

 ForDogSake.org

The Family Dog Readiness Guide

Don't Get the Kids a Dog Until You Read This



Prepared By

ForDogSake.org

Prepared? You're about to make a 10-15 year commitment.

Getting a dog for your children can be one of the most rewarding decisions your family makes—or one of the most stressful.

Every year, thousands of dogs end up back in shelters because families weren't prepared for the reality of dog ownership.

This isn't meant to scare you. It's meant to prepare you.

This guide will help you:

- Choose the right dog for your family's lifestyle
- Avoid the 5 biggest mistakes parents make
- Set realistic expectations (time, money, energy)
- Keep your kids AND your dog safe

If, after reading this, you realize now isn't the right time—that's a win. The dogs thank you. If you're ready—let's make sure you do this right.

PUPPY VS. OLDER DOG

Should You Get a Puppy or an Older Dog?

This is the first big decision—and most families get it wrong.

PUPPY (8-12 weeks)

THE APPEAL:

- Adorable, cuddly, bonds deeply with your family
- You shape their behavior from day one
- Grows up with your children

THE REALITY:

- Requires **intense training** (potty training can take 4-6 months)
- Bites, chews, destroys things (it's normal puppy behavior)
- Needs constant supervision with kids
- High energy—can accidentally knock over small children
- **1 in 3 families say raising a puppy was harder than they expected**

BEST FOR: Families with children **8+ years old** who can help with training, stay-at-home parents, or flexible schedules.



ADULT/RESCUE DOG (1-3+ years)

THE APPEAL:

- Calmer, past the destructive puppy phase
- Personality already formed (you know what you're getting)
- Often already house-trained
- Lower energy—safer around younger kids

THE REALITY:

- May have unknown history or past trauma
- Could need behavior correction
- Bonding may take longer

BEST FOR: Busy families, first-time dog owners, families with children **under 6 years old**.

💡 **EXPERT TIP:** If your kids are under 6, get a 2-3 year old dog. If your kids are 8+, a puppy can be a great learning experience—**if** you have the time.



The 5 Best Dog Breeds for Families with Kids

Not all breeds are created equal. Some are naturally patient with children. Others aren't.

- 1. LABRADOR RETRIEVER** ✓ Gentle, patient, loyal ✓ Great with all ages
⚠ Needs daily exercise (1+ hour)
- 2. GOLDEN RETRIEVER** ✓ Friendly, playful, forgiving ✓ Loves kids, tolerates rough play ⚠ Sheds a lot, needs regular grooming
- 3. CAVALIER KING CHARLES SPANIEL** ✓ Small, gentle, easygoing ✓ Perfect for apartments ✓ Great for younger children (less likely to knock them over)
- 4. BEAGLE** ✓ Curious, social, sturdy ✓ Good with rough play ⚠ Can be vocal (barking/howling)
- 5. POODLE (Standard or Miniature)** ✓ Hypoallergenic (great for allergies) ✓ Smart, trainable ✓ Low-shedding



BREEDS TO AVOID

⚠ Breeds to Avoid Generally

(For First-Time Families)

These breeds CAN be great—but they're not beginner-friendly.

✗ **BOXERS** High energy, jump on people, slobber everywhere. Can accidentally hurt small kids.

✗ **HUSKIES** Escape artists. Need TONS of exercise. Stubborn, hard to train.

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✗ **DALMATIANS** Can be aggressive or anxious around small children. High energy.

✗ **JACK RUSSELL TERRIERS** Too high-energy for young kids. Nippy, stubborn.

✗ **CHIHUAHUAS** Fragile (kids can accidentally hurt them). Often snappy with children.


💡 **THE RULE:** If you're a first-time dog owner with kids, stick to the "Top 5" list. Save the adventurous breeds for when you have experience.

IS YOUR HOME READY?

The Pre-Dog Checklist

Before you bring a dog home, make sure you have:

- Secure fencing** (if you have a yard—dogs escape!)
- A safe space** for the dog (crate, bed, quiet zone away from kids)
- Puppy-proofed rooms** (no exposed wires, toxic plants, small toys, chemicals) **Food & water bowls** (stainless steel, not plastic)
- Leash, collar, ID tag** (with your phone number)
- Age-appropriate toys** (chew toys, puzzle toys, NOT stuffed animals)
- Vet appointment booked** (first check-up within 1 week of bringing dog home)
- Training plan** (puppy class, online course, or trainer contact)

 **DON'T SKIP THE CRATE.** A crate isn't cruel—it's a safe den for your dog. It helps with potty training and gives them a place to escape when overwhelmed.

