just like the straw that broke the camel's back, dogs can reach a breaking point. Do not let your toddlers do things that annoy or bother your dog.
- Consider your dog as "unavailable" to your toddler(s). Learn effective child management techniques to redirect attraction to the dog. It IS possible for toddlers to ignore your dog and still be friends later.
- Know your toddler's developmental stages and what can reasonably be expected in each stage.
- Build positive associations with your dog. Speak well of him at all times!
- Do not badmouth your dog!
- When toddler approaches your dog, call your dog to you and reinforce him for coming. This will help him be more likely to come find you if cornered by your toddler.

- Walk with your toddler and be ready to step between toddler and dog before there is any contact.
- A toddler's behavior is not predictable enough to be a friend to a dog. Your dog will not trust friendly overtures later if they are paired with crazy toddler behavior now.
- There is a big difference between **not letting** your toddler mess with your dog and saying such behavior is "not allowed." The point is to prevent problems before they start, not just to tell the toddler "No" after he's already done it. This is important in terms of building safe habits for your child. I can almost guarantee that toddlers will go back to the "no, no, no" behaviors as soon as they have an opportunity. Unless you are able to watch your toddler every single minute, it's important to monitor what's going into her repertoire.
- What you allow your child to practice doing with your dog is what he will develop as habitual behaviors with dogs in general. This is partially why so many children are bitten by dogs owned by friends and family. Other dogs may not be as forgiving as your dog has been. Early childhood habits and attitudes towards dogs form the foundation for influencing choices throughout childhood. What you do now may prevent a bite later!
- Do not laugh at or respond to things your toddler does with your dog other than casually removing the opportunity to continue the behavior. A common example is throwing food to the dog from the highchair.
- Does your dog get agitated at certain times of the day or with certain things your toddler does? Teach older toddlers how to notice when the dog is upset and to STOP what they are doing.
- Remind toddlers often that it is not their job to make the dog do anything or stop doing anything. Three and four year olds like to be little police officers!

Basics for the Dog's Side of Things

- All dogs have a goodwill/tolerance "bank" account. No one knows the starting balance, but we can keep track of the withdrawals and deposits along the way. Every unpleasant encounter is a withdrawal. Is your toddler writing checks on your dog's account? Are you sure to be making deposits by actively reinforcing your dog with praise and treats whenever something annoying happens? If not, you may see a bounced check in the form of a growl or snap.
- How's your training foundation? What behaviors could your dog learn or brush up on that would make things easier with a toddler? Training gives you the communication tools for teaching your dog what you WANT him to do. Think: "Wouldn't it be cool if my dog did _____" rather than "I wish my dog would stop doing _____."
- Set yourself and your dog up for success! Are your dog's basic needs for good nutrition, medical care, physical and mental exercise and time with the family being met?
- Dogs benefit from a little time away, too! Quick walks can do a world of good.

- Many dogs will not leave to be by themselves. Don't assume your dog is OK just because he's apparently choosing to stick around amid a lot of chaos. This is especially true when dogs are in a comfortable resting spot.
- Why not consider a fun dog training class to reconnect with your dog (and get out of the house yourself!)?
- Toddlers that come to visit are almost like starting over for your dog. Do not expect the same tolerance and be prepared to reinforce heavily.
- Are you wearing "Lassie Glasses" and missing important warning signs in your dog's behavior?
- Dogs pick up on YOUR stress whether you want them to or not. What can you do to make things easier for yourself? That will help your dog and child, too.

Real Life Examples

"What do I do when..."

- Dog is barking and driving me crazy
- Dog grabs toddler's toy
- Toddler bounces ball off dog's head (or similar disruptive thing)
- Child is walking around with food and dog is trying to get it
- Dog knocks over child
- Toddler throws food on the floor
- Dog growls at child
- Toddler hits dog
- Toddler has tantrum and freaks out the dog b/c he's hitting ME
- Toddler is obsessed with dog's water bowl (or toy basket)
- Etc.

For any situation, your response is going to follow the same basic pattern. The idea is to remain focused on the future. "This time" has already happened and can't be changed, but you CAN influence how things turn out next time.

