

# A Companion Guide

By Mike Wombacher

Module 1:

## Preparing your Dog for Childlike Handling



*Introduction*

*Module 1*

## Introduction

I've been training dogs for more than two decades and performed well over 30,000 in-home, private behavior and training consultations. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands of these, have concerned issues revolving around preparing a dog for the arrival of a child.

Unfortunately, over the course of those years I've met many couples whose problems did not arise until their baby started crawling at around 8 months. And in a great many of those cases the dog, now panicked and uncertain as to how to relate to the child, nipped the child in the face or came uncomfortably close to doing so. The tragic result? Surrender of the beloved family dog.

About two years into my training career I self-published my first book, *There's a Baby in the House: Preparing your Dog for the Arrival of your Child*, as a response to this predicament. If only people had a set of reasonable guidelines to help prepare their dog, I thought, then perhaps fewer dogs would end up getting re-homed – or worse. Several years ago a mainstream publishing company (New World Library), recognizing the lack of available information on this subject, purchased the rights to my book and republished a revised and expanded version as *Good Dog, Happy Baby*.

By that time advances in digital technology made it possible for me to begin to think about developing an integrated online training program that would provide people with a thorough and easy-to-use roadmap to help prepare their dog for the arrival of their baby. This set of videos represents the first of a dozen modules to come. It focuses on the leading cause of problems between dogs and babies: the dog's confusion and fear in the face of unpredictable and erratic baby behavior, especially crawling, encroaching and grabbing. This single issue is by far and away the biggest threat to your dog's relationship with your child and consequently its ability to remain in your home.



## Don't think you have a problem? Consider the numbers.

Are you telling yourself "oh, my dog would never...she's harmless, wouldn't hurt a fly?" Don't be so sure. In almost every case in which I've had to counsel parents of young children to re-home their dogs that was the driving presumption causing them to overlook legitimate concerns.

If you think I'm hyping up these concerns in order to sell books and video courses consider the numbers. Recent statistics (2014) have led the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to label dog bites on children as a national epidemic, second only to teen substance abuse as a threat to child well-being.

On average, there are about 4.5 million reported dog bites in the United States each year (the number of unreported bites is vastly higher). Of those, approximately 800,000 require hospital visits and of those about 30,000 require reconstructive surgery. The overwhelming majority (around 80%) happen to very young children and the bulk of them (again, about 80%) happen around the face and neck. Consequently it is estimated that by the age of 12 about 50% of children have been bitten by dogs and a significant percentage of those end up suffering with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). And guess what? Somewhere on the order of 90% of those bites are inflicted by either the family dog or a dog that was familiar to the child. So if you think you're immune to such concerns, think again.

In terms of the causes behind such bites I speak from years of experience when I say that the leading cause of bites on very young children is simply that the family dog has not been prepared to deal with the kind of punishment in the form of crawling, encroachment and grabbing that a young child can dish out. Often this does not even occur to people until their child is about 8 months old, at which point they begin crawling. Of course all this only gets worse about six months later when the baby starts walking and from there things tend to spin increasingly out of control as the baby's mobility picks up steam.



## How to use this Guide

I've designed the current video course specifically with this problem in mind. The main body of the course is divided into 5 lessons. Each lesson contains the essential elements of a process known as "systematic desensitizing" but focuses on specific issues that vary from dog to dog and are relevant to dog owners at various stages of their child's development.

Throughout the course I emphasize certain points repeatedly. This is intentional and not meant as a slight to anyone's intelligence. My reasons are twofold. First, I want to make sure that folks who are just skipping through the videos will get the points. And second, some points are simply so important that they can't be repeated enough.

In this companion document I've outlined the content of each video lesson with references to the video time code so you can easily find the material in question in the video itself. Additionally, I've cross-referenced the material (in adjoining parentheses) with the other videos in which similar principles are discussed. That way it should be easy for you to quickly find related materials in the other videos.

The point, of course, is to maximize the user friendliness of the whole program. With this little companion guide it shouldn't take you longer than a minute to find the information you're looking for anywhere in the 7 video lessons that comprise this module. Having said all that, let's dive in..



## Lesson Overviews

### Lesson 1 – General Peaches

General Peaches is a lovely little middle-aged toy poodle. She has a gentle demeanor and loves everyone. However, she's totally freaked out by most forms of grooming, brushing and grabbing and has repeatedly bitten the owners in these situations. The owners aren't currently pregnant but are hoping to be soon. They've fortunately had the forethought to see the potential trouble such sensitivities could create and have decided to get some help. The following are the key points covered in this video in the order in which they appear. The time code where you can find the material is included in parentheses after the topic title and time codes to related materials are provided in parentheses below where relevant.

