



A Puppy Party for Kid-Friendly Dogs

Hosting a puppy party is a great way to help your new puppy begin enjoying and feeling at ease around kids. Puppies under 5 months old can learn a lot in an easy 30-minute play date. Here are a few tips.

Send Invitations to 5-10 Kids. Write something like this: "We have a new dog! Bailey is a 3-month-old beagle/Labrador mix, and she loves kids! You are invited to her first puppy party where you can help us teach her how to play nicely with kids. Join us on Saturday at 2:30 pm."

Proper Introductions. Have Bailey on a leash when the kids arrive. Step on it so that she cannot jump on the children. Ask them to come over and extend their fist (with fingers curled in) so that she can sniff it. Explain to the kids that dogs use their sense of smell to recognize people and that Bailey sniffs them to learn who they are. Most puppies will be wiggly and interested in the kids. Let the kids pet Bailey gently under her chin or on the side of her neck. Encourage the children to be careful of the dog's sensitive eyes and ears, which will discourage them from petting the dog on top of the head. People often pat dogs on the head, but dogs really don't like it, so you'll be teaching the children good habits for interacting with all dogs.

Pass the Puppy. After each child has had a chance to meet the puppy on leash, have the kids all sit in a circle on the floor. Each child in turn will be allowed to call Bailey over, give her a treat, and gently pet her for about 15 seconds. Give a few delicious dog treats to each child in turn. The other kids should be told to ignore Bailey if she comes to them when it isn't their turn. Once everyone has had a turn, go around again and give each child two more treats. Then you will call a child's name at random, and he can again call Bailey, give her one of the treats, and pet her gently. When everyone has had two turns in the mixed up sequence, the kids can begin teaching Bailey to sit politely for greeting.

Be a Tree. Put Bailey in her crate for a few minutes and, teach all of the children to be a tree—by planting their feet, clasping their hands together and holding them close to their body, and looking down at their feet. Tell the kids that by being a tree they are using body language to teach a dog to be calm and polite. Have a few silly, wiggly practice sessions in which you all hop around and then on cue suddenly freeze into the tree pose. Kids love that. Bring Bailey back over on leash and tell each child to be a tree when she comes close. If she jumps on them, they should ignore her and keep being a tree.

Let Bailey wander around the kids for a minute or two. She'll be wondering why they are all suddenly so boring. Then give the children each a treat and ask them to stand in a circle so they can practice teaching Bailey not to jump on people. As with Pass the Puppy, each kid will take a turn to call Bailey over. If she jumps up, the child should immediately be a tree and withhold the treat. If she does not jump, tell them to give her the treat. After going around the room a few times, Bailey will quickly learn that keeping all four paws on the ground equals treats and jumping makes people become boring. What a great lesson for a young pup to learn.



Helping the Lessons to Stick. Put Bailey back in her crate for a nap and take the kids to the kitchen to wash up and get a snack. Over cookies and juice, talk to the kids about all the ways they can help Bailey—and the other dogs they know—by interacting with them in gentle, calm ways. Remind them that they can be a tree whenever they are worried about a new dog or when they are near a dog that is being too silly, such as when they come through the door at a friend's house and the dog greets enthusiastically. Dogs communicate almost exclusively through body language so tell the kids they are learning to communicate with the dogs in “dog language” and that their new skills will make dogs like them even more than they already do.

Thank them for helping you get Bailey off to a good start, and ask them to continue to help you by not petting Bailey if she jumps on them. Using these simple tips, you will soon have a dog that loves hanging out with kids and enjoys gentle, calm interactions with them.

Send out your invitations right away. Kids will be clamoring to come to your puppy party!