- 1) Remain calm. Respond as if you are well in control of the situation. Reacting by yelling or getting upset only serves to add emotional fuel to the fire and actually make it more likely that the problem will be repeated. **Model the behavior you'd like your child to show when things go wrong in her own life.**
- 2) Was it bad for your dog? Immediately make eye contact, praise your dog and give him some treats. Give enough reinforcement to your dog to more than make up for whatever withdrawal just happened. Do not yell at your toddler.
- 3) Was it bad for your toddler? Remain neutral towards your dog, calm and steady with your toddler until she calms down. Emphasize that YOU will handle things. Do not yell at your dog.

- 4) Analyze the situation. Can you identify a training gap and fix it? Did your management break down? Are you set up for success with both toddler and dog? Do these problems happen at the same time each day? Anyone tired or hungry?
- 5) Make a plan for how to prevent in the future (training or management).

Fostering Friendship Between Dog and Toddler

When?

- Child is between four and five years old
- Child shows an interest AND can reliably follow directions and rules
- Dog already knows how to take treats gently without being reminded
- Dog is already good at a few basic behaviors or tricks. Good ones are Sit, Down, Wait and Come. (Do not allow toddler to work on "Shake".)

How?

- Under direct parental supervision. Parent is responsible for both dog and toddler. Expect to be actively coaching both. Have some treats handy to reinforce dog for hanging in there with child!
- In set "sessions", not something toddler is encouraged to do on his own
- Consider picking up some "gear" for your toddler - treat bag, his own treats, etc. This is fun for kids and makes it easier to limit "training" to when you are available to supervise (and get his gear down from its high/hiding place).
- When first teaching gentle touches, teach "Pet, pet, pet...All Done...Walk Away". Toddlers like to say "All Done" to the dog (even though we know it's meant for them). Teach touches that are already familiar and pleasant to your dog. Good choices are petting shoulder area on the closest side or stroking from top of head to middle of back.
- Start referring to dog as "your dog," as in, "Let your dog out."

What? - Provide Relief

- Best first choices are things that provide relief to your dog. Stuff like filling the water bowl when dog is thirsty (can set up after a walk) - child fills from a watering can vs. carrying water bowl. Other things are opening door to let dog out or in (if child already opens doors) or being the one to give permission with the food bowl.
- Caution on toddler "helping" with feeding: involving a toddler usually means the feeding takes a lot longer. This can be frustrating and annoying to the dog and have the opposite effect of fostering friendship if the toddler's involvement means that it takes *longer* to get food!

What? - Build Communication

- All training is communication and what child doesn't want to learn to talk to the animals?
- Allow child to cue easy behaviors for the dog and reinforce with treats. This helps the dog learn to listen and respond to the child and to anticipate this sort of relationship in future interactions. It makes the child more familiar and predictable and thus, safer to be around.
- Play games as a family! Hide and Seek recalls, jumping over things together, calling dog's name, teaching tricks, etc.
- Parents can start dog on clicker training and incorporate into toddler sessions.
- NOTE: In no way is training expected to "show the dog who's boss" or make the dog "respect" child as you may read in older, dominance-based training books. That is a dangerous way for dogs and toddlers to relate to each other. Remember, this is the time for building a foundation and beginning to foster friendship. Set your expectations accordingly.

Training Methods Have Come a Long Way - Are Yours "Kid-Safe"?

The Basics

Modern dog training techniques have little in common with the old days of "military style" training with choke chains and lots of yelling and yanking on the dog to make him do things. Trainers and pet owners around the world have found that you just don't have to do these things to effectively motivate and communicate with ANY animal, let alone the animals we have as our friends.

"Dominance/alpha theory" as applied to our relationships with pet dogs has been questioned for quite some time and is falling out of favor in the scientific community. There is little substantive scientific basis for using wolf pack theory as a basis for communicating with our pet dogs. Plus, it's not that useful for fostering friendships between children and dogs. Kids will never win under those rules.