- What is systematic desensitizing? (3:05). Systematic desensitization is the key process that will take us through all of these lessons. It includes many subtleties and we introduce the central tenets of it in this first video. The essential elements go something like this:
  - Introduce something your dog doesn't like in tiny increments your dog can handle.
    - (See also Lesson 2/Jack 1/1:40)



## Lesson 1 – General Peaches *(continued)*

- Couple the mildly annoying stimulation with something your dog is crazy about – hot dogs, string cheese or any other high value treat – in generous quantities.
- Over time increase the levels of the negative stimulus in increments that your dog can handle while keeping her focused on the yummy goodies she's getting.
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver and Rye/9:05 – 10:00)
- With the general outline set up we move on to more specific steps involved in implementing a program of systematic desensitizing (4:22 – 6:42)
  - Begin by focusing on the treats. These should be extremely high value!
  - With your dog focused on the treat begin introducing the unpleasant stimulus in small increments that your dog can handle. We want to be sure that your dog can feel the stimulation but is not becoming reactive to it.
    - (See also Lesson 2/Jack1/2:30)
- Do this often. More is better!



## Lesson 1 – General Peaches *(continued)*

- If you accidentally go to far – which just about everyone does – and your dog reacts, you have to back off a little bit. Occasionally crossing the line and triggering your dog’s reactivity is inevitable if you’re working at the edge of the dog’s sensitivity. After all, if you’re making progress then that edge becomes a bit of a moving target. It’s at this point that things become a bit more art than science.
  - (See also Lesson 2/Jack 1/ 10:00)
- The goal is to develop trust and tolerance.
- While it’s not okay to harshly reprimand your dog in the process of desensitizing – as it will reinforce her notion that this is all a big drag – it is okay to give an “ah ah,” a moderate verbal reprimand that provides the dog with a marker as to where she’s making a mistake and a clue about what it is that we don’t like.
  - (See also Jack 2/2:23 – 3:48)
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/11:00 – 14:45)
- Developing the sequence (6:44 – 9:00).
  - Initially you present the high value treat first and in generous amounts while introducing a small amount of the aversive stimulus a few moments after your dog is totally engrossed in the treat.
  - Over time (how much depends on the dog and is unique to each situation) we want to get to the point where we can introduce the annoying stimulus first and only after a few moments produce the high value rewards.
    - (See also Lesson 2/Jack 1/10:22 and 11:04 and 13:00)
  - This teaches tolerance and helps your dog begin to understand “delayed gratification.” This is vital because down the road there will be many times when your child’s grabbing of the dog is going to happen without an immediate treat. Therefore, by teaching your dog to wait a few moments before the treat arrives we are helping to keep her in a state of anticipation for the reward (something positive) and delaying her focus on the annoying handling (something negative) while simultaneously training her to become increasingly indifferent to the annoying handling.



## Lesson 1 – General Peaches *(continued)*

- If at any time your dog pulls away or retreats from the exercise, let her! But cease delivering the treats as well. This is key! It's important that your dog knows that there's always an out. But at the same time she should learn that taking that out will also abruptly end the yummy rewards.
  - (See also Lesson 2/Jack 1/ 4:35)
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/11:00 – 14:45)
  - (See also Lesson 5/Posie/5:59)
- Always do these exercises in small bursts that your dog can handle. That is, while it's good to do these exercises as often as possible it's also important to keep the lessons short and fun without unduly stressing the dog out, pushing her to some kind of breaking point.
- You want to get your dog to the point where she thinks this is the best part of the day. Keep the experience positive and fun with an upbeat tone of voice and attitude
  - (See also Lesson 4/Manta/8:04)
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/11:00 – 14:45)
- Expanding the application zone (9:30 – 9:35).
- As you progress assertively work over your dog's body actively seeking out sensitive areas. Then begin applying these principles wherever you discover new areas that trigger her reactivity.
  - (See also Lesson 2/Jack 1; 4:10)
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/11:00 – 14:45)



## Lesson 2 – Jack 1

In the second lesson we take the same principles and build on them with Jack, another cute, sweet and friendly toy poodle who is aggressively resistant to being touched in all sorts of ways. Unlike General Peaches' owners, however, Jack's parents are expecting any day. Having been busy for months attending to the litany of concerns common to all expecting parents they had neglected to address Jack's reactivity around all manner of issues until the 11th hour. So our window of opportunity to impact Jack's sensitivities is considerably smaller.

