

KIDS AND DOGS!

I once read a book called Dogs and Kids - Parenting Tips. I read this book shortly after a Shar-pei puppy named, Sammie, moved into my life. I had neither kids nor dogs and quickly could see I was in over my head. I started reading books and all of them said "A Shar-pei is not the right dog for a first time dog owner". I said to myself "Oh my goodness, now what? I already have the dog." That's kind of similar to having a baby that doesn't behave as you expected it would. So you have to learn because that baby is yours. If you settle down and decide I can figure this out, you can.

The premise of the book is that what kids need and dogs need is often similar. 1. They need to know they are safe. 2. They have food and water in adequate amounts. 3. They have social needs and they can be met by you and other family members and friends. - Children and dogs that are not attended to become problems. They have active little brains and bodies that need to be exercised. 4. Kids and dogs need to know the "rules of the road". If the rule is that the dog is not allowed on the couch, then when it gets on the couch it must be immediately corrected. Correction and discipline do not mean abuse. It means we have rules and we abide by them. If you are consistent with your rules you will create safety, confidence and a secure dog or person. One of the things my dog trainer told me with Sammie is that once you ask him to do something you must carry it through until he does what he is asked. If you come home from work and you are too tired to carry this out with your pet or your child, then don't ask.

Shar-pei's are strong willed, determined, "I want to do it my way" kind of dogs. I could see the wisdom in what my trainer said almost immediately. I never forget those words of wisdom and decided what the rules needed to be and then never ever waived from them. I am pretty sure that two of Sammie's siblings were turned into shelters because they were not properly taught and disciplined and were aggressive and pushy by the time they were a year old. Their owner's could no longer deal with them and the young dogs were clearly not right for the leadership role in the household. You need to be the leader, that does not mean being a tyrant or abusive in any way.

If you let your children do whatever they want you will have spoiled children that have no understanding of boundaries and limitations. They grow up to think they are the center of everything. It works the same with your dog. You can play with them, love them, treat them really well, but you must also let them know there are boundaries to what they can do and family rules they must follow.

I have a dog now, who with little training, causes no problems with anyone. She's just a good girl. Sammie was the most amazing and interesting dog, but he needed consistency and to know that I was the pack leader. My trainer said "He's the kind of dog that will take a mile if you give him an inch." I spent a lot of time in his early years establishing what was O.K and what wasn't and providing consistent consequences when doing things that weren't right. He became a confident, well balanced dog that was a constant amusement and joy to be around.

Your children need to be treated as individuals and so do your pets. Some are easy and some are not. Sometimes some of the most delightful children and pets are the most high spirited and not always the easiest. They keep you on your toes.

Today I read about a person who got a dog at one of the central valley shelters on his last day before euthanasia. She crossed her fingers and hoped she was doing the right thing. She said the dog was a good dog with others animals and with people. The dog was also high spirited and some what out of control. She said she took the dog home and he settled right down. When dogs, like children feel secure and cared about they often behave better.

The secret to having well behaved and yet outgoing fun children and dogs is safety, care and clear and consistent understanding of what behavior is acceptable. If you need help consult an expert for guidance. I can be reached at cheryl.wicks@sammiesfriends.org for help and referrals.

Love your pet, enjoy them, and provide boundaries and you will have an amazing experience.

Cheryl Wicks is the Co-Founder and President of Sammie's Friends