In addition, any training method involving the use of force or intimidation carries unique risks to young children - physical, emotional and developmental. **Why take risks with your child when you can use benevolent, no-force methods to achieve even better training results?**

Physical Safety Concerns

- It's only a matter of time before your toddler mimics your behavior with your dog. This is how kids learn. What is YOUR toddler learning? If your toddler is learning to point at the dog, grab the dog roughly by the collar, shout at the dog or even more dangerous actions, she is going to be at risk of a serious bite when the dog says, "Enough!" The bite may come from *your* dog; it may come from a dog at a friend's house.
- If your dog has been raised with the philosophy that "might makes right," he may have less inhibition about doing his own "corrections" to your child when she inevitably does something annoying.
- If your training approach focuses on suppressing behavior by punishing the dog, please keep in mind that you cannot predict when this behavior will "bubble up" again. The dog has not learned the skills he needs to manage this situation and will not know what else to do.
- A specific danger from punishing or "correcting" dogs for those initial lower-level aggressive responses like growling or air snapping is that you just might see the next level come without warning. Keep punishing the warning signs and you may end up seeing a serious bite come seemingly out of nowhere.

Effects on Small Children - Emotional and Developmental

- "Problem behaviors" from our pets are opportunities to teach our children how to approach problem solving with empathy and compassion towards the feelings and needs of others. Consider: "Betty didn't go on her walk today so she has a lot of extra energy - let's throw the ball for her" vs "Goshdarnit! STOP JUMPING! NO - BAD DOG!" This is also an opportunity to focus on the importance of paying attention and taking responsibility: "It's not the dog's fault we left the sausage on the table. Next time, we will clear the table before going out to play."
- Your behavior with your dog shows your child what you are capable of. Your child may reasonably deduce that your same reactions are available for how she will be treated. Will your child be afraid of you based on how she sees you react to your dog's mistakes?
- What are you demonstrating about how to handle situations that do not go your way? Your behavior with your dog is a model to your child on what to do when things do not go HIS way - generalized to all kinds of situations, possibly for a lifetime.
- Many children form strong connections and feel "allied" with family pets. It can be devastating and alienating for children to see them treated harshly.
- What do kids learn about the permanence of family members when they hear parents yelling at "that damn dog?" Besides contributing to a throw-away view of animals, kids have to wonder whether those same rules apply to them. Will very young children think parents might want to "get rid of" them someday, too?

Effect on Parents of Venting Anger

- Physiological studies on the effects of anger - particularly lashing out when you are angry - showed the surprising conclusion that it is beneficial to your health to keep your cool.
- From Authentic Happiness by Dr. Martin Seligman: "...*the angriest (in the study) had roughly five times as much heart disease as the least angry ones. In another study, men who had the highest risk of later heart attacks were just the ones with more explosive voices, more irritation when forced to wait, and more outwardly directed anger. In experimental studies, when male students bottle up their anger, blood pressure goes down, and it goes up if they decide to express their feelings. Anger expression raises blood pressure for women as well. **In contrast, friendliness in reaction to trespass lowers it.**" (my emphasis)*
- Next time your dog drives you up a wall, give YOURSELF a break and let it go! Think instead of the heart-healthy habits your example is instilling in your child!

What to Do Instead

- Modern reinforcement-based training gives you the tools to teach your dog what you *want* him to do. No longer are owners limited to attempts to communicate "no". Teach your dog what you would like him to do instead and circumvent all the nagging and scolding.
- Dog trainers use the term "Management" to describe behavior solutions that involve no actual training! Set your family up for success by preventing problems from starting or escalating. Management doesn't change the dog - it changes the situation. Management is not failsafe, however, so do not plan to rely solely on things like baby gates and closed doors to keep a dangerous dog away from a baby or young child.
- Respond calmly when something goes wrong; act as if it's no big deal as you model the calm assurance of someone who is on top of things and won't be riled. This is also more effective for getting what you want - too much excitement actually reinforces unwanted behavior and/or makes it harder to catch the dog!
- Avoid reprimanding the dog in the presence of your toddler or young child. This is so important to avoid future problems where a toddler will mimic your actions or possibly learn to provoke the dog as a way to stir up some attention or excitement.
- Specific to dog and baby/toddler interactions, supervise to proactively prevent unsafe encounters and goodwill "withdrawals". Remember that supervising and preventing means it doesn't happen in the first place. Almost every single fatal dog attack involving a child or infant **began without an adult present** - meaning that the child and dog somehow ended up alone together. **Never rely on the self-control and moral reasoning powers of an animal or young child!**

Dogs and Toddlers Meeting in Public

Overview

Imagine you are out with your husband minding your own business. Along comes a man who asks your husband if he can kiss you - and your husband says he can! Then, when you push the guy away, your husband yells at you and says, "He was only being friendly and trying to show you his love." Yikes - that's a creepy example - but is it really THAT different for our dogs when we ask them to tolerate uncomfortable touches from toddlers?

