

## GREAT DANE PUPPIES AND CHILDREN

By Georgia Hymmen



Most Great Dane puppies absolutely adore kids, and a properly-trained puppy (and child) can make a wonderful pair. Due to their rapid growth and large size, problems can occur when a Dane puppy does normal puppy behavior: jumping up on kids, mouthing them, tearing around like crazy, and grabbing at clothes. The large size alone can be hazardous for younger kids—even the best Dane can accidentally knock a child down. Tails could be considered dangerous weapons, as they are right at face level of toddlers.

Prior to purchase the family with young children should carefully consider whether the adults in the household are willing to make a major time and training commitment to a puppy. This commitment is absolutely necessary in order for the puppy to successfully integrate into the home and be a valued and trusted member of the family. Puppies do not train themselves and an untrained puppy grows up to be an unruly, ill-mannered adult who may soon find he's looking for a new home.

Common sense, basic house-manners training, proper socialization and a good puppy kindergarten class will help set up an excellent foundation for the new puppy. Additionally, all the family members must adhere to the same set of house rules and be consistent with commands and training.

### **Rule #1: Supervise! Always!**

Children under the age of twelve should never be left unattended with dogs of any age —**NEVER!** This is one rule you must comply with for the safety of your child and your pet. Even the best dog and the best-behaved child can run amok without adult supervision. Every year there are numerous incidents where a child was seriously injured by the family dog and there was no adult supervision when the accident occurred. A very tragic event for both the pet and the child, and highly preventable.

We love our Danes so much. We consider them family members and give them human attributes. We even go as far as treating them like people. However, don't forget what they are—canines. And what are canines? Predators. You must never forget what your dog is—an animal. And, knowing that, you know dogs can react negatively in certain situations. The best way to prevent an unfortunate incident is to make sure the stage is never set for it in the first place.

## **Rule #2: The Golden Rules of Puppy Training**

There are three basic rules of puppy training:

1. The puppy is under your *direct* supervision, or
2. The puppy is crated, or
3. The puppy is in his outside area.

These are three simple rules that can have a huge impact on how your puppy and child learn to interact with each other.

The first part, direct supervision, has been covered. Any time the puppy and child are together, an adult needs to be in direct supervision. If you're in the kitchen, so should the child and puppy. If needed, gate off any exits so they don't wander away unattended and get into trouble. Keep a close eye on how the two are playing. If they get too wild and out of control, stop that behavior immediately. A general



house rule should be that rough and tumble play is not allowed between the child and the Dane puppy at any time. Too soon the puppy is larger than the child, and the Dane soon learns he can simply overpower the child if he wants.

A crate is a godsend for any puppy owner, but it becomes all the more important when dealing with young puppies and children. If you teach the children the crate is off limits, the puppy will soon learn to go in it if the kids get to be too much for him. Additionally, if the crate is placed in the living area of your house, the puppy can be crated when you can't supervise, and still be with the family. When needed, the crate can also be a time-out area.

However, be sure the crate doesn't become punishment and never let a child pull a puppy out of his crate. Always keep a supply of special toys in the crate, and toss in a wonderful treat as the dog enters the crate. Additional information on crate training can be easily found on the internet.

### **Rule #3: No Games That Teach the Dog How Strong He Is**

Any behavior you allow your puppy to do as a youngster will continue into his adulthood. You should think very carefully before allowing any games between the Dane puppy and the child that teach the dog he has power over a human.

One game that should definitely be considered verboten would be tug-o-war. Simply put, the dog is always going to win. And if, during this game, he learns that growling (even in play) or putting his teeth on a human results in him "winning" (toys being released), he's learned a very negative lesson: Use your teeth and growl and you get what you want.

### **Rule #4: Bad Behavior = No Play**



If, during play between the child and puppy, unwanted behaviors such as jumping, playing too rough, using teeth to grab a toy from a child, etc. happen, the *play must stop immediately*. The puppy wants to play—after all, this is great fun. However, when he figures out that his actions stopped the play, he will soon learn to act in an appropriate manner.

For example, if the puppy and child are playing nicely with a toy, and the puppy then uses his teeth to get the toy from the youngster, the child should drop the toy at once and simply leave the room. Do not allow the puppy to follow the child. Do the same thing if the puppy is playing too roughly with the child; the child should immediately stop playing, stand still (not looking at the dog), then leave the room.

### **Rule #5: A Tired Puppy Is a Good Puppy**

Dane puppies go through a stage where they have tremendous amounts of energy. Many people are astounded since all the literature they've read says "Danes don't require much exercise". However, that's not quite true. Danes under two years of age may require much more exercise than most people realize.

It is important that your growing Dane puppy has ample opportunity to self-exercise in a securely-fenced area to burn off this excess energy. Failure to do so results in a puppy that is too "full of himself"—and when that happens, you generally start having some behavior problems



If you are having problems with your Dane puppy being too wild in the house, you might look at your puppy's schedule and see if you need to rearrange it. Perhaps a generous amount of outside play time in his area is needed prior to coming into the house for his people time. I also feel it's important for a Dane to learn how to play by himself and not require human interaction every minute of the day.