- With Jack we continue and expand upon the principles of systematic desensitizing.
  - We begin by re-emphasizing a key insight, namely that when baby's grabbing and pulling comes together with crawling at about 8 months of age an important threshold has been crossed. It is here that a lot of problems that may have been previously unapparent explode into the forefront of everyone's attention (0:57).
    - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/15:29 – 19:16)
  - We then review the key elements of systematic desensitizing while pointing out that over time, as your dog gets increasingly comfortable with formerly tough to take handling, it can be helpful to have other people practice with her as well. In this way she can begin to realize and become okay with the notion that this type of handling can come from multiple sources, including, at length, your child (3:00).



## Lesson 2 – Jack 1 (continued)

- I also re-emphasize how important it is to keep things upbeat and positive. In the event that you've crossed your dog's threshold of tolerance and she becomes tense or scared, which, as I mentioned above, is inevitable if you're effectively pushing the boundaries with your dog, back off and go easy until you can build up her confidence and enjoyment of the process again. (3:37)
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/11:00 – 14:45)
- We also take a closer look at how to bridge from presenting a treat first and then handling the dog to how to handle the dog first and deliver the treat a bit later (remember, this helps build tolerance and teach "delayed gratification"). We begin by coming in with the treat first and then the handling before switching the focus to how to bring the treat and the handling together simultaneously, being careful to have the emphasis on the positive and to avoid triggering the dog (3:45; See also 10:22).
- We also discuss the importance of tone of voice with special attention to the admonition to never talk to your dog in cooing, comforting or reassuring tones. Why? Because doing so will make her dramatically worse in almost no time at all. Instead, you want to either be neutral or, in the best of all worlds, super upbeat and positive (4:46).
- Then we take a brief break in order to summarize of all these points (5:28).
- We then shift our attention to a few other subtleties involved in this process. The first involves the quality and types of treats to use. The essential points are to always use super high value treats and, in the event that your dog gets bored with what you're using, switching treats around (8:23).
- We also discuss the element of speed as we attempt how to teach the dog tolerance for being grabbed. After all, kids move fast and unpredictably, precisely the elements that tend to freak dogs out. So once your dog gets used to various forms of grabbing and pulling it's important to add speed to it (9:30).



## Lesson 2 – Jack 1 (continued)

- Having mentioned that it's inevitable that we are going to occasionally breach the dog's threshold of reactivity if we are diligently working through this process we discuss what it means to always work creatively the edge of your dog's sensitivities (10:00).
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/11:00 – 14:45)
- With Jack progressing nicely we take several opportunities to explore the 3-step sequence of treat first, then touch, treat and touch simultaneously, and finally touch first then treat (10:22, 11:04, 13:00).
- We also explore the problem of the dog who is fussy about treats, suggesting that skipping meals prior to desensitizing sessions and making up the deficit with yummy treats can be a very helpful strategy. Why? Not only because your dog will obviously be hungry but also because behaviors instilled through a period of deprivation will tend to remain stronger even when the deprivation is no longer there than behaviors taught without deprivation (12:19).
- And lastly, I also point out that for dogs who are generally happy to take treats their willingness to take or not take them in the process of systematic desensitizing is an important barometer of their emotional condition (13:31).



## Lesson 3 – Jack 2

In this lesson we move from the sofa to the floor with Jack where we encounter a few new problems. These primarily have to do with crawling and encroachment. Of course, this is a major issue since babies relentlessly do all those things.

- Therefore, using the same approach of systematic desensitizing, you want to try to mimic the types of behavior a child might dish out, namely crawl, encroach upon and hug your dog (1:41 – 2:11).
- While your dog will clearly know that you're not an infant, nonetheless parents should start doing all these things with their dogs in order to create a "template of behavior," a pattern similar enough to what's coming down the pike with baby that the dog can connect them. And, of course, through systematic desensitizing, can connect to them positively.
- Again, always work the edge of your dog's sensitivities to try to develop your dog's threshold of tolerance.
- Returning to the point that it's almost inevitable that somewhere along the way you might inadvertently go further than your dog handle we unpack the additional point never to reprimand your dog for any associated outbursts. In other words, be sure that even if your dog snaps not to sharply reprimand the dog. Reprimanding a fearful dog who is only defending himself because you've inadvertently gone too far – which is guaranteed to happen at times – will only make him worse and set you back (2:23 – 3:48).
  - (see also Lesson 1/General Peaches/4:22 – 6:42)
- Respect your dog's right to tell you when she's had enough. Back off and make no drama.
  - (See also Lesson 5/Posie/2:26)
- We need her to feel okay with giving us signs when she's had enough.



