The Kids are Alright

February 22, 2014

A SAMPLE OF “KIDS WITH DOGS” PHOTOS TAKEN FROM A 30-SECOND GOOGLE SEARCH

Disclaimer: If you are not horrified by these photographs (even worse….if you think they are cute), you are probably not going to like what follows.

A few statistics: According to the CDC, approximately 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year. Of these reported bites, a large victim demographic is children under the age of 10. Children are most likely to be bitten severely enough to require medical care or hospitalization. They are also most frequently bitten by their own dog or by a dog who they know, such as the dog belonging to a neighbor or relative. Bites to the face and neck are common in children, most likely because of their size and the types of behavior that they engage in with dogs.

Why is this surprising? Really now. If I can find the preceding photographs with a seconds-long Google search, then my guess is that there are a lot more of these photos out there and many more interactions of this type taking place between children and dogs each day. Indeed, such evidence suggests that our dogs are, in general, much more tolerant and accepting
of abuse than we ever give them credit for. Unsafe (and potentially unkind) behavior of children towards dogs appears to be epidemic in our society.

**Bite Prevention Programs for Kids:** The good news is that these alarming dog bite statistics have led to the development of bite prevention programs. Though not many have been thoroughly studied or validated, there is some evidence showing that these programs can influence the beliefs and behavior of children:

- **Prevent-A-Bite:** Grade school children (7 to 8 years of age) completed a 30-minute lesson that provided instruction for behaving appropriately and safely around dogs (1). Following the lesson, the children had the opportunity to interact with a friendly dog. Of the children who completed the program, only 9 percent behaved inappropriately with the dog. By comparison, 79 percent of children of the same age who had not completed the Prevent-A-Bite lesson (the control group) showed inappropriate behavior upon meeting the dog.

- **BARK Program (Be Aware, Responsible and Kind):** This study was a pre-test/post-test evaluation with 500 children, aged 6 to 9 years (2). After reading and completing activity workbooks and watching a video, children showed improved knowledge about how to behave with dogs. (Note: This study did not include a test with a live dog).

- **Delta DogSafe Program:** A group of young children, 3 to 5 years of age, completed a program that used photographs and a puppet show to model safe behavior with dogs (3). Children who completed the training were more likely to recognize potentially dangerous behaviors depicted in dogs in photographs than children who had not completed the training. (Note: This study did not include a test with a live dog).

- **The Blue Dog Program:** *The Blue Dog* is an interactive computer program designed for children between 3 and 6 years of age and their parents. It includes a series of animated scenarios of a dog and a child and the user must make decisions about how (or if) the child character interacts with the dog in each scene. The program provides instant feedback regarding appropriate behavior with dogs. A recent study examined the learning outcomes of using Blue Dog in 76 children (4). After a week of using the program with their parents, children were better able to recognize risky situations when shown photographs of dogs. However, the children who had used the program did not change their actual behavior when presented with an unfamiliar live dog or when tested using scenarios with dolls.

**The kids are alright:** The results of these studies suggest that children can benefit from dog bite prevention programs in terms of their reported knowledge, and that older children can transfer these lessons to live interactions with unfamiliar dogs. It appears that the transfer of understanding into behavior may be less effective in younger children, however. (Note: No studies to date have evaluated post-test behaviors with familiar dogs, an important issue seeing that the majority of bites come from known dogs).

**WHAT ABOUT THE PERSON ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CAMERA?**

**The parents, on the other hand......** In their 2011 study of *Blue Dog*, David Schwebel, Barbara Morrongiello and their colleagues also collected data from the parents of the 3- to 6-year-olds. They reported some rather disturbing findings:

- 76% of the parents believed that their child already knew most or all of the information that *Blue Dog* provided (remember, these kids were just 3 to 6 years of age).
A majority of parents (65%) also believed that their child would apply most or all of what they learned from the program to interactions with their own dog. (Seems to be rather contradictory, seeing that they believed their kid already knew everything......I was confused).

And, most parents admitted that they did not read the Parent Guide completely (93 percent actually), which included information about safe behavior between children and dogs. (It appears that the parents were certain that they too already knew everything there was to know about proper dog interactions).

Given that parental supervision and good judgment are key components to safe interactions between small children and dogs, the same group of researchers decided to test the effectiveness of Blue Dog training on the behavior of parents – specifically how parental supervision during interactions between children and dogs was influenced by completion of Blue Dog training (5).

