



Greyhounds & Children

Greyhounds are gentle, laid back characters which makes them great companions for children. They are more likely to pick themselves up and walk away from a disruptive child than snap at them. However, like all dogs, they have their limits. This is usually because boundaries are not being enforced by the parent.

As adorable as young children are, they can still be noisy, fast and occasionally clumsy. A dog, who has always lived in a kennel environment, will have only met adult humans. Your dog may have no understanding of what a child is and may be frightened.

Your child may not understand that the dog is scared. Most situations occur when the dog is frightened, not because he is aggressive.

Dogs offer wonderful companionship for children and often give them a sense of responsibility and security, however children can sometimes tease and be cruel to dogs and encourage the types of behaviour you want to avoid (e.g. jumping up, nipping and begging). If certain dog behaviour is treated inconsistently by individual family members, it will be difficult for your dog to understand what the desired behaviour should be. Likewise, dogs which have had negative or cruel experiences with children can grow up to treat children with caution.

Consequently, it is important for dogs to have as many positive experiences with children as possible and that children, as well as adults, are educated in good training and behavioural practices.

A lot of rehoming centres will not rehome dogs to families with children because even a fully assessed dog can:

- Have a fright and react in an unpredictable way.
- Be awakened from a deep sleep or a bad dream and react in an out of character manner.

Dogs are sometimes returned to centres because they have snapped at a child. They are normally not bad dogs, but are nevertheless labelled aggressive and can be put at risk of being put to sleep. In fact, it is usually because parents have not enforced boundaries or they have not organized their home so that children and dogs can be kept separate when they are not being supervised.

By 'supervision', we mean actively paying attention to the interaction between your child and dog, not listening from upstairs, working at a desk in the corner or reading on the sofa. You need to take responsibility for the interaction between the dog and the child. Children can - if unchecked - unwittingly overwhelm a new dog with too much attention.

House Rules

For children in the house it is a good idea to set up some house rules and, if they are old enough, get the children involved in coming up with some new rules themselves. The rules don't just have to be for the children to follow as you maybe have some rules that you wish your new dog to follow too.

If there are rules that the new dog has to follow it is important that everyone in the family knows and keeps to the rules in order for the dog to understand what is expected of it. For example, you should make up a rule that the children are not allowed near or in the dog's bed, and maybe you could apply this rule vice versa too and say that your new dog is not allowed in the children's bedrooms. (We would strongly recommend you do not allow dogs in children's bedrooms regardless).

This helps the child understand that the dog needs its space and that the dog should also respect their space.

Making up rules together as a family help the children understand how important looking after their new pet is, and because they have been involved in the process they will be more likely to follow them!

If your children are too young to understand and help make up rules, it is still important to follow through with the rules so the child grows up knowing what is expected of them and what the correct way to treat a dog is.

Adopting

Before considering adopting a dog from Brighton Retired Greyhound Trust or anywhere else, you will need to consider 2 things:

1. Will your children respect the dog and give it space? A dog is not a toy and children – without any exceptions or excuses – need to understand this.
2. Will your children leave the dog alone if you ask them to? If they will not, do not or you cannot enforce this request, then you put both your child and the dog at risk.

If this answer is no to either of the above – then you need to delay getting a dog until your children are able to give the dog respect and space he will need.

Although we can do our best to test the temperament of a dog, we cannot test for children who do not understand, or parents who will not enforce the simple rules of children living happily with dogs.

If you have children and you are considering rehoming a dog from BRGT, we will expect the following:

- You must understand the importance of actively supervising your child and dog when they are together.
- You must ensure you boundary your children appropriately at all times. Dogs do not take kindly to children running around screaming uncontrollably. This will make your dog extremely anxious and unsettled, and they could potentially react if a child comes close enough to provoke a fear response.

You will be expected to demonstrate at your home check where the dog will stay when you cannot actively supervise the interaction between the dog and your child. Preferably it will be a room you don't use all the time, with a gate across the door. (Most dogs will not enjoy a closed door when the family are in the house).

Or another safe space tucked into the corner of the living room/kitchen. Your child must be able to follow instructions to leave the dog where it is. This space will also be essential when friends' children visit.