What Parents Need to Know

- Practice simply observing dogs with your toddler. Stop a little distance away from the dog and just watch. Point out interesting things to notice - colors, what the dog is doing, what kind of dog, etc. Approach the sight of a dog as if it were an animal in the zoo vs. an amusement park attraction. This gives you time to assess the safety of the situation and prevents your child from developing the habit of running up to strange dogs.
- ****Most dog owners do not have sufficient influence over their dogs' behavior choices and they overestimate their dogs' interest in being touched by a toddler.**
- Just because an owner says, "Yes, your toddler may pet my dog" doesn't mean it's a good idea. I've known more than one owner who was holding his/her breath and hoping nothing bad would happen. The social pressure to say yes is so strong that it overwhelms common sense.
- Talk to dog owners! Say things like, "Hi! Your dog is very beautiful. We are enjoying watching her walk with you." You can have a "meeting" that does not involve touching. Do not ask to touch the dog! If the owner offers to allow your toddler to touch, you can assess the situation and decide appropriately:
- Do NOT touch: dogs on prong or shock collars, dogs whose owners jerk on the leash or yell or speak sharply to the dog, dogs barking AT your child, dogs backing away, dogs that stare at your child, dogs straining at the leash to come visit.
- Use CAUTION* with: dogs on choke chains, dogs wearing head halters, dogs who do not look at your child. (*means I would not allow my kids to touch)
- CONSIDER visiting: dogs who maintain a loose leash, respond easily to their owner and remain calm and relaxed as you approach. It's usually a good sign if the owner is prepared with treats to make it a positive experience for the dog.
- Can always ask to see any tricks as a fun way for an interested owner to show off her dog!
- What do you do if you decide to allow your toddler to visit? You or the dog's owner are between the dog's head and the child at all times. Slide your hand along with your child's so you can prevent any grabbing or pulling. Remember: Pet, pet, pet - All Done.
- Expect dogs to want to lick toddler's faces - can knock kids down or make kids cry.

- If toddler is already obsessed with dogs, realize that this is no different than any other toddler "obsession". What if your toddler were obsessed with basketballs (as mine was)? Would you allow him to run onto courts and grab basketballs whenever he sees them? No, you would manage to deal with the tantrums until your toddler matured enough to watch calmly.
- Explain to toddlers that it's important to give dogs space.
- Toddlers learn from their parents. Be nonchalant when you see dogs. It's OK to point them out but resist the urge to get your toddler all excited. He or she will come to love dogs in the proper time.
- Tell your child he may touch dogs with you when he's five years old. This may help in situations where other people offer their dogs to your toddler to touch (even when the dogs are out of control!).
- Never allow your child to go up to people with dogs by himself. Always, always, always be right there with your child.
- Special Points for Loose dogs:
 - Watch out for staring at your toddler
 - Do not let toddler "toddle" around loose dogs. Pick up your child.
 - Plan to intercept dogs if they approach
 - Tell the owner to call his/her dog and put him on leash
 - Leave the park if you are uncomfortable with the situation
 - Call Animal Services if there is a leash law issue

What Dog Owners Need to Know

- **KNOW THIS:** Toddlers can be rough on dogs. "Affection" takes the form of too tight hugs, trying to kiss, grabbing at paws to shake, etc. Young toddlers often pull fur, grab and pinch - it's just what they do. **PLAN:** Given this, how will you ensure a good experience for your dog? Feel free to say "no" if you are not prepared or are not interested. There's a lot of social pressure to allow your dog to be petted by toddlers so some owners come up with convenient lies! "My dog doesn't feel well today" or "It's not my dog."
- Expect to have to be the one to tell the toddler "No" and plan to be direct and clear in your instruction. "I'm sorry but you may not touch my dog today." Use a "stop" hand signal with younger toddlers.
- Always an available option to simply turn and walk your dog away if you see an out-of-control toddler.
- If you want to allow toddler to pet your dog, make sure the parent is present and engaged.
- If there are several children, only allow one at a time to pet your dog (if you choose to allow petting).

