



DOG TRAINING SOLUTIONS

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Bitten Tot to blame and not the dog – says mother

Another case arose where a two-year-old boy in the Hunter Valley, NSW was bitten in the face by their pet Bullmastiff cross Staffordshire bull terrier. Toddler and dog had got on very well – but this time Junior's pulling of the dog's ears resulted not in a warning, but a snap (see Herald Sun article 30/1/2008) - despite Mum warning the child. ABC Radio (774) got into an interesting phone-in discussing whether the dog was to blame and whether the family would be able to retain this dog? Opinions differed and some comments were very sensible. The fact remains that dogs and kids should NEVER be left together unsupervised, particularly with such a very strong breed.

We recommend teaching the dog proper interaction with children as soon as the dog joins the family – all based on a relationship of respect for each other. Teach your child not to be rough, not to pull tails and ears – I am sure that they do not like to have theirs pulled either. The child should be involved with the dog from an early stage, but under supervision, so parents can ensure child and dog grow up in harmony and earn respect. Make sure the dog is OK to be touched everywhere (gently) and is OK with sudden movements or noises of the child, allow the child to play with their toys and eat their snacks without the dog hovering to remove them. Dogs should never be allowed to jump on a child, teach children to be quiet and relaxed around the dog, no shouting and no rough housing. The child in the incident was lying on the dog – and the dog sees the child as a puppy and therefore will be tolerant. However the moment the “puppy” steps out of line or the dog feels in any way threatened, it will react. Remember that it is a DOG with normal dog reactions. Minimise risk and allow a child and a dog to grow up together in harmonious joy, *you must train both!* And that is a parent responsibility!

There remains the question whether you retain a dog that has bitten your child? Again if there have never been signs of disharmony and the reason for the biting can be logically explained, a possible routine – strictly supervised at all times, with revised boundaries for all concerned – *may* be re-established. However if there's *any* sign at all – given that the dog already has the upper hand on the child (especially since the incident), the dog may be considered untrustworthy, and be better rehoused to an environment without children. This is a very hard decision to make as neither option is perfect and all have risks. As a parent, the safety and wellbeing of your child is paramount. If the child shows no fear of the dog after the incident and the dog is relaxed – some supervised training may get you through. If in any doubt, rehouse, or put a-sleep, as you surely do not want your problem fixed by handballing it to others.

Training, training, training can overcome all this! Happy training!

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