

A Toddler Safe Swissy. Well, Almost!

By Connie L. McLean



I wish I could guarantee that if you do everything I suggest, your child will never be bowled over and sent sailing through the air by your darling little puppy. **However, if you follow many of these suggestions, you might have it happen less often and have far more enjoyable child – dog encounters.** One advantage of getting your new puppy while you have a small child is a lot of child proofing and puppy proofing is similar. There are two parts to having a good experience with your new puppy. The first involves the puppy itself. The second involves your child.

It is extremely important to get some obedience control over your puppy before it is 4 months old. By 10 weeks they will weigh around 20 lbs. By 16 weeks at least 40 lbs and they now outweigh your toddler. **Puppy schools will teach the command DOWN. It seems to prevent collisions better than NO because the puppy does not always know what you are saying NO about and therefore does not know how to react.** It also works well when bringing in an adult dog into the house to let them settle



before releasing it to roam. You should enroll your new puppy in obedience school as soon as the puppy has had all of its shots and is safe to be exposed to other dogs. This should be no later than when the puppy is 12 weeks old, it is an extremely important time for socializing. The more dogs and people your puppy meets the better it will be in a variety of situations during its lifetime. **I pursued the**

obedience for two reasons. I wanted to have my dog safely pull my son in a sled and or a wagon (harness work will be discussed later) because I wanted as much control as possible while she was hitched to my son, secondly it was safer while I walked my dog and pushed a stroller. Ideally, you should be committed to obedience for up to two years. An aside to my pursuit of obedience was a Companion Dog title. It was not my goal, however, after training my dog I was encouraged to attempt a title and we enjoyed the experience.



Crate training is similar to a crib. **When you need to put the puppy somewhere safe,**



you put them in an appropriate sized crate. I will not discuss much about crate training because there is a lot out there about it. **I will say as a mother with a 16 month old toddler in diapers and potty training a puppy the crate was critical for my sanity.** If you cannot concentrate on the puppy while potty training in the house, it should be in the crate. Be sure to place the crate where the family spends most of its time, this makes the puppy feel like part of the pack. (An investment, around \$30, in the Bissell brand Spot lifter, will make puppy and child clean ups 100% easier. There are special products for pet stains it works well on toddler stains too, juice, blood...etc.)

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Puppy dinnertime can be a dangerous place for an unsupervised toddler. **Never let your toddler to play with the dog food during puppy's dinnertime.** However, it is a good idea under supervision for your child to hand feed the puppy. **An appropriate time also for teaching your puppy to let you remove things from the puppy's mouth and to play with the puppy's mouth.** This will help teach your puppy proper teeth pressure and allow you to remove dangerous objects in the future. **Your puppy/dog should never, ever, growl at you or your children or invited guests without being corrected.**



If your puppy continues with inappropriate growling, talk to your obedience school instructor and do submissive exercises while it is still young. It is extremely important that your dog learn to be submissive to you and your family. **Your puppy is establishing its pecking order and you want to make sure the puppy is at the bottom not your child.** These exercises can be quite simple such as rolling the puppy on to the floor and holding it on it's side while you play with its feet (later this will aid nail trimming) until **you** are ready to let it go. When it is still **smallish** straddling the puppy and with two hands dangle it with all four feet off the ground between your knees. You need to do the latter very early because by 4-months it is difficult to get them off the ground.

As you take your puppy for its first walk I have found it is easier to start a good habit then to break a bad one. Remember these dogs at full-grown can easily pull over 1200 lbs without a problem. I start a 9-week old puppy on very short walks. Always walking by my left side on a loose leash and always sitting when I stop. They are never allowed to roam on leash unless I am somewhere appropriate, not the neighbors yard, and tell them OKAY. Be sure to have a baggie to take "things" home with you. A good alternative is to teach it a GO POTTY command to take care of necessities before you hit the road. I do not use the OKAY command, which releases them from any activity and permits them freedom to sniff, until they are really walking under control at my left side (6 months to 1 year), not a perfect heel, but in the vicinity of my left side on a loose leash. This works well because if you are pushing a stroller too you do not want your puppy lunging at things, people/dogs/bikes/skaters.