- Your hands should be on your dog the whole time the toddler is petting or close enough to touch. Your hands are comforting and familiar and your touch allows you to feel for any tension in your dog's body. You can also prevent toddler grabbing.
- If all is going well after several seconds, end the encounter. Either finish your walk or you can offer to show a trick or two!
- Regarding treats, DO carry treats with you to reinforce tolerance and to make deposits. However, NEVER fool yourself into using treats to "cover up" for a dog who is acutely uncomfortable with small children (or who has a history of growling around food). The attraction of the treat can mask warning signs and you may see a snap or growl when the treats are no longer there.

Helping Dogs Be More Comfortable/Safer With Toddlers

Do These Dogs Look Happy?

(Review of photos in class)

Here's a list of common body language/behavior differences between stressed dogs and happy dogs. Most dogs will not show ALL these signs so look for a predominance of happy vs. stressed. Also, an important sign of stress in your own dog is a *change* from how he or she normally looks or acts.

Stressed Dogs

- Move very fast or remain unnaturally still or frozen
- "Wild eyes" darting around or eyes pointedly looking away
- Might be barking
- Tense body, held stiffly
- Does not respond to owner cues
- May refuse to take/eat treats
- Panting, even drooling
- Tail tucked or wagging frantically
- Ears pulled back
- Growling

Relaxed/Happy Dogs

- Move normally, relaxed speed
- Respond to praise with wags and eye contact
- Can still do behaviors and may even offer known behaviors
- Look the same as they did before the toddler interaction started
- Will look at the child (as if open to communication)
- If excited, will be "dancing" vs. jumping and lunging
- Ears falling naturally

Notice that many of the behaviors of a stressed dog lead to "correction" from owners. This makes matters worse!

Allow a stressed dog the opportunity to calm down before even thinking about allowing a toddler to interact or be close to the dog. In fact, the absence of "looking happy" is an early warning sign in itself for some dogs.

How to Calm a Dog

- First step: Calm Yourself! Breathe deeply and slowly. Allow your hands to be quiet and gentle on your dog.
- Do some Calming Signals: Yawn, look away, lick your lips, look down at the ground or crouch down in interest, turn away, etc. Kids are great at calming signals!

- Give the dog some space. Stop whatever's going on when the dog appears stressed. Heed the early warning signals. Being "heard" is very reassuring to dogs.
- Offer treats for effort or for steps in the right direction even if it's not exactly what you want. Treats can change the whole picture for a dog and take the pressure right off.
- Play some *Canine Lullabies* (available for sale at the San Diego Humane Society)
- Teach dog to go get a comforting toy when he's stressed
- Do some tricks your dog knows well.
- Praise your dog just for being a good dog.
- Stand in-between your dog and the object of his concern.
- Teach your dog to respond to whispered cues and use these cues in stressful situations.
- Take your dog out of the situation.

How Do You Safely Socialize Dogs to Children?

The first step is to keep your dog safe and protect him from bad experiences, keeping in mind that your *DOG* gets to decide what's a good or bad experience irrespective of the intent of the toddlers. "Socialization" comes from positive experiences and represents the dog's conclusion that a particular situation is safe and normal and nothing to be concerned about. Socialization does not happen through repeated exposure to scary or unpleasant things in hopes that the dog will just get used to it.

The next step is to build a strong foundation of attention behaviors. This is so the dog will know what to do when he's unsure. The answer will be to look at you and check in for guidance.

Exposure to a wide variety of **other** novel situations (i.e., not toddlers) will give you and your dog a chance to practice and to build your dog's confidence in checking in with you and feeling safe.

If dog is a "blank slate" with toddlers:

- Still practice first with other novel stimuli. At the very least, you will see whether there is any difference when children are involved.
- Arrange controlled experiences with calm children who will follow directions
- Do some of the "fostering friendship" suggestions
- Realize that none of this will make the dog "like" bad treatment from other children later on. Nothing will make a dog enjoy being treated poorly!

If dog is already unhappy with toddlers:

- Do more with other situations; give your dog a break from child interactions.
- **Expect to work with a qualified trainer and/or do a LOT of self-study to understand aggressive behavior.** This is not something that can be covered in a few tips.
- Remember to breathe and be calm yourself!
- Always start working at a distance where your dog notices but does not get worried. Use double rewards of treat AND leaving the situation.
- Don't expect your dog to suddenly "like" toddlers. Goal should be to increase your dog's comfort zone or goodwill/tolerance buffer in order to get by safely in everyday situations.