## Lesson 4 – Manta, Oliver and Rye

In this series of clips we are visiting with three dogs in two different households. Manta is a large Chocolate Lab who has zero issues with fear. On the contrary, he's exuberant and powerful, which produces its own set of issues. So while we're using basic desensitizing here we are going at it kind of roughly and calling it "hazing." But the principles are the same.

Additionally, unlike with Jack or General Peaches, Manta actually has a brand new baby in his life, a four-month-old infant named Kai. That means that baby's crawling, grabbing and encroachment on Manta, which can become a potentially disastrous issue when baby passes eight months of age, is rapidly approaching.

Oliver and Rye – a large Pit Bull and small French Bulldog – live together in a different home and also have a baby on the ground, in this case only about a month old. But they have an assortment of issues including fear of being encroached upon, sensitivity to being touched in certain ways as well as over exuberance.

With all three dogs we review the basic principles of systematic desensitizing but start adding a few new elements, including the use of slings and Baby Bjorns, in order to help prepare the dogs for very close and intimate contact with the child, which we also begin introducing toward the end of the video.

- Almost right from the get go with Manta we encounter an issue more commonly seen in men's relationship with their dogs than women's. That is, in the process of desensitizing Manta's dad is simply too rough on the dog. I let this play out a bit just to see whether he would continue in this vein or, based on the dog's response, figure it out on his own (1:38 – 2:38 as well as 3:19 – 4:12).



## Lesson 4 – Manta, Oliver and Rye *(continued)*

- Again, we start with the basics. Work your dog to the point where he's aware of the offending stimulus but not so much that he wants to escape. Even tough, outgoing, tolerant dogs have a limit. So when you work you should be working for a lack of reactivity and not the reactivity itself. Escape behavior or other forms of reactivity are signs that you need to back off.
- I point out to the owner that he should beware of what I call “the buddy syndrome” – constantly slapping and pushing the dog like an old college buddy – and avoid pushing the dog to the point where he's trying to escape. Your dog shouldn't be expected to tolerate endless torment either from you or from your child (1:41).
  - Respect your dog's boundaries!
    - (See also Lesson 5/Posie 2:26).
- We also revisit the importance of always keeping the context fun and upbeat (8:04).
- Then we turn to Oliver & Rye. The parents have a very young approximately 4-week-old infant. The little French bulldog is a little afraid while the big Pit is both overly exuberant and powerful on one hand and afraid of encroachment on the other. Additionally, the dogs together haven't learned impulse control when it comes to rough play with one another (8:45).



#### **Lesson 4 – Manta, Oliver and Rye** *(continued)*

- This segment starts by reviewing the basics of systematic desensitizing including the setting of limits with a well-timed “ah-ah” if needed.
  - (see also Lesson 1/General Peaches/4:22 – 6:42)
- I also emphasize that I do not permit mouthiness or biting in this or any other context.
- Additionally, we actively seek out sensitive areas such as the flanks or feet and then work them consistently with lots of treats. It’s both about having fun and asserting a certain amount of authority to draw boundaries (9:05 – 10:00).
- We then discuss how important it is to discover such sensitivities as early as possible and work on them diligently. It’s very important to find these things out now rather than having your 8 month old discover them later. Whenever we find a sensitive area we slow down and focus on it. Work it at a level your dog can handle without crossing the fear/reactivity threshold (11:00 – 14:45).
  - Your dog has to learn to moderate any kind of snappy responses and we have to work to desensitize the dog to being handled.
  - Always watch your dog’s face and overall body language as you work with her.
  - Keep it fun and always use a happy tone.



