

THE LARGE DOG & CHILDREN

1 Do not allow the child, however small, to tease the dog either physically or verbally. The child who shrieks and leaps incessantly beside a nervous puppy may drive him to snap out in fear as quickly as the child who grabs its tail or sits on it. If a child is persistent, remove him. Do not even once allow him to continue.

2 Do not let a small child pick up or carry a puppy. Puppies like babies are afraid of falling. They will often squirm and fight to free themselves. If successful, they may break a leg. (Vet bills are not cheap). If panicked they may even bite. Remember, in this case, it is not the puppy's fault but yours for allowing the situation to progress to the point where the puppy can no longer cope with it. Encourage the child to get down on the puppy's level, ie, the floor, for fun and games. They can play all they like without either one getting hurt and the puppy is free to move away when he has had enough. A child may not realize the fact that he has inadvertently cornered the pup and set in motion a series of instinctive behavior mechanisms.

3 Do not expect the pup to absorb endless punishment in the form of constant noise or teasing. He will learn to defend himself unless he has some place to go such as a crate, bed, corner or run where he can go when he does not want to be disturbed. Make certain that everyone understands that he is not to be disturbed there and then make sure he is not. He will come back out when he is ready.

4 Do not leave your dog unattended in the yard with small children no matter how trustworthy you may think your dog is. Although Bullmastiffs enjoy children more so than many other breeds, they are not a miracle dog and must be treated the same as any other large dog when around children. A dog may not mean to hurt a child, yet it usually seems to turn out the other way.

5 Do not buy a dog until you have a fence for him outside where he can be safe from a) Teasing by small children b) Dognappers c) Stray dogs d) Mishaps on the road. Dogs which are tied become defensive, bored and irritably aggressive. A fence is convenient, durable and safe.

6 Enlist the help of your child in the training of the dog. It will increase his sense of self importance and his concern and knowledge of animal behavior. "If Max wakes up, take him outside right away so he won't make a mistake in the house. You watch, Billy, in case I don't notice, OK?"

7 Do insist that neighborhood children who come to play abide by the same rules that you expect of your own. "Stuart, we don't hit Max with sticks. Here, throw it for him instead. Look how happy he is now! I think he likes you." If Stuart delivers a sly kick instead, stop him. (A little knowledge of gentle collar control is useful with children, as well as dogs.) Put the dog in his run or crate and see to it that Stuart leaves him alone. If Stuart is uncooperative, send him home, nicely but firmly. If you get angry, he will be angry and defiant, too. When he learns that he simply cannot play at your house if he continues, he will probably stop if he feels that you basically like him and that if it is only his specific action that you dislike. Here again, take two minutes to give the child and the dog something constructive to do. Let the child have the opportunity to receive a warm response from the dog and he may become your staunchest ally. "Hey Mrs. Jones, I just saw Max down the street. Someone must have left the gate open."

8 Do teach the dog to sit before he is given food or a treat, and to wait for an okay to take it. The Bullmastiff pup will grow quicker than your toddler. If the sit-stay becomes automatic, you will find him sitting before a baby with food, hoping but never touching. Parents of visiting children are less than understanding when your 75 lb pup grabs for a cookie and their child goes tumbling. Many fears of dogs are traced back to just such an incident. They will not only remember that it was a large dog but also that it was a Bullmastiff. Never allow a small child to take the pup's food or bone as this could create a problem later when the pup has grown into adulthood.

9 Do give your Bullmastiff simple obedience training so that he will be spared random scoldings and confusion. "DOWN" and "SIT" are pleasant commands to a pup if they are rewarded with a brushing or a tummy rub by his young master.

10 Don't expect the dog to be patient with your child unless you have taught him to be. He will learn not to defend himself if he realizes that you consistently rescue him before he gets hurt. Conversely you must teach the small child to be patient with the dog. Don't reinforce his fears if he inadvertently takes a tumble by telling him what a big, mean naughty dog that is. Be matter of fact, pick him up, staunch the blood and say "Here, help me teach Max to be more gentle." Help the child learn to cope with the situation, reinforce his confidence with small things he can handle, and be there to handle a situation that proves to be more than he can control.

11 Do not expose an innocent passerby to your dog's protective tendencies. Do not leave your Bullmastiff and your small child outside a store and expect them to take care of each other. Some well intentioned stranger may be bitten. Even though your dog may do exactly what you wish him to do under different circumstances, he will be the one put down while you face an expensive lawsuit. Never assume that the public understands dog behavior. The fool who puts his hands inside your car or the boy who pokes at the dog through a fence obviously do not, but you may end up paying the doctor bills.

12 Do increase your child's sense of responsibility and pride of achievement by letting him help as much as he can. Do not expect him to know what to do. Guide him. "Here is Max's dish, Billy, tell him to come. that's it, now tell him to sit. (You help Max sit. He is just learning that he must also obey Billy). Good, now put the dish down. Tell him okay. There, see how nicely he obeyed you!" Billy will leave with the distinct impression that he is the world's smartest dog trainer and that his dog is the smartest dog on the block.