The Study: The researchers had two objectives. First, they examined the typical supervisory practices of parents of preschool children when their child was in the presence of an unfamiliar dog. They then assessed changes in parental supervision several weeks after the parents had completed the Blue Dog program with their child. The study groups included 55 child/parent pairs, each of which lived with at least one adult dog. Half of the families completed Blue Dog training and half (the control group) completed a similar type of computer program that provided fire safety education. A pre/post test method was used in which the parent and the child were brought into a room in which a gentle and friendly dog was present with his/her trainer. The parents were given no information about the dog's temperament and were told that there would be a dog in the room immediately prior to entering the room. Measured parent outcomes included reactions to seeing their child in the vicinity of an unfamiliar dog and to interacting with the dog and the presence/absence/intensity of supervisory behaviors.

The Results: Results were reported for the pre-test (before Blue Dog training) and post-test (after Blue Dog Training) sessions.

- **Pre-test session:** Children in both the test group and the control group showed cautious behaviors upon seeing the unfamiliar dog. In contrast, the majority of the parents demonstrated risky behaviors that included encouraging their child to immediately approach the dog or immediately approaching the dog themselves. Most of the children did eventually interact with the dog, either on their own or as a result of encouragement from the parent. There were no differences between the test group and the control group, but......here's the kicker......the collective behaviors of the parents were scored as being significantly more risky than those of their children.

- **Post-test session:** Following Blue Dog training, once again, the children were appropriately cautious when confronted with an unfamiliar dog (a different dog from session 1). Their parents, on the other hand, continued to demonstrate risky behaviors. (Parental behavior trended toward less risky behaviors after the training, but the difference was not statistically significant; P = 0.07). Following training, there were no significant differences between the test group that had completed Blue Dog and the control group – in other words, the training had no statistically significant effect on the behavior of either the children or their parents. (The children continued to behave cautiously; the parents, well, they continued to behave badly).

- **Both Sessions:** In both sessions, parents stayed in proximity of their children and demonstrated high degrees of attentiveness. This result is an important one because it showed that while the parents’ behaviors with the dog and with the child-dog interactions were unsafe, they consistently demonstrated overall good general parenting supervision.

The results of this study suggest that a large proportion of the problem, at least for young children, lies not with the kids, but with the parents. And, the problem appears to NOT be one of inattention or poor supervision, as the parents in this study did stay in proximity of their children and did pay attention to them. Rather, at issue is parents' beliefs about appropriate behaviors when interacting (and encouraging their child to interact) with dogs.
Like many trainers, I cringe when new clients say to me “Oh, our Rover is such a great dog! My kids and their friends can do anything to him – sit on him, grab his skin, pull his tail, and he just takes it! Isn’t he a wonderful family dog?”. Similarly, my teeth clench when I open emails from well-meaning (though misguided) people who send me photos such as those posted above because “You like dogs, so you will love this photo of little Johnny crawling on top of our dog”. Yeah…..well, no.

To all parents: Your child should not sit on your dog while reading a book. Nor should he ride your dog like a pony, sprawl across her whilst she is napping, grab your dog’s face in his fist, pull on her skin or tail, or stick a hand into her food bowl. Not only are these behaviors disrespectful and borderline (sometimes not even borderline) abusive, but they are dangerous. Your loving, sweet family dog who has finally had enough abuse and air snaps at your child in response to these unsafe behaviors will pay dearly for that snap if she makes contact. Both your child and your dog pay (with the dog possibly paying the ultimate price – her life).

Not only should you prevent your child from doing these things (even if you live with that wonderful dog who allows it) you should model kindness and respect and proper interactions with dogs – all dogs – starting with your own.

References:

Prevention classes may not be enough. Why not make taking an educational class on dog ownership required before buying a dog. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESUMQjdco_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESUMQjdco_I)

If you are given a dog by a private party make both liable for proof of certification. Just my 2 cents.
Good points made here. I am appalled at some people's behavior with dogs. I ALWAYS ask to pet someone's dog and I expect that people ask my permission too...it's not just safety, it's common courtesy. I also taught my dogs it was never okay to snap or bark at a human, but in the same way I never let people be inappropriate with my dogs either...mutual respect is required.

Love this article. As a dog owner I took considerable time teaching my German Shepherd how to interact with young children – not to rush up to them wanting to play, or poke with her paw (something she did as a puppy when she was playing with other dogs). Children need to learn the same rules for the safety of all concerned. Thanks for sharing this!

I worked in my moms daycare for ten years with two yorkies. I made sure that the children knew gentle. I showed them frequently with Buddy, my moms terror. Buddy loved kids and often ran and played with the children. Bengi was the gentle one. I had several babies learn to walk by holding onto him as he walked. I made sure to watch the dogs for signs they needed a break and rescued them as needed. While the pictures are cute, I get this article. I have seen children get bit even after they have been told to stop by their parents. I have learned how to read dog and cat body language and my first step is to read the strange dog or cats language. After that, I ask to pet. This way I get permission from both dog and owner. I know when to back off too. My aunts dog, Misty, gets possessive of my cousin when he is around and growls when you approach him. I always respond to Misty with I'm sorry, am I too close? I'll move back.

