



## Paw Perfect Introductions podcast

### Episode Seven – Introducing your baby to a puppy or adult dog

**Cathy:** Hello, this is episode seven of the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast. I'm Cathy Beer from Pets 4 Life, and with me is animal behaviourist Dr Joanne Righetti from Pet Problems Solved. Our podcast topic today is all about how to introduce your new puppy or adult dog to your baby or young child. Welcome back, Jo, to the podcast.

**Dr Righetti:** Thanks for having me, Cathy. It's always an exciting time when there are babies and children and dogs together, and that excitement can be trouble if we don't watch out, so this is a great opportunity to talk to people about dogs and babies and children.

**Cathy:** Oh, good. Thanks, Jo. This is a very common scenario, isn't it, where families with a baby or young children decide, *It's time to get a puppy or adopt an adult dog*. It all sounds great and I guess most of the time it probably is, but things can go wrong such as dog bites and other things. So Jo, shall we just start with the baby-puppy combination? What are your tips for parents who've got a baby and they want to add a puppy to the family?

**Dr Righetti:** Well, first of all, think carefully. You already have a baby; that's hard work. I know you're in this nurturing phase and the hormones are going wild and you think you can bring it all on—babies, children, dogs, everything at once—but it is hard work. So you know, be prepared if you are going to do this. And there are many places that actually won't release animals to people who have very young babies because they really don't think that they'll be able to offer adequate care. I've done it, and you can do it, but you do need to be prepared. So what I'd say is, if you've got a baby and you want to add a puppy, then have your house set up. So it's not only baby gates we're talking here. You might want to have dog gates set up. You might want to have a puppy pen, or another playpen for your baby to go into, or you might use the same one and alternate who goes in there—baby one day, dog the next. So it's really about all being set up and then really making a careful choice as to what puppy that you're going to add to your family. So you said, maybe an adult dog—that might be an easier option. But if you're going for a puppy, you're have to start looking, do I want a breed? What breed is going to suit my energy requirements, my lifestyle? It's not all about looks. It's about deciding the energy levels, the hair, how much this animal is going to shed, how much grooming you're going to have to do, the cost of the animal, how long it's going to live for... Are you prepared for holiday care? Are you prepared for the veterinary bill? Looking at all that is really, really important long before you get to the day that you actually select the puppy you're going to have. And then you could go to a dog breeder and meet them, meet their dogs, or get recommendations from your friends, or take a trip out to a shelter and have a look at the dogs and puppies there. People think that shelters only have adult dogs that are misbehaving usually, but that's not the case! They have puppies; they have pedigree puppies; they have pedigree dogs. So there are a lot of options out there for families who are looking to add a dog to their household.

**Cathy:** What would we be doing differently for the arrival of a puppy or adult dog in introducing that animal to the baby?

**Dr Righetti:** Yeah. Well, an adult dog probably—it depends on the age, of course—but if you're getting one that's over two years of age, they may be less energetic than a puppy, so that might be an easier option for many families. Puppies have a lot of energy, and you've got to do a lot of training to teach them in your household groove and your boundaries that you set for them. A dog probably has had a little bit of training in the past and will be easier to just blend in. And what happens with an adult dog? A lot of their habits are set. And that can include bad habits, too, of course. And you may need to change those around. But the good thing is that you will know what you're taking on. Now if you're getting, say, an adult dog from the shelter, you ask the shelter, *Tell me all the things that this dog may need help with. Or, What is it good at? Does it come when it's called? Does it fret when it's left alone?* Ask these things. Now, at the shelter that you're getting it from or whoever you're adopting it from—friend or family member—ask them. And if they can't tell you that, then it's better to go elsewhere and get somebody who can give you some information on the dog that you're taking on. I think that's very important. And then at home, when you've got that dog or puppy with your baby or young children, it's really important that you supervise—especially in the beginning because you don't know how this dog's going to react. Puppies use their teeth all the time. And adult dogs will use their teeth if they feel they can't get away from a potential or perceived threat in a situation. So it's really important we supervise. And of course, we supervise children and dogs together right up until at least age seven, if not ten years old. It's a commitment the parents make—but it's absolutely necessary because dogs don't want to bite our children, but sometimes they feel that's their only option when they can't get away.

