Children & Pets: Building Bonds

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There has always been a special bond between children and animals. Keep this special bond successfully alive during the holidays, the time of year that your pet and visiting children - or visiting pets and your children - will interact.

Dogs and kids

Socializing dogs to children is best done when the dog is between 5 weeks and 5 months of age. Unless you have a dog that just doesn't like kids (and there are some out there), it is never too late to train him to be child-friendly.

To begin the socialization process, encourage your children to gently play with the puppy or dog and to bring over peers so he or she learns to get along with youngsters. If you do not have children, invite neighborhood kids over to interact.

Never underestimate the power of puppy or beginning obedience classes. In these classes your canine companion will begin learning the basics of "sit," "stay," "down," and the very important "off" commands, as well as other canine manners.

Take advantage of your dog's natural pack instincts. This means that all members of the human race are above the dog in the "pack" hierarchy, and that includes children.

Here are some pack-instinct actions that speak dog language louder than words:

- When your dog and any child enter or exit a room or house together, always make sure that the child enters or exits before the dog or pup.
- Feed the child (and the family) before you feed the pup.
- Make sure the child acts confidently when petting the dog: stroke along the shoulders in a straight line.
- Invite children of all ages to play with the pup. He'll learn to be confident around children and that children are fun.

These tips can help your household - as well as any households you visit with your pet - to have a happy and safe holiday.

Teach your children well. . .

- Children should respect that the pet is a living creature and not a toy.
- Don't let them grab things away from the pet.
- Be gentle, especially with little puppies and kittens.
- No running up to strange dogs, or staring them down - these are challenges in dog language.
- Leave the pet alone while he is eating.
- ALWAYS supervise. You should never leave a pet alone with a child.

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