If your unhappy dog **must** live with a toddler:

- Pay particular attention to the following section on red flags and warning signs and plan to consult with a qualified trainer.
- Must be able to guarantee that the toddler will not mess with the dog
- Family must be committed to positive reinforcement-based training
- Look at the dog's bite thresholds (what makes him growl/bite), bite inhibition (how hard might he bite?), size and power of the dog and any other history of aggressive behavior as key factors in deciding whether to take a chance living with a toddler.
- Remember that your toddler will grow to be a child and your dog may not be as uncomfortable as during the toddler stage.

Recognizing Warning Signs and Red Flags

The "red flag" examples below are frequently associated with serious dog/child problems--where there is injury or threat to the toddler and/or the dog is re-homed or euthanized. Training, management and your relationship with your dog will affect how serious these problems may be in your situation. Just knowing the potential for problems puts you miles ahead of other parents and ensures more effective vigilance. Red flags don't necessarily mean an unworkable situation, but they do require serious family discussion and a solid plan for resolution and problem prevention. Expect to enlist the help of a qualified trainer.

NOTE: Review this list with the dogs of friends and family members in mind, too. If you have a concern, do not risk your child's safety out of fear of offending someone!

- Dog does not live in the house, particularly if chained**
- Unneutered male dog**
- Dog used for protection or guard work**
- Not friendly with children/bad experience with children**
- Little or no basic training, especially leash walking and barking
- Use of correction-based training or alpha/dominance techniques
- The child's primary caregiver has insufficient interest or skill to safely manage dog and toddler
- Does not like certain types of touch: _____
- Not friendly with visitors to the house
- Will growl or bite over food bowl, rawhides, bones or other objects
- Painful or annoying medical condition: _____
- Objects to being moved off furniture, disturbed when resting, etc.
- Not all family members "like" the dog
- You would describe your dog as "Hard to read"
- Sensitive, nervous dog
- Dog is "protective" or "possessive" of certain family member(s)
- Rough play style
- Shows dissatisfaction by growling, snapping or biting, for example: when you try to "make" the dog do something he doesn't want to do
- Past history of ANY other aggressive behavior towards people or other animals
- _____
- _____

(Bold items have been associated with infant or toddler fatalities. Refer to *Fatal Dog Attacks, The Stories Behind the Statistics* by Karen Delise.)

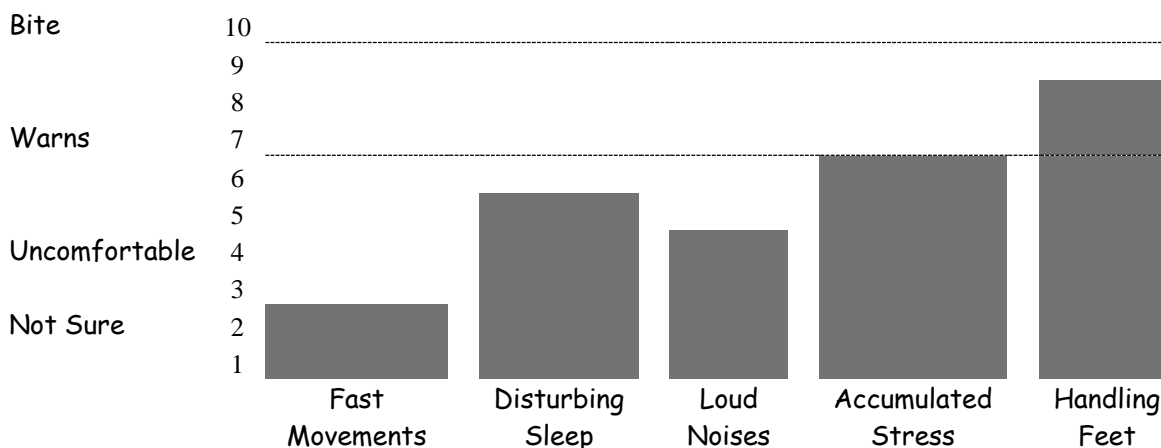
Understanding Thresholds - The "Perfect Storm" for a Bite

Rather than label individual dogs as "biters" or "non-biters," consider that every dog has the potential to bite if stretched to his limit. Just as people have different flash points

for their tempers and different things that "set them off" and different ways of expressing their angst, dogs are individuals who will react in their own ways to situations they find stressful. And...having a toddler in the house can be very stressful.