THE REAL COSTS

What Does a Dog ACTUALLY Cost?

Most families underestimate this. Here's the truth.

FIRST-YEAR COSTS:

Adoption/Purchase: \$50 - \$2,000 (*Shelter dogs are cheaper, but purebreds can cost \$1,000-\$3,000*)

Vet Visits (vaccines, spay/neuter, check-ups): \$500 - \$800

Food: \$300 - \$600/year (*Quality food costs more, but saves vet bills later*)

Supplies (bed, crate, toys, bowls): \$200 - \$400

Training Classes: \$100 - \$300

Emergency Vet Fund: \$500+ (*Accidents happen. You NEED savings for this.*)

ONGOING COSTS (Every Year):

- Food: \$300-\$600
- Vet check-ups: \$200-\$400
- Flea/tick prevention: \$100-\$200
- Grooming: \$50-\$500 (depending on breed)
- Pet insurance: \$360-\$600/year (\$30-50/month)

 **TOTAL FIRST-YEAR COST: \$1,500 - \$4,000+**

 **TOTAL PER YEAR AFTER: \$1,000 - \$2,500+**

If that number makes you uncomfortable, wait until you're financially ready. Your future dog will thank you.

TEACHING KIDS DOG SAFETY

⚠️ CRITICAL: Dog Safety for Kids

Most dog bites happen to children—and most happen because kids don't understand dog body language.

Even the sweetest dog has limits.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THESE RULES:

- ✓ Never approach a dog while they're eating
- ✓ Never pull ears, tail, or fur
- ✓ Ask permission before petting (even your own dog)
- ✓ Give the dog space when sleeping or in their crate
- ✓ No hugging or kissing the dog's face (dogs see this as threatening)
- ✓ If the dog walks away, leave them alone

TEACH THEM TO RECOGNIZE STRESS SIGNALS:

🚩 Yawning (when not tired) 🚩 Lip-licking 🚩 Ears pinned back 🚩 Tail tucked between legs 🚩 Showing the whites of their eyes ("whale eye") 🚩 Freezing or going stiff

If you see these signs, the dog is uncomfortable. Give them space IMMEDIATELY.

💡 THE GOLDEN RULE: "NO CONSENT = NO TOUCH"

THE 30-DAY ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

The First 30 Days Are the Hardest

Don't panic. This is normal.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

WEEK 1: Confusion Your dog may not eat, hide, have accidents, or seem scared. They're overwhelmed.

WEEK 2: Testing Boundaries Barking, chewing, jumping. They're figuring out the rules.

WEEK 3: Settling In Starting to relax, learning the routine, responding to training.

WEEK 4: Bonding Begins Trust builds. You'll see their real personality emerge.

 **MOST "PROBLEM DOGS" JUST NEED TIME.**

If you're struggling in Week 2, don't give up. It gets better.

RED FLAGS (When to Get Professional Help):

- Aggression toward children (growling, snapping, biting)
- Severe separation anxiety (destroying things, self-harm)
- Uncontrollable barking or reactivity
- Fear that doesn't improve after 30 days

If you see these, contact a certified dog trainer or behaviorist immediately.

THE FINAL CHECKLIST

Are You REALLY Ready?

Answer honestly. No judgment.

- Can you commit **1-2 hours per day** to exercise, training, and play?
- Can you afford **\$1,500-\$4,000 in the first year** (and \$1,000-\$2,500 every year after)?
- Are your children old enough to follow safety rules?
- Do you have a backup plan for vacations, emergencies, or if you get sick?
- Are you prepared for **10-15 years** of responsibility? (Some dogs live 15+ years.)
- Is everyone in your household on board? (If one person says no, don't get a dog.)
- Do you have time for training? (Untrained dogs end up in shelters.)
- Can you handle accidents, chewed furniture, barking, and mess?

IF YOU ANSWERED "NO" TO ANY OF THESE:

Wait. There's no shame in saying "not yet."

A dog isn't a trial run. It's a decade-long commitment. **IF YOU ANSWERED "YES" TO ALL OF THESE:** You're ready. Let's do this the right way.

NEXT STEPS

Ready to Raise the Perfect Family Dog?

This guide gave you the foundation—but there's so much more to learn.

If you want:

- ✓ A **step-by-step training system** (from day 1 to a well-behaved dog)
- ✓ Solutions to common problems (barking, jumping, leash pulling)
- ✓ How to build a lifelong bond with your dog
- ✓ Expert tips to avoid costly mistakes

Check out:

The Adventures of Sparky

How to love and care for a dog with responsibility

👉 Sparky.ForDogSake.org

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