

# Kids and Dogs

## There are about 170 different breeds of dog in South Australia and an almost infinite number of mixtures of those breeds.

Every dog breed was developed for a specific purpose and shows typical character traits. The dog's parents, early experiences, training and socialization are all critically important but the selection of the right breed of dog for your circumstance is a good starting point to ensure a valued family pet.

Most dog attacks reported to hospitals, doctors and councils, occur in the dog owners' own home and occur to the dog owners' children or their friends. If there are young children in the family, it is very important that the dog is a suitable breed and is healthy and well socialised. Children must be taught how to interact with the dog and not tease, hurt or provoke. Similarly, the dog must be taught how to interact with children and to walk away when the children do something wrong. Never leave children and dogs together without adult supervision.

Dogs that are not used to children can be fearful. When visitors with children arrive, the dog should be confined in a secure area. When everyone is settled and comfortable, and if the dog is usually friendly with strangers, the dog and the guests can meet.

The owner of the dog is responsible for its behaviour. The local council or the Police can take action, if a dog attacks a person or another animal.

For more practical information about choosing and looking after a pet, ask for a copy of the Dog and Cat Management Board's "Your Dog, Your Cat Owners Manual" available at council offices, some vets and pet shops or go to [www.GoodDogSA.com](http://www.GoodDogSA.com)

### **Obedience training.**

A dog needs to be taught what is expected of it and when it has overstepped the mark. Obedience training teaches the dog to stop whatever it is doing and obey when certain signals and commands are made. Dogs are pack animals and they need to understand their place in our social structures. Obedience classes also teach dog owners how to train their dogs and are excellent venues to teach dogs how to behave around strange dogs and people. It is also a good place to meet new friends for you and your dog.

### **Socialisation.**

Dogs have to learn how to behave appropriately around other dogs and people. Dogs sniff trees and posts for a reason. This helps them identify other dogs in the area as well as know how long it's been since they last passed the tree or post. Like humans, dogs are social creatures and enjoy being able to go for a walk and smell the smells of the neighbourhood. Walking a dog also helps to maintain the health and fitness of the owner and it's a lot of fun.

### **Teach children and dogs, how to behave around each other.**

Teach children to be gentle with dogs and never leave young children unsupervised with any dog. Do not allow children to approach or pat a dog that is sleeping or eating and do not permit children to feed dogs from their own plates or the dinner table. It is important discipline for both children and dogs to know the difference between "people food" and "dog food". Dogs that beg at the table, or steal food, become a nuisance at home. Do not give dogs bones or other high value chews when children are present. A dog may bite if a child goes near a bone or other chew which has been left lying around. Children who interfere with a dog that is eating, risk being bitten.

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## **Children should:**

- never approach strange dogs without the permission of the owners.
- approach dogs slowly, with the back of the hand extended.
- make a fist and allow the dog to sniff it (so that fingers are protected if the dog nips).
- stroke dogs gently on the chest, shoulder or under the chin – should never pat the head.
- stand still if being approached by a strange dog – try not to squeal or jump.
- avoid eye contact with strange dogs.

Direct eye contact and patting on top of the head are both threatening behaviors to a dog and it may react by being aggressive. Running and screaming is prey behavior and many dogs will chase either as a game or as a serious attack.

## **Children should not touch a dog if:**

- there is no owner to ask if it is okay to pat the dog
- the dog lifts its lips and bares its teeth
- the dog snarls, growls or snaps
- the dog backs away
- the dog raises the hair on its neck or back.

## **Don't leave children unattended with dogs**

Sometimes kids climb on dogs, pull tails, or are excessively rough with the dog. A tormented dog, may bite without warning. Always supervise children and dogs. If they can't be supervised properly, they must be separated.

## **Let sleeping dogs, sleep**

If the dog goes away to have a rest, make sure children don't disturb it. Once the dog has had a rest, it will usually be willing to play again.

## **Don't allow dogs to jump on visitors or family members.**

Whilst it may be cute to have a pup jump up when it wants to be picked up, it may not be as much fun when the pup grows up! The lessons the dogs learn as pups, stay with them as adult dogs.

Allowing the dog to jump may frighten or annoy some adults and children.