**Cathy:** I'm just thinking, you talked about the playpens before, which is fantastic. What about a crate as well? For puppies, I suppose, you're probably looking at doing some crate training and that's another way to separate babies and toddlers—

**Dr Righetti:** Absolutely, yeah.

**Cathy:** —with a puppy when you can't supervise.

**Dr Righetti:** Exactly. And you know, people think that crates are like a prison for dogs. They're not at all because the dog actually likes it. It makes the dog feel secure, perhaps a bit like it's going into its cot or its bassinet for the night and feeling secure with four walls around it. Dogs and cats are like that, too. They like to have four walls around them. So having your dog trained to go into a crate is a really good idea. The moment you get your dog, make it a positive experience. Put in some food in there. A nice, comfortable bed. And let your dog have some time in there. Get it used to it with the door open and then start closing the door, and before long, your dog will be crate-trained. And it's very important that we teach any child to leave the dog alone when they're in that. That is the dog's safe haven. And the dog should know that they can go there and nobody will disturb them while they're in that crate. And that's really important—a lot of families don't give a dog a space to get away from children—to get away from the family. Everyone needs space from each other in the family—every single family member. And so it's important that we provide that safe haven for a dog.

**Cathy:** So what about setting up house rules before they bring that adult dog or puppy home?

**Dr Righetti:** Yeah. I think it's a great idea to set the rules up at the start before you bring the dog home. But be prepared to bend those rules as you go, because so many families say, *Well,*

*we'll definitely be keeping the dog outdoors, and then, Well, it's a cold night; we'll bring the dog in.*

**Cathy:** Yeah, right. <Laughs>

**Dr Righetti:** *Oh well, we weren't going to have the dog on the sofa, but you know, I quite like a cuddle when everyone's gone to bed. Oh, well my dog's on my bed—how did it get there last night?* And so it goes on. So I always say, dogs have this way of finding their way from the backyard to your lounge room to your sofa to your bed and right up into your heart. You know? And that's a dog's job to do that.

**Cathy:** Yes. <Laughs>

**Dr Righetti:** So don't be surprised that you do bend the rules a little bit. But it is good for all family members to be consistent in how they deal with the dog. So, discuss it with your partner, discuss it with older children what you intend to do—that you're going to be training. A young child is too young, really, to train a dog, but they can stand by you as you ask your dog to sit and then feed them, and they can help put the dish down. Make sure, of course, that the dog is safe around the child and the child's safe around the dog. The child could even give the dog a few treats. So the dog's then seeing this child bring positive things to them, and they'll start to really enjoy children. Dogs are great for any mess that children make when they're eating and drop food on the ground. Perhaps you don't want the dog under your dining table to eat, but you could let them go and clean up under the high chair and the dining table—

**Cathy:** Yes.

—once you've finished your meal. So yes, it is all about setting up some rules, some boundaries, being consistent. And of course, always rewarding good behaviour. Now, that applies to dogs and to children.

**Cathy:** Yes.

**Dr Righetti:** If we reward behaviour, we see that behaviour repeated, so that's the way to go: reward, reward, reward.

**Cathy:** Absolutely, Jo. And as you know, I'm learning about positive dog training. So, I can't stress that point enough (rewarding calm behaviour). Set the house rules and the dog gets to know what they should and shouldn't be doing, and feel comfortable in any situation.

**Dr Righetti:** Absolutely, yes. It's all about training the owners, training the dog, training the child—everybody needs a little bit of training and everybody can make mistakes. But overall, as long as we keep positive about it, we'll soon have children and dogs and even adults who are well-behaved around the home.

**Cathy:** Thanks, Jo, for the great tips. I'm sure parents with a baby or young children will find these tips very helpful when bringing home a canine bundle of joy.

**Dr Righetti:** Love talking about pets.

**Cathy:** <Laughs> Thanks. Next time on the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast, I'll be chatting with Dr Joanne Righetti again about introducing your new kitten or adult cat to your baby or child in episode eight. Thanks, Jo!

**Dr Righetti:** Thanks, Cathy!

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