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You want to try to establish submissive behaviors in your puppy towards your family. The dog should always be the last one... coming in the house, going down the stairs, waiting for affections. Teaching the WAIT command is excellent for controlling a dogs entry into the house, through a door, or barreling down the stairs. I have found that putting a leash on the young dog each time it comes in will teach it to come in quietly. Before it is allowed to come in to the house it must SIT quietly out side the door (this requires some effort initially). Eventually the sitting quietly outside the door becomes the signal to me that it wants in and often quiets down some before being allowed inside the house. I make the dog come in and lay down for three minutes, this often settles the dog down and then it does not tend to send children or guests flying.



However, my son does tend to scuttle towards higher ground; couch, bunk bed, or he will make himself flush with a wall if they come in too excited. Your children will also learn these survival techniques, but I recommend the DOWN and settle situation as often as possible. Be sure that when you release your puppy from the down position you always do it quietly, “okay, good dog”. When you let them off leash, a little loving and “okay, good dog”. Don’t work the dog up when you release it or the dog will think off leash means it doesn’t have to remember its manners. Speaking of manners, the absolute worse thing you can let your little darling puppy do it to jump on your legs. **Never, ever let them jump. While your puppy is little you will need to come down to its level. Putting their paws on your shoulders may be “cool” but very “un-cool” around children, strangers, elderly, and the clean shirt you just put on.** Remember it is much easier to teach things right the first time, than to correct them later, your dog will weigh at least 100 lbs when full grown. They can hurt you if they jump on you.

As I mentioned **there are two parts to being a good dog owner with children.** Children can be horribly cruel to puppies and dogs. As a mother I would be horrified if one of my Swissy’s ever bit my child or his one of his friends. I have worked very hard to establish the correct pecking order to encourage gentleness around my child and guests. **You should expect your dog to remove itself from a bad situation if it is socialized properly.** However, your dog has sharp teeth for a reason. How much abuse should your dog be able to endure before it bites? I am not saying this to frighten you away from the breed because it does not matter what breed you are dealing with, every dog will have its limit. If a dog is sound asleep behaving itself and **attacked** or a child jumps on it, the dog’s instinctive reaction may be dangerous. **Stop and think for a moment, you are relaxed and asleep on the couch, your 3 year old launches itself on to your midsection... do you wake**



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up and say “hello sweetie” or do you cry out in pain and push your toddler off before even waking up?



If you don't want your puppy to feel it must protect itself from your child, then you had better protect the puppy from your child by teaching your children gentle behavior. Never allow a child to step on the dog, jump on the dog, pull its hair, flap their fingers in its face or any of the other hundreds of things children can think of to tease a dog. This is the principal reason to supervise children around dogs at all times. When a child is feeding a treat they must be supervised until child and dog are old enough to behave responsibly. **When feeding puppy a treat, the child should NEVER tease the puppy by jerking back. This just teaches the puppy to take it fast, with a snap.** Warn adults to not tease the puppy either this is critical time for learning a lifetime behavior for both child and puppy.

At dinnertime, a Swissy will quickly learn that your child is a consistent food source. Keep the puppy in the crate during meals times until the puppy can remain in a down command within view, but away from the table. **Remember most Swissy's can rest their chins on your kitchen table. If you are not going to set a place for your Swissy, teach it to behave during meal times!**



In our own personal experience, we brought home our first Swissy, Ria, when our son was 16 months old. Ria outweighed our son by the end of the first week in our home. Ria is kind to our son and endures hugs and other various games. However, they haven't seemed to bond as well as our second Swissy, Hanna. We got Hanna when my son was 3 years old. Alex would watch me train her on the leash, so he would try to copy me and put a leash on her and lead her around under my supervision. Today she outweighs my son by at still allows him to lead her not be led by our son unless there and make her obey your goal is to have a bond and child then perhaps your least 3 years old to be raising of a puppy.



11 months old and least 50 lbs, but she around. (Ria will I verbally stand him.) My point is, if between your puppy child should be at involved in the

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Other activities you can pursue with your Swissy are either sledding or draft work with your dog and child. A book that helped me get started was “*Newfoundland Draft Work, A guide for Training*” by Consie Powell. As well as our many Swissy friends and their encouragement and advise. *Dogworks.com* is also an excellent site for harnesses, videos on carting, the above book, Drafting events and other supplies.

Good luck with your new puppy. **The training is a lot of effort but result is an enjoyable family companion for years to come.**

