

Reviewers' Corner

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Happy Kids, Happy Dogs: Building a Friendship Right from the Start, Barbara Schumannfang (Lulu Press, 2006, 184 pages, softcover, \$16.95)

Reviewer: Merope Pavlides, MS, CPDT

Content: 🐾🐾🐾🐾

Presentation: 🐾🐾🐾🐾

Readability: 🐾🐾🐾🐾

Audience: Typical dog owners, prospective dog owners, and parents.

Two days prior to the writing of this review, a four-year-old boy was killed in Houston when two pit bulls attacked him in his yard. A horrific incident like this always stirs the public to outcries against dangerous dogs, yet as Schumannfang points out in this book, incidents like this are indeed rare. Less rare, however, are the nonfatal bites children receive in their own, or friends' homes. If every parent and prospective parent read this book, this number would surely drop. The subtitle is indeed apt—this is a book not so much about solving problems, but preventing them. It provides a protocol for laying the foundation for healthy interactions from the moment children enter a dog's life.

Schumannfang wisely begins by addressing how our culture mythologizes the child/dog relationship and asks her readers to rethink expectations. She notes

that all too often parents assume that a "good dog" will find Junior as adorable as they do, or that babies and puppies will naturally bond as if littermates. Schumannfang

debunks popular notions persuasively, validating the emotions that drive them, at the same time that she points out prevalent misconceptions regarding canine behavior. Trainers and behavior consultants will nod when reading this book, having heard cries of "My kids can do anything and my dog doesn't mind!" repeatedly. Although this book is intended for the dog owner, professionals will glean insight into how to help clients reconsider the encounters they witness, and how to effectively restructure the home environment.

Happy Kids, Happy Dogs is both well-organized and well-written, covering concerns from pregnancy through adolescence. The book's real strength, however, comes from Schumannfang's attention to detail. She asks parents to think thoroughly and creatively about opportunities for potential challenges, providing specific examples. In addition, she includes step-by-step suggestions for training to help disarm troublesome interactions. Her chapter on "Your Growing and Changing Child" is especially valuable. Parents are often lulled into a false sense of security when a dog seems

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unruffled by a crying infant, forgetting that a mobile toddler presents a myriad of new stressors. Included are photos clearly illustrating dogs experiencing stress and those enjoying the proximity of a child, as well as images of training techniques. Appendices provide useful references and resources.

The resounding response from parents and prospective parents reading this book will undoubtedly be, "I never thought of that!" Schumannfang seems to have thought of it all. Some parents may even reconsider adding a dog to their growing family. All readers will certainly be inspired to expanded thought and dialogue on the topic of integrating a dog successfully into a family with children, helping lower both the incidents of dog bites and potentially, of surrendered dogs.

Merope Pavlides is the owner of Compliant Canines, LLC. She may be reached through her Web site, www.compliantcanines.com.

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