

THE DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK

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Have you ever heard the phrase “the dog ate my homework”? Well, your dog may in fact be helping your child with his or her homework.

The company Pets At Home conducted a survey of 1,000 children between the ages of 5 and 16 that revealed 79 percent of those students believed that owning a pet had a positive effect on their sense of responsibility and improved their social skills.¹ When you take a look at your child’s report card, you’ll see that responsibility is an essential skill for success. What’s even more surprising is that researchers in the U.S. found that reading to dogs helped children improve their reading fluency by over 30 percent!² That’s a lot! Children feel safe reading around dogs. They feel like they are not being judged or corrected, and they can be more animated, which can help them build more confidence.

With these benefits in mind, let’s look at responsible pet ownership and how you can get children more involved...

Prior to getting a dog, your children can help you research what supplies you will need, and they can make a list and help with the shopping. Here are some tasks you can assign to children, depending on their age:

- Organize where to keep the supplies, such as the food, collar, leash and poop bags, grooming supplies, and toys.
- Help devise a schedule that outlines who is responsible for what, such as when the dog should be fed, walked,

trained, bathed, groomed, played with, etc.

- Maintain a calendar of events by writing down appointments for veterinarian visits, grooming sessions, training, and/or a medication schedule.
- Organize a binder of handouts from the veterinarian and trainer.
- Give them fun titles, like Director of Training or Food Manager.

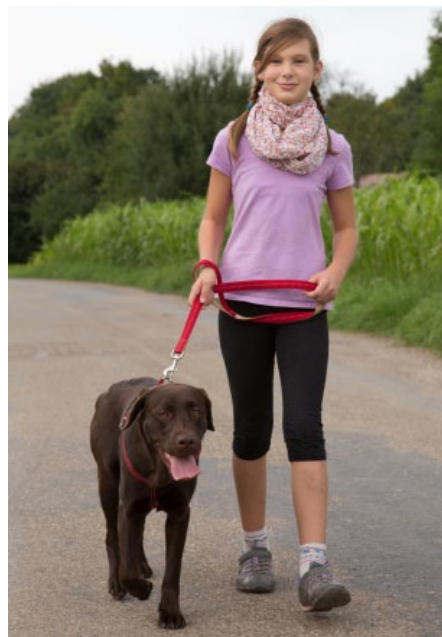
It’s really important for children to understand that their dog is a living thing and that dogs have feelings and needs. Children need to be taught to be gentle with dogs and to respect them. You can teach a child what keeps a dog safe, healthy, and happy by being a good role model. Demonstrate how to brush the dog, how to feed the dog, how to put on their leash, and how to teach behaviours like “come” and “sit.”

It’s essential that children learn as much as they can about dog body language so they can recognize what their dog is saying and what their dog needs. For more on dog body language, visit www.doggonesafe.com/Speak_Dog.

If you’re wondering when a child is old enough to walk or otherwise interact with a dog without adult supervision, there is no “one size fits all” rule. Parents need to evaluate both the dog and the child and then decide when the time is right.

Doggone Safe suggests a child is ready to walk a dog alone

- when the child can read the dog’s body language;
- when the child and dog have a mutually respectful relationship;
- when the dog will willingly and happily follow directions from the child;



- if the dog has never shown signs of aggression toward people or other dogs and does not chase cars, cats, or other animals; and
- when the child knows how to interpret situations and take appropriate action.

Parents must also know that sometimes the novelty of a new pet will wear off for a child. In that case, the responsibility really is theirs. It’s important to praise children for any active role that they take in caring for their dog; tell them how much you appreciate their help.

Parents should, however, avoid making their children feel guilty for not helping look after the family pet, as that will just build up resentment. Parents definitely shouldn’t tell their children that if they don’t do a particular task then they will get rid of the dog because that just teaches children that dogs are disposable, which they aren’t.

Happy and Healthy New Year!

¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2174318/Children-pets-clever-according-new-survey-chinchilla-owners-getting-best-results.html>

² <http://www.sott.net/article/207678-Dogs-Helped-Kids-Improve-Reading-Fluency>