## Lesson 4 – Manta, Oliver and Rye *(continued)*

- Make it a daily drill. Practice often until they become “soft as butter” around areas that made them nervous previously.
  - (See also Lesson 2/Jack 1; 4:10)
  - (See also Lesson 1/General Peaches/9:30)
- Practice multiple times a day. If you make it fun you can replace some of your normal play periods with periods of systematic desensitizing (15:00).
- We also begin to explore issues around preparing your dog for baby’s crawling. It’s something weird for dogs and we shouldn’t just assume they’re going to be okay with it (15:29 – 19:16).
  - (See also the entirety of Lesson 3/Jack 2)
- In this context we also discuss something called hyper-specificity (16:10).
- With that behind us we begin introducing slings and Baby Bjorns in order to help get the dogs (all three of them) comfortable with childlike handling as well as the child’s proximity to them with increasing encroachment (19:45 – 23:50).
- To highlight important points I’ve included a Section Summary (23:50 - 25:55) which re-emphasizes points I’ve been making throughout the video:



## Lesson 4 – Manta, Oliver and Rye *(continued)*

- Systematic desensitizing takes time and patience. In a perfect world you have almost 16 months to practice. And even if your child is already on the ground you have until 8 months of age to help prepare your doggie.
- Another review of the basic elements of systematic desensitizing.
  - (See also Lesson 1/Gen. Peaches/3:05 – 6:42).
- If you are going to include obedience exercises in your routines be sure that you have trained those exercises to a pretty decent level in a separate context. There is absolutely no room for physical corrections or strong self-assertion in this context. Remember, we want to keep this fun (25:08).
  - (See also Lesson 5, Posie/4:05)
- No rough play between multiple dogs in the household near the baby (25:55).
- Now we shift back to Manta. Here the child is a few months older and we begin to use the Baby Bjorn to slowly introduce close proximity and physical contact between Manta and the baby (27:06).
- Then we transition out of the Baby Bjorn into direct, intimate, encroaching contact between the baby and the dog (29:58).
- We also take some time to teach Manta dog to settle calmly on his side prior to teaching him to tolerate baby's crawling around on him (30:59).
- If your dog gets too wound up with treats present then when baby is around reward with love and affection instead and keep treats out of the picture (32:44).



## Lesson 5 – Posie

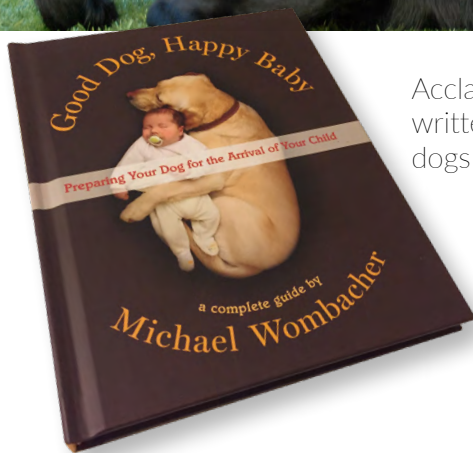
Posie provides an example of a situation in which the owner really hasn't done any prep work. The result? Posie is extremely cautious around the baby, constantly trying to keep her distance and casting sidelong looks in her direction. To help her we apply all the basic principles of systematic desensitizing that we've learned so far but because of the dog's extreme nervousness we focus less on direct and intense touching and more on simple proximity. You gotta start somewhere.



- One of the key points here is to respect your dog's boundaries and work within her sensitivities. Focus on proximity first and take your time. Once again, systematic desensitizing takes time, patience and consistency (2:24).
  - (See also Lesson 1/General Peaches/6:44 – 9:00).
- Once again, since we are using obedience exercises to help focus and settle the dog it's important to be sure that these have been taught in a separate context and that they're easy and non-stressful for the dog (4:05 – 5:55).
  - (See also Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/25:08).
- If she wants to retreat, let her. But the treats stop also (5:59).
  - (See also Lesson 1/Gen. Peaches/6:44 – 9:00)
- I also repeat again how important it is to keep session short, fun and upbeat and offer another general overview of systematic desensitizing (9:59).
- We then move on to demonstrate how to use toys and games in the process of desensitizing rather than food. This is helpful for dogs who are not especially motivated by food or dogs like Manta who can get really riled up when treats are around. Toys are commonly overlooked as a source of positive associations in the process of systematic desensitizing (11:55 – 15:55).

# Good Dog, Happy Baby

So that's it. I hope that you've enjoyed this course and, most importantly, found it helpful. I intend to continue producing video courses and other materials designed to help expecting parents prepare their dog for the arrival of their baby as well as much of the development beyond that. Stay tuned at [www.gooddoghappybaby.com](http://www.gooddoghappybaby.com). Thank you again for taking this journey with me and the best of luck in all things to do with your dog and baby.



Acclaimed San Francisco dog trainer, Michael Wombacher, has written the definitive book to help new parents who love their dogs create a safe baby-friendly environment.

**Mike Wombacher**

415-420-4768

[contact@gooddoghappybaby.com](mailto:contact@gooddoghappybaby.com)



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