Your child needs to understand that if you say no, to whatever he or she is doing with the dog, you actually mean no and they need to stop. No excuses. Only you know whether your child has self-control.

It is not something you can put an age recommendation on – even a 10 year old can jump off a sofa and land on a dog.

Let sleeping dogs lie!

You will be expected to ensure your dog has a quiet place to sleep where it will not be disturbed.

This is a really important rule and your child must be able to always keep to this rule.

Children must never suddenly wake a sleeping dog – greyhounds can often sleep with their eyes open and appear to be awake. If your dog is asleep, or in its bed, your children need to respect the dog's space – a dog is not a toy.

Training your children is really important - this is for both for the safety of your children and your dog! You should always exercise caution during initial introductions with children.

The best way to introduce dogs to children is to ask the children to put a dog treat on the palm of their hand with their fingers close together and let the dog approach them to retrieve the titbit.

Children should hold their hand beneath the dog's mouth level and keep it still. They should be encouraged to stroke or scratch a dog under the chin, around the throat or chest rather than patting them on the head. Patting on the head obstructs dogs' sense organs and can be misconstrued as an act of aggression.

You should be prepared to train your dog to stay off the sofa and beds in the very early months post adoption. The dog should be resting in its own bed, where he will not be disturbed. You may need a bed in more than one room – but not in a child's room. *This is very important if you have children.*

You must teach your child how to play safely with your dog. For example, squeaky toys can be too exciting for some greyhounds.

Teach your child not to take toys from the dog, not to sit on the dog or pull his fur and not to follow the dog if he moves away.

Remember! Tails and ears are private things not play things.

Teach your children the importance of closing doors and outside gates – you do not want your greyhound to escape!

Feeding

You must feed the dog where they are alone and will not be disturbed by children. You must ensure your child does not eat near the dog until it is trained with food manners. The dog should be able to go out immediately after eating to toilet without interference or being bothered by an excited child.

Understanding dog signals and what they mean

You should do some research and learn some of the key signs of dog behaviour.

Dogs use lots of signals to tell us they are not happy and it is good to know what these are and what they mean. It is clear that a growl means that the dog is extremely unhappy or uncomfortable and the particular interaction needs to stop immediately, but a dog will normally have told you he is worried or uncomfortable long before he growled.

For example, he may have licked his nose, or yawned or moved away. He may have tucked his tail under, or his body may have become stiff. Learn what your dog is trying to tell you. Please remember, children do not pick up on growling and the signals the dog is giving out.

Please remember! - Most children approach dogs head-on with all good intentions of hugging the dog. Such intense body language and direct eye contact are very threatening to all dogs.

Before meeting the dogs, please let us know if any of your children are nervous around dogs, have any learning difficulties or have any allergies. This is really important information which we need to match you with the right dog.

These rules may seem excessive but there are a disproportionate number of dogs returned to all rehoming centres each year because of children. Even, if it is not the dog's fault, it risks the life of the dog.

Think carefully

Just remember these rules should work both ways! If your child is being unwillingly pestered by your dog to play or be petted, your dog should be given the 'bed' command so he/she knows that it is not welcome to play at the moment. If you make up some house rules for children, dogs and adults and these rules are consistently followed, they will become second nature for everyone. You will have a much happier household where everyone will know their place, what is expected of them and how to treat and respect each other.

Finally - NEVER let a young child walk your hound alone without adult supervision. These are large powerful dogs and as such need to be treated with respect.

Tempting as it may be, & no matter how predictable & safe you think your dog is on lead all it can take is for your dog to be frightened by a noise, or to see a rabbit etc & run.

Your child & dog may end up seriously injured, or worse.

It can be really rewarding for your children to grow up around a dog, but do take time to think carefully.

Who will walk the dog in the morning and evening when there lots of things to do with the children?

It is not appropriate to think a slow walk to school with a child is exercise – it's not!

Quite often it's a very daunting experience to be surrounded by a group of excited schoolchildren.

Is everyone committed to homing the dog? And does everyone want the dog enough to be prepared to put the hard work in. Can you really commit to our rules? These rules are sensible, safe and good for all dog owning families.

Helpful Information

Kennel Manager contact info: 07704 982140 or info@brightonrgt.org.uk

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