Lovely article! To share my own embarrassing story:

A year or so ago, when my stepson was 5, we stopped at an adoption event outside of a pet store. While we were chatting
with one of the volunteers, we took attention off of the littleun’ (SHAME SHAME) and he stooped over a relaxed dog on a leash and started petting it...it jumped up and back, yelping and startling him. We apologized profusely and asked if we could approach the dog again after a minute for it to relax. We reminded him how he should approach a new dog, and he tried again...getting licks and tail wags. It was scary, but a good learning experience...for the littleun’ AND for us: we let out guard down, because we thought he knew how to act around dogs. Accidents happen, and we ALL need to accept responsibility.

★ Liked by 1 person

Reply

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Poige DeBoer
MARCH 26, 2014 AT 4:41 AM

I was taught from the time I was a toddler how to interact with animals. And one of the most important things I was taught is that if an animal bit me, is was most likely my own darn fault. I think kids STILL need to be taught that.

★ Like

Reply

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Grace
MARCH 23, 2014 AT 6:11 PM

The basis of safety when dealing with dogs and other animals is to understand and respect them and to treat them kindly, while maintaining control. To expect that an animal will never object to bad behaviour is absolutely unreasonable. Too many adults do not recognize this and do not instill in their children an understanding of body language and animal behaviour. The long suffering pet will eventually react and the people involved need to understand that the responsibility and cure lies with them. It is unfortunately true that too many adults have not learned this as they grew up. One of the disadvantages of urban living. Too many believe that they and their children are never at fault. This foolish attitude is the root of many dreadful incidents at zoos and animal parks, in spite of the warnings.

★ Like

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jsam
MARCH 23, 2014 AT 4:52 PM

Reblogged this on Gra Machree.

★ Like

Reply

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rachelradiostar
MARCH 22, 2014 AT 1:54 AM

Reblogged this on Rachelradiostar's Other Blog – Here so you can find me! and commented:
A very interesting thought provoking read.
Deborah Moore  MARCH 21, 2014 AT 5:52 PM

Love this article. As a dog trainer, I have had many discussions about dog/kid safety with clients and am in the process of putting together a video presentation. Please continue with the effort to educate. If one parent can learn and save their dog and child from a disaster, it is well worth the effort. Kudos to you!

Emma  MARCH 21, 2014 AT 5:49 PM

All of this article makes complete sense, I only wish it went on to actually provide resources for parents and children as to proper management of the dog/child interaction. I am a new parent, and was given all the information in the world about preparing the dog for baby, introducing the dog to baby... And then nothing after that. My girl is now 8 months and has started crawling and of course her favourite target is our Golden Retriever who is often lying around the same room. I never leave them together unsupervised but outside of that, and trying to teach her to be gentle with the dog (no pulling tail, fur, poking eyes etc) I don't know what the other 'rules' are. And I'll admit the whole situation makes me very nervous. So all of the above comments that have a go at parents for being stupid, perhaps just realise there is a lack of education and resources out there for parents. Now, can anyone suggest a way I can access the guidelines or a tutorial on what is best? The Internet is overrun with information, many of it contradictory, so I am looking for a credible guide.

Deborah Moore  MARCH 21, 2014 AT 5:55 PM

Lily Chin has some excellent posters about positive interaction between children and dogs. Also, I'm sure some of the organizations listed in the article might provide some guidelines that would be helpful.

grady2  MARCH 21, 2014 AT 6:02 PM


Emma, an 8 month old child has not yet developed empathy for others, judgment, or self control. I think this trainer has the right idea. Here's the 3rd article in the series. Best wishes. [http://www.dogsandbabieslearning.com/2011/02/24/helping-toddlers-not-be-magnetized-to-dogs-part-3/](http://www.dogsandbabieslearning.com/2011/02/24/helping-toddlers-not-be-magnetized-to-dogs-part-3/)


Reblogged this on [BRITISH LUXE BULLDOGS](http://www.britishluxebulldogs.com) and commented:
I agree with 99% of the statements & content within this post about moronic owners who thinks it's ok for their kids to pester they're dogs without thinking of the consequences or what distress they are putting their dog through Xx

Like any interaction with an animal you have to guide your child and teach your child the proper behavior. The animal, the child and the owner has to know how to behave. It is ignorant what makes the world unsafe.
Children should always be supervised when they are with animals, and when they are with other children (and some adults). Period.

I do not understand why life lessons like how to interact with animals, basic first aid and survival, are not taught in grade school! That should be at least as important as how to color!!

Why are teachers again expected to do the job of the parent. Surely this should be instilled in the child before they start school and reinforced by a teacher. You wouldn't (or shouldn't) send a child to school in nappies not toilet trained. I'm afraid parents are shirking their responsibilities and passing the buck.