Remember, dogs don't bite "out of the blue" - it just seems that way sometimes when warning signs are missed. Remember the story of the straw that broke the camel's back? Refer to the following illustration to see how a typical bite can happen.

Bite Thresholds Example:



Key Factors

- How hard will dog bite?
- Number of potential triggers to manage
- How quickly does dog go from 1 to 10?
- Presence of accumulated stress (Goodwill bank account)
- How do you know when dog is uncomfortable or approaching a trigger point? Calming Signals; signs of stress. Plus, "okay" is not OK! Goal is a happy, comfortable, relaxed dog. Know what this looks like!
- When is it just too dangerous for a young child?

Play it Safe - What to Do

- Learn how to help dog "back down" the levels
- Teach alternate reactions; actively reinforce tolerance
- Build dog's general repertoire and level of responsiveness
- Know that correction/punishment can mask a growing problem; underlying issue is not "fixed" (See Training Methods section)
- Get help!

APPENDIX: Where to Go From Here?

San Diego Humane Society FREE Behavior Helpline

- 619-299-7012, Ext. 2244 for any sort of pet behavior question or problem. Trainer will call back to discuss. Also lots of classes for family dogs; private consultations and behavior evaluations also available.

Books and Videos

- *The Power of Positive Training* by Pat Miller - step-by step dog training book
- *Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline* by Becky Bailey, Phd. - a parenting book so helpful for training the toddler side of things!
- *The Cautious Canine* by Patricia McConnell - Booklet for fearful and reactive dogs.
- *Click to Calm* by Emma Parsons - Written for dogs uncomfortable with other dogs, but applies equally to dogs and toddlers.
- *Clicker Puppy* (DVD) by Karen Pryor - Children are doing all the training for young pups.
- *Take a Bow, Wow!* by Broitman and Lippman - Videos on all kinds of tricks!

Internet Resources

- You are welcome to e-mail me with any questions or concerns at enjoydog@san.rr.com. I offer a limited number of private consultations and will be adding hands-on dog training classes specifically for expectant parents and other classes to help preschool age children foster friendships with their dogs. Send me an e-mail if you'd like advance notice for any of these programs. Also, I will have a website up in a few months: <http://www.dogsbabieskids.com> (not ready yet, though!).
- <http://www.clickersolutions.com> - Great website with helpful e-mail list, tips and interesting articles on many different training challenges. See also <http://www.clickertraining.com> for fascinating articles on real life applications of scientific training.
- <http://www.apdt.com> - Association of Pet Dog Trainers website has a listing of trainers throughout the country. **MOST** APDT trainers use positive reinforcement methods but this is not a requirement of membership; use good judgment when interviewing trainers. You may also call the SDHS Behavior Helpline to discuss training recommendations.
- <http://www.yahooogroups.com> - Look for the group called "AgBeh" for a discussion forum on aggressive behavior in dogs. As always, use your good judgment before following any old suggestion, but this group is usually well-moderated by an experienced, reinforcement-based trainer and can be great place to learn more about aggressive behavior.

APPENDIX: Nutrition Information

As mentioned in the materials, diet plays an important role in your dog's overall well-being and behavior, particularly regarding aggressive behaviors. There are tons of internet resources on nutrition and references to lots of books with more information on the subject. The *Whole Dog Journal* provides independent name brand food reviews on an annual basis. Refer to <http://www.whole-dog-journal.com> for the full articles and analysis.

Brands that have made the *Whole Dog Journal's* list of **Recommended** brands for several years running:

- California Natural - Chicken and Rice
- Canidae
- Flint River Ranch Dry Water
- Solid Gold
- Natural Balance Dry Dog Food
- Innova
- Avo-derm

Brands on the *Whole Dog Journal's* "**Not Recommended**" list include:

- Diamond's Premium
- Eukanuba Adult
- Iams
- Nature's Recipe
- Nutro Max
- Purina One
- Beniful
- Science Diet Canine Maintenance
- Pedigree Prime

For further questions, consult with your veterinarian for a referral to a veterinary nutrition specialist.