

## CHILDREN AND GREYHOUNDS

By Chris Garret, SEGC Member

Do You Have Kids? Before you adopt a greyhound, consider the following.

Children love to hug dogs. They should be taught not to.

Dogs and young children should not be left alone together. Even the most tolerant dog cannot stand up to badgering. Kids are kids and dogs are dogs and that's why there are crates. With all the demands on you, you need a place to put the dog when you just can't handle one more thing.

Children are loud. This can confuse dogs. It's common for dogs to associate loud noises with trouble.

There are dogs that don't like kids and/or babies. Some dogs are frightened and are fear biters. Some dogs are too aggressive - aggression biters. It is no sin to decide that this dog is better off in another home.

None of the above refers to greyhounds alone. Each of these is a quote from Brian Kilcommons' book "Child-Proofing your Dog". They apply to all dogs, all breeds, and all families. Many of the returned Greyhounds in the Southeastern Greyhound Adoption Group are from families with children. "The dog snapped at my child for no reason". There is almost always a reason. You just didn't recognize the signs. Adults can read body language, kids can't. "It is too much work. We weren't prepared." To socialize an ex-racing greyhound coming from a track with a strict routine and no child socialization to a home with small children and a busy household is a LOT of work. Are you willing to do what it takes?

There are steps that should be taken to correctly set up the dynamics to introducing a Greyhound to children and a new home. First and extremely important...READ, READ, READ. Without exception Brian Kilcommons' book *Child-proofing Your Dog* should be required reading and your reference. Know the signs and be ready to implement any steps to correct a problem before it gets serious. Lee Livingood's book *Ex-Racing Greyhounds for Dummies* is also required reading. You are not only adopting an adult dog but a specialized athlete. You need to be able to understand the breed and his background at the track.

This is not just "Child-Proofing Your Dog" 101 but also "Dog-Proofing Your Child." You need training, the children need training, the other parent needs training, and the dog needs training. It is a team effort. Just like in raising children, the dog requires consistency in training. Why should your children obey you and do what you want if at first you say no and then change your mind? They quickly learn that if they can wear down your patience they will eventually get what they want. Dogs know that too. That's how kids get spoiled and that's how dogs get spoiled. A spoiled dog has an attitude problem that you don't need when you have children.

There are guidelines to introducing an ex-racing greyhound to a home with younger children. If you can commit to following these steps without exception you are up to the challenge:

1. Don't get a greyhound FOR your child, to grow up with your child or to teach your child responsibility. This is a family decision and a family dog. It may be your intention to have the greyhound be your child's dog but your dog will bond first and closest to the person who feeds it, lets him outdoors, generally cares for him, and spends the most time with him. These days kids' schedules often call for the children to be away from home more than the adults so guess who he will bond with first? The more the child participates with feeding, caring for, and training your dog, the more the dog will respect your child and seek out his attention. But it cannot and in all probability will not be the child's responsibility.
2. Buy a crate and use it for housetraining and a safe place for the dog to be when you are not home or he cannot be supervised. It is absolutely essential for the first few weeks to make sure your new dog is either in a crate or an ex-pen when he cannot be supervised or needs peace and quiet.
3. Most dogs, of any breed, do not like to be hugged or kissed on the face, etc. Many dogs, including greyhounds, will warm up to this eventually but for the first few months don't let any child, yours or others do this. Most dogs would rather be scratched on the chest. They see a hand coming over the head as threatening, especially from a being their own size and one as active and confident as a child. Let the dog come to you/and the child.
4. Don't let your kids or their friends chase your new greyhound. This includes crowding him or backing him into a situation he feels like he can't escape from. This provokes fear biting. This is also where the crate comes in. His safe place is off limits to everyone. Keep the door of the crate open so he can escape to it when he needs to and teach all children not to reach into the crate when the dog is in it.
5. Don't let your kids approach the dog while he is eating. If this seems to be a problem, after a few days when it is feeding time and, UNDER SUPERVISION, let your child feed the dog kibble from his hand, flat palm up.
6. EXERCISE! Don't let your child walk your dog alone at first. At first you need to walk him with your child tagging along. You need to get a feel for how well your dog walks on a leash. If he is a puller, there are corrections for this. Of course greyhounds will take off after any small moving creature. Be prepared with your hand placed through the leash loop. Your child will learn from you how to correctly hold the leash and walk the dog. After you feel confident, let the child put on the leash (don't tolerate jumping up and excitement while attaching the leash, wait until he calms down) and walk the dog under your supervision. When you are comfortable with the situation, the child can walk the dog on his own. Of course this is your call, depending on the child's age and walking situation in your neighborhood. No, greyhounds don't NEED tons of exercise. They are happy to lie around your house. But, as we like to say, "a tired dog is a happy dog" especially with all the nervousness of being new. A walk is good for everybody ...just be aware of those neighborhood kids at first who run up and want to hug your new dog around the neck. Don't let them!
7. Don't spoil the dog. This dog came from having nothing at the track...a severe situation... to having everything at your house. How would you react? He is not used to a lot of attention

and even if he demands, especially if he demands, don't give it to him. Do not allow him on the furniture. It puts him on an equal level with you and your child. His place, at this time, is on the floor. Not (human) beds, not sofas, etc.

8. Greyhounds are not normally rough and tumble dogs. However, no tug of war games or similar rough housing. Games, such as these, boost the dog's confidence and can lead to dominant behaviors especially towards children.
9. Don't shut him away! This is not a dog to be put in another room. Greyhounds are very social and want to be part of your life. In the beginning when you use a crate or ex-pen put it where you all gather. He may whine at first but it won't be forever and before long he won't have to be in a crate unless you choose. Maybe the crate could be set up in the child's room at night or have the children sleep on the sofa with the crate in the den. The dog won't soil the house in the middle of the night, the child has a job to do with the dog and they both bond sooner!
10. And, most important, OBEDIENCE TRAIN. Your dog needs a job to do and a way to earn treats. You have to earn his respect and he has to learn to respect you. It is an excellent tool for you and your child in relating to your dog's place in your home. Go to an obedience class with your dog and your child and eventually have the child give the commands. If the dog won't obey the child, have the child stand in front of you (as if you were one person) at first so the dog knows to obey both of you. Don't let him get away with only obeying you. Treat for all good behaviors. If he shows any sign of being overwhelmed, backing up/retreating, confident posturing or barking at the children by all means crate or ex-pen and call us. Never be forceful or let the children be forceful with your dog. It just makes the situation worse.
11. Most people know not to approach a dog sleeping on a bed. It actually goes further than that. Don't allow kids to approach a dog lying down anywhere, period! If he is lying down **even with his head up**, it is his quiet time and he doesn't want to be disturbed. That includes lying on the floor, on the dog bed, next to the dog bed or even close to him when he is on the floor. Depending on the dog's personality he may eventually tolerate close company, but this would be months from now when you really feel comfortable with him.

If you can commit to these very important first steps you will go along way to creating a successful and rewarding relationship with your new greyhound and your family. If you have ANY questions or concerns, please call us. Don't wait...we can help.