Well, in fairness, we know a teacher has managed to get through university and was bright enough to get a teaching license. Unfortunately, not so for parents. They're the ones who bring home dogs they can't handle and don't seem to understand this is an issue. It's like anything else, I mean we have to legislate that people wear motorcycle helmets and children cannot rid on your knee in a car...think about that.
Why is it the teacher’s responsibility? Do you know how many other things teachers have to do? It’s 100% parent responsibility to teach kids safety around dogs. Just like its parent responsibility to teach the child to look both ways before crossing the street.

Dana Fedman, CPDT-KA
MARCH 22, 2014 AT 1:46 PM

You can’t teach what you don’t know yourself.

Parakitamol
MARCH 21, 2014 AT 4:49 AM

So true, I couldn’t agree more with your blog, but the stupids will always be stupid. They are future Darwin award winners.

I don’t think there is a cure for idiocy yet and it is sadly the poor dogs and other animals on the planet who suffer.

Dieta Decker
MARCH 21, 2014 AT 2:46 AM

My pet hate are children shouting ‘doggie doggie doggie’ while charging towards my St Bernhardt, who is deaf. The parents stand and watch and smile, so I have to put myself between dog and child and tell the little tyke to ask whether it is ok to interact. Then I show them how to approach a dog safely, pet and talk – that’s the good case scenario. There are times though when I get abuse from the parents for checking their child and insinuations that my dog must be dangerous.

Whitewitchofthesouth
MARCH 21, 2014 AT 4:49 PM

Sounds familiar, Dieta. Kids often come running towards my dogs, two galgos, a mastin and a mastin mix, especially the mastin mix is mortally frightened of young kids, he was found as a puppy in the streets and we believe he has had a lot of abuse from kids. One of the galgos is an absolute angel with kids, he didn’t even flinch when a kid threw her arms around his neck and started leaning on him heavily even though I was in a department store holding him on a very close lead. I told the little girl off and explained her that she was doing something very dangerous, not all dogs would be so gentle if a complete stranger would do that to them, then the parents surfaced around the corner so I addressed them and explained how their daughter had put herself at risk by doing that, instead of understanding I got a big gob...
from mother dearest and idiot dad snapped at me that i should keep my dog with me on a short lead (which i did) their stupidity was mindboggling.

Maryah
MARCH 24, 2014 AT 6:23 AM

I understand this and have two large-ish dogs myself. My parents made sure I knew how to approach strange dogs (all animals actually) and it's something I try to teach my kids. To approach slowly, calmly and with open hand out for them to sniff. Do not rush them, give them warning and above all, ask permission from the dogs owner. Whenever I introduce my girls to new dogs I always ask if the dogs is kid-friendly and if we may pet them.

Pingback: Cute photo poses that you should never ask of your dog. Training children respect.

Elena Collins
MARCH 21, 2014 AT 1:47 AM

I feel like the idiotic parents have actually staged a “cute pose” without permission from the animal and the children look confused. The adults seem to be looking for attention. We don’t know that the children (I’m talking toddlers) are not whisked away after the picture is done or maybe the kid did something to the dog right after like pull the tail, the ears, poke them in the eye, and then the dog retaliates. That is what bothers me the most. Remember, most bites are, in my opinion, provoked.

Reply
Pingback: Cute photo poses that you should never ask of your dog. Training children respect.

Michael L Clark
MARCH 20, 2014 AT 8:23 PM

I have watched clips of parents egging their children on to play with the dog. Most dogs will go through pain because they do not want to hurt their owners. Young children do not know how much force they use. The parents are either ignorant or they want the dog to attack. that would be my conclusion. Some people shouldn’t have children and some shouldn’t have dogs. Then there are those who shouldn’t have neither.

Agnes Norlen
MARCH 20, 2014 AT 6:11 PM

Great article!!
BEST SELLER! “Beware the Straw Man: The Science Dog Explores Dog Training Fact & Fiction”

“Dog Food Logic: Making Smart Decisions for your Dog in an Age of Too Many Choices”
Dog Food Logic
Making Smart Decisions for Your Dog in an Age of Too Many Choices

\[ \text{kcal/day} = 95 \times (\text{Wt}_{\text{kg}})^{0.75} \]
Critics Consensus: The Kids are Alright is a surprisingly poignant, thoughtful show with a classic sitcom feel. 100%. Average Rating: 7.12/10. Season Reviews: 8. Fresh: 8. Rotten: 0. Critics Consensus: No consensus yet. Critic Consensus: The Kids are Alright is a surprisingly poignant, thoughtful show with a classic sitcom feel. What The Kids Are Alright has going for it most of all is