



Jeff & Laura McCracken :: 509.754.6171 :: www.desertwindlabradors.com

Labs and Children

When the average person thinks of a child and a dog, a Labrador will appear in that mental picture 90% of the time. Labs are known worldwide to be accommodating, well tempered, loving companions. They stand alone in being the perfect child friendly dog.

Age of Children

Deciding when to introduce a Labrador into the family depends on many circumstances. The age of the child is not nearly as important as your comfort level in handling children and Labs at the same time. Generally speaking, however, the younger the child, the better. Younger children have lower likelihood of developing allergies to the dog when introduced as babies or toddlers. They also learn to accept and celebrate the company of the Lab early on. Fear of dogs does not have time to develop. Children that grow up with dogs from an early age are shown to have remarkably increased social skills, including the ability to express themselves and get along with others.

Temperament of Children

Breeders that have worked with children will be more able to assist in this area.

Your breeder should ask you about the temperament of your son or daughter, as this will be important when selecting the right litter to choose from. (If your child is under two years of age, your temperament will be more important). The temperament of children can range from that of the outgoing, sports playing gregarious child that never knows a stranger, to the more intellectual bookworm that is just as happy curled up by the fireplace. Matching the temperament of the Lab to that of the child will make a better bond.

If your child has challenges, such as a learning disability, mental handicap, or behavioral problem, make sure to let your breeder know. This information is invaluable.

Behavior of Children

This may be the most difficult area to talk about, as your child's behavior is usually linked directly to how you as parents discipline or love him. Make sure you spill the beans to your breeder, and be completely honest. Remember that children, like puppies, are works in progress. Your breeder (assuming he has an interest in helping you with training issues in the future) should be taking notes, as his future advice will be strongly influenced by these facts.

Discipline of Children

The psychology of raising a puppy and a child are very much the same. For example, the message that you are the leader and they are the follower should be strong.

Let your breeder know how you discipline your children. Non-spanking parents (those that would not spank their children even if they were kicked in the shins) present very different puppy training challenges than those parents that will turn the backside up for a roasting. If your puppy sees your child getting away with murder, they will follow suit.

Children Picking Puppies

For the most part, it is not a good idea to rely on a child to pick the puppy, or even the color. Respect their expressions of desire, but realize that your breeder (assuming he is a good one) will be much more successful in making suggestions. Young children almost always pick yellow, as it is a vibrant, eye catching color. This is an excellent opportunity to teach your child that there is more to picking a Lab than the color.

There are exceptions to this, of course. If you have a calm, reasonable child that latches onto one puppy and forms a bond, then your breeder will most likely suggest they stay together, unless some underlying circumstances prevail.

Children Training Puppies

Children that have good discipline themselves can certainly benefit from being involved in training their Labs. Keep your child's age (and attention span) in mind as much as the puppy's. Your breeder can help you set up a training syllabus that you can follow. Repetition and consistency are key. You should be present to make sure the puppy is not receiving mixed signals. Keep it fun for both your child and the puppy. Setting goals helps. For example, when the puppy learns to sit and stay for ten seconds, you may wish to do something special with your child. (The puppy will receive his reward in praise. Never let your child reward your Lab with treats). If you are receiving training at your breeder's location, bring your children with you. Your breeder can involve them in the process.

Children sleeping with their Lab

Here is an area where you are sure to get plenty of advice from friends and relatives. Half of the advisers will tell you to never let the dog in the bedroom, and the other half will tell you to let your child use the Lab as a pillow. The real question should be whether the Lab and the child will benefit from sharing the room. In most cases, once the puppy is housebroken and can sleep through the night, there is great benefit to allowing the two of them to share at least the room, if not the bed. Children usually sleep better knowing their friend is watching out for them. (Use caution in children under five, as the Lab may use the child as a pillow).