

Introducing Dogs & Children

Children and foster dogs can form incredible bonds when supervised appropriately and taught to build relationships with mutual respect.



A child should never be left alone with a foster animal, even if the child is left alone with an owned pet. Only adult supervision is acceptable. Children and foster dogs cannot be left alone with older siblings under 18.

Items to discuss with children prior to bringing a dog home

1. I will not stare into my foster dog's eyes.
2. The crate is my foster dog's safe space. I will not tease or bother my foster dog when he is in the crate. I will not stick my fingers through my foster dog's crate.
3. I will not touch or play with my foster dog while he is eating.
4. I will not touch or startle my foster dog when he is sleeping.
5. I will not pull on my foster dog's ears, tail or other parts of their body. I will not hit my foster dog or squeeze them. I will not pull my foster dog by their collar.
6. I understand that while I might like hugs, I should not hug my foster dog or any other dog that I have just met.

Adults should be aware of children's behaviors that can appear threatening to a foster dog. Children should not bother dogs who are eating, playing with bones, sleeping, or in their "safe" space. Children should not pull, push, or poke the animal with fingers or other objects. They should not swing toys or other items near the animal, chase the animal, ride them or put any significant weight on them.

If you have boisterous young children, it is important to give the dog a safe space that they can always retreat to. This can be an open crate covered by a blanket or sheet that is "off limits" to children.



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From the Dog's Perspective

The foster dog has been through many changes and has had their life turned upside down. They need to trust that adults will not allow children to make them uncomfortable. They look to adults for guidance and help. If they do not receive that help, they may try to stop the behavior by reacting in ways that can hurt or scare children.

It is important to remember that any dog who will “let kids do anything” is never set up for success. Even if the dog seems to tolerate intrusive behavior for now, it can affect the dog's perception of children and can often lead to a dog “snapping” when they have eventually had enough.

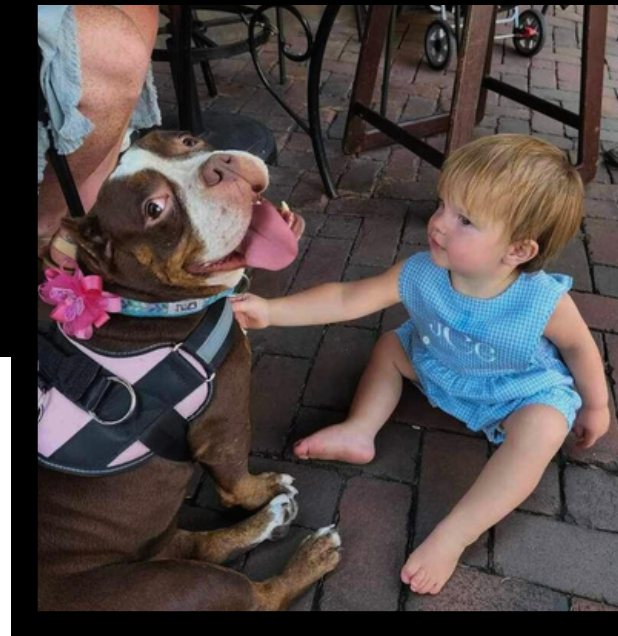
Often, we expect animals to be docile creatures and we do not consider that they deserve to be comfortable and safe from intrusion where they live. We would not expect a human to take kindly to another human grabbing our arm or leg while we are resting, so we should not expect that out of animals.



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Tips on Positive Introductions

Every dog will be different and introducing a 6 week old puppy will be very different from introducing a senior dog with vision loss. Even if a dog has been around children in the past, it will take some time for the dog to build a relationship with a new child.

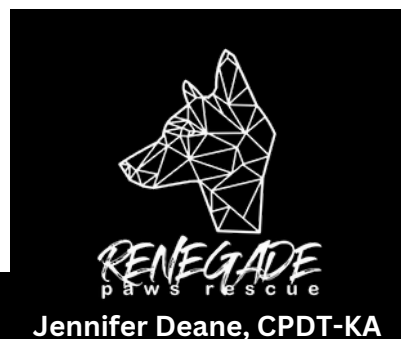
The first time meeting a dog, have the child standing still. Sometimes staring at dogs in the eyes can be intimidating, so have the child focus on the dog's feet.

The child can toss treats to the dog until the dog feels comfortable approaching. Do not force the child or the dog to interact if they do not want to. If the dog and child feel comfortable (and the supervising adult is confident in the interaction), the child can offer treats out of an open palm. Remind young children to remain still as rapid, jerky movements can scare the dog.

If the dog is jumping on the child or is very excited (and is scaring the child), have the child stop giving treats and turn around or walk away until the dog is calm.

When the child and dog have built some rapport, the child can gently scratch the dog under the chin. Many dogs do not like being pet over their heads.

“I tell kids to pretend like they are a tree when meeting dogs. It helps them to understand they need to stand still.” - Jennifer Deane, CPDT-KA



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