If the puppy and children share a common yard and this is causing problems with adequate supervision, then the obvious solution would be to close off a section of the yard specifically for the dog. This area is not a "punishment" place, but a secure place where the Dane puppy can be outside and get his exercise with supervision between child and dog not required. Make the play yard fun by regularly hiding treats, new toys, and by adults playing a few games with him in there.

As Danes get older, their exercise requirements do decrease, but adequate exercise should always be provided to keep the dog fit and healthy

### **Rule #6: Use It or Loose It**

Puppy kindergarten is a must for every puppy, but it's only the start. Besides attending your regular puppy classes, you need to work the puppy on basic training exercises *on a daily basis at least once a day*. If you do not, the puppy will never have a chance "to get it". Puppy training is easy, so you can quickly throw in some obedience exercises during the normal course of the day.

As the puppy becomes more adapt at performing his training exercises, the children can also begin to help with training. Your class instructor should be able to assist you on this. There are many varied and wonderful resource guides in book form or on websites. A listing of them is included at the end of this chapter.

### **Rule #7: Never Reinforce Negative Behavior but Always the Positive**

Dogs pick up on things very quickly, and if you reward an action, it will become something the dog does all the time, whether you want him to or not.

As human beings, we are not always aware of how we are “signaling” our dogs that an unwanted behavior is acceptable. When we do this, it is called “reinforcing negative behavior”.

A few very simply examples would include;

- Your young puppy is happy to see you; he runs to you and jumps up on your legs. You lean down and pet him. You have just told the puppy it’s ok to do this. Remember, you are dealing with a giant breed and this won’t be so fun or cute when he gets older and knocks down the kids – or you. An alternate would be to teach the puppy to sit prior to accepting praise and meeting new people.
- The puppy is playing too rough and play continues. The message to the puppy is that this is acceptable. A better action would be for all play to stop.
- The puppy bowls past you going in or out of doorways or up and down stairs. You continue, and then feed him or play with him. It then becomes ok to do this. Instead, teach the puppy he must wait for you to go through the doorway or up and down the stairs first.



### **Rule # 8: Play Fair!**

Recently a man inquired of our rescue program about adopting a Dane for his five-year-old child. He wanted a dog that “could take tail-pulling, ear-yanking, and fur-grabbing” and had heard Danes were good with kids. He actually was quite put off when informed he would not be considered an

appropriate home for a Dane. Why? First, it was obvious by the conversation the child was already out of control. And second, the caller didn't seem to think there was anything wrong with allowing his child to do these things to a dog.

Any dog, even the best dog in the world, is going to react when a kid sticks a pencil in the dog's ear or uses the tail as a pull toy. As a responsible adult, it is your duty to teach your child such behavior is inappropriate, cruel, and even downright dangerous. Maybe you are fortunate to have a very forgiving dog that will tolerate such abuse, but the neighbor's dog when subjected to the same treatment may not be so pardoning. Do not expect your dog to tolerate being abused and tormented by children. Back to the basics—if both the child and dog are under your direct supervision, you can teach the child appropriate behavior around dogs and avoid dangerous situations.



## **Common Problems and Solutions**

***Problem:*** The puppy is jumping up at the kids, and nipping at clothing.

***Solution:*** Play the game “RED LIGHT GREEN LIGHT”

It goes like this. The parent is in the backyard with puppy and kids. (Sit down and make yourself comfortable if you want.) Kids scream and run, puppy yaps and runs, puppy jumps up on kids. Now here's how to stop it. Parent says "RED LIGHT" and kids stop, "make like a tree" (crossing arms over chest) and look to the sky. Puppy usually stops jumping right then as he is astonished. (If not, the parent enforces the SIT command, physically if need be.) All small children and young dogs calm down. Parent says GREEN LIGHT and they can all go merrily along their "amok" ways. When it gets out of hand again, it's time again for RED LIGHT. You get the picture? Eventually the "tree kid" can "help" the parent say SIT to the dog, and eventually the responsibility for saying red light/green light can be transferred to older kids.

This works because it recognizes the basic problem--too many crazy young things running wildly out of control. And it works because it's fun--so the kids will do it. (By J P Yousha)

**Problem:** The puppy is playing too rough with the children when outside and I'm too busy to supervise.

**Solution:** If you are unable to supervise, the puppy and children should not be outside together without you. The puppy should be put into his play yard if you don't want to bring him inside.

### **Recommended Reading and Resources**

There are many excellent books and websites on teaching children and puppies how to "play nicely". A few of them are listed below, and I hope that you will take the time to read at least a couple of them. A good puppy kindergarten class, combined with common sense, consistent, fair and proper training in house-manners, supervision, and socialization will go far in helping to make your Dane puppy a valued member of your household and a loving companion for your child.



**Suggested**

**Sites**

**and**

**Books**[http://www.greatpets.com/home/dogs/children\\_and\\_dogs/baby](http://www.greatpets.com/home/dogs/children_and_dogs/baby)  
<http://www.doglogic.com/kidsanddogs.htm>  
<http://www.detnews.com/2004/lifestyle/0405/22/e18-159132.htm>

"Child-Proofing Your Dog" by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson