



Children should be careful playing with dogs

By Good Morning Tri-State
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It seems everyone has a pet. In my home, for example, we have a dog, gerbil, gecko and an assortment of tropical fish. We visit the pet stores, pay for boarding services for our English springer spaniel and worry about who will feed the rodent, reptile and fish when we leave for a long weekend.

So it's no surprise, I guess, that our readers care about pets, too. Journalists sometimes complain they get more feedback on stories about pets than their investigative, in-depth articles. It's clear: You care about pets.

With that in mind, I thought I'd share a recent tip sheet I received from Marlin Beck, a professional dog trainer and the president of Evansville's Animal Control Board. Beck, no relation to me, recently attended a conference on preventing dogs biting children, and he believes it's important for kids to learn the proper way to behave around dogs. He's been a help to my family, helping my children learn proper dog etiquette.

We love our dogs, of course, but that can present dangers for children. Beck said all children should be taught how to properly interact with canines, even if they don't have one in their own home. A dog, of course, is an animal, not a four-legged human, no matter how much we humanize our furry friends.

So here is the list of six things that Beck says kids should not do with dogs.

1) Hugging and kissing: "As much as this is a loving gesture on the children's part, many dogs don't perceive it as such." Instead, Beck suggests children kiss their hands and then pet the dog with the kissed hand. A dog may tolerate an adult's kiss or hug, but children have less control over the amount of pressure they exert. They could receive a bite on the face if the dog feels threatened.

Beck, however, knows some people will ignore his advice on this one. "If you foolishly choose to ignore this, your children must absolutely understand it's never OK to hug and kiss other dogs."

2) Staring into a dog's eyes: Direct eye contact also can be a strong threat to a dog, Beck says. "Teach your child to look at the top of or over a dog's head rather than directly at his eyes."

3) Running and screaming: Chaos - and who doesn't have chaos with young kids - can arouse a dog, encouraging him to chase and bite. "If kids want to run and scream, put the dog away," Beck said.

4) Teasing, pinching, poking and blowing at the dog: Kids like to see the dog react. These behaviors are dangerous. Instead, teach the dog to fetch so he directs his reactions on a ball.

5) Following and chasing: If a dog walks or runs away, he is sending a message he doesn't want to play. If a child follows, Beck said, he is risking a bite. "If you have very young children, it's a good idea to create escape routes for your dog, such as low gates he can jump over while the children can't."

6) Wrestling, straddling, riding and lying on the dog: Beck said some dogs will tolerate this behavior, but that doesn't mean they should. "It's sometimes a fine line between tolerate and bite."

- Jim Beck

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