



A New Dog with Old Kids

We adopted a dog recently. Edzo is a 2-year-old Norwegian elkhound. He's sweet, social and gentle, and I have not seen one worrisome behavior in the time we've had him. My kids are really excited to have him in the family.

My three sons have been raised with dogs and have attended more bite-prevention events than they care to remember. They know how to be respectful and kind to dogs, so they've been a little puzzled by some of the rules I've set in place to help Edzo adjust to living in our home.

Supervision. We were told that Edzo was housetrained and did not chew household objects. As a dog trainer, I spend a lot of time talking to people about housetraining and about cleaning carpets. I really hate cleaning carpets. If I can help it, there will be no housetraining accidents, so we have to treat Edzo as if he were an untrained puppy and set him up for success. The first few days, I kept him very close by and would use his leash to tether him near me. Once I felt confident that he was reliably eliminating in the yard and not prone to chewing up random objects, I began giving him a little more freedom, which meant that instead of keeping him in my sight, I was leaping up and following him each time he moved.

More freedom for him meant less for me. I've gone back to living with a toddler, giving Edzo room to explore while providing the supervision necessary to ensure that he doesn't get into anything he shouldn't. When I cannot supervise Edzo for a few minutes, I've asked my 15- and 12-year-old sons to do it. They know that if Edzo has an accident or chews something on their watch, they'll be doing the cleanup. So far, so good. Edzo has had no accidents in the house and has only destroyed one sponge ball he found behind the couch.

Quieter Play. Our 7-year-old labrador is unflappable. When the kids chase each other through the house, he barely lifts an eyebrow. Edzo, on the other hand, needs some time to adjust to living with five people. He needs to learn that kids can be loud without being scary. The boys are doing a pretty good job of remembering to modulate their play, but I've had to remind them a few times. I'm not at all worried that Edzo would bite them for being too rambunctious, only that they might unintentionally frighten him. The goal is to have a dog that loves kids and is unfazed by their antics, so it's worth toning things down a bit for the short term.

Downtime. Every now and then, Edzo wanders into his crate, lies down on his cozy bed, and takes a nap. I am happy to see him choosing downtime on his own. I love when dogs learn to self-regulate their arousal levels. At times, I have also put him into his crate and closed the door for an hour or so. It's really important that new dogs be given some downtime to rest up and be ready to have more new experiences when they wake.

Keep in mind that everything in your household is new to the dog and that if the dog has never lived with kids, he'll be introduced to some behavior he's never seen before. When's the last time you invited adult guests over to play hide and seek or to build a fort out of couch cushions in the living room? Kids are different. Dogs can adapt well to change, but it's important to give them a balance of busy and quiet periods.



Meeting Friends. My 10-year-old son excitedly called all of his friends to tell them about his new dog. One of them wanted to come over at a time when I would be at work. I told Brandon that, while I'm sure Edzo will be delighted to meet his friends, I must be present to orchestrate the introductions. I want to be sure that Edzo doesn't jump on anyone and that the kids learn the proper way to meet a dog. I encourage children to let the dog sniff their hand and then to pet the dog gently under the chin or on the neck, but never on top of the head. It's natural for people to reach over a dog's head to pat him, but it's very disconcerting for the dog to have someone reaching toward his blind spot. I seize every chance to teach kids how to make dogs like them, and meeting friends for the first time is a prime opportunity.

Edzo is a fantastic dog. He's fitting in beautifully with our family—in part because I've insisted that we take the time to ease Edzo into our routines and to help him adapt to a busy household.

A little advance planning and extra effort on a parent's part can go a long way to having a dog that loves kids.