

A Companion Guide

By Mike Wombacher

Module 2:

Dogs who are afraid of children



Introduction

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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 didn't 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 youngster 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 one of a dozen modules to come. It focuses on one of the leading causes of problems between dogs and babies: the dog's general fear and distrust of small children with all their running, jumping, squealing and unpredictability.



If you have such a dog this set of training videos will help you enormously in beginning to acclimate your dog to the general presence of children. It also works hand in hand with the first module of this course, which is focused on preparing your dog for the grabbing, pulling and generally rough handling that very small children are likely to dish out. Between these two modules you should

be able to get on top of your dog's issues with regards to anxiety around children. What's critical is to work hard to begin to implement a lot of what's in both modules before your baby crosses the 8-month threshold, where he or she will begin to crawl and, of course, ultimately, walk. That's when all the problems tend to begin with dogs that have not been appropriately prepared and who are now freaking out with a mobile miniature human tooling around your house.

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. Additionally, I've provided two bonus lessons as a thank you for purchasing this course. The first revolves around Spencer, a huge pit bull who refuses to have his nails clipped. The second includes a series of out-takes from the main body of the course which go more deeply into specific aspects of the principles introduced as well as some new material that adds context and depth (take this out for marketing promo). 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 5 video lessons that comprise this module. Having said all that, let's dive in..



Lesson Overviews

Lesson 1- Addie

In the first lesson we will meet Addie, a lovely, rather timid medium sized dog who is petrified of children. Her owners are not pregnant yet and have had the foresight to attempt to address this issue long before a baby becomes a part of their reality.

With Addie I will introduce a process known as systematic desensitizing, which we will use in various permutations throughout the module.

- Systematic Desensitizing involves exposing your dog to things she's uncomfortable with (children in this case) in doses she can handle and connecting it to something she loves and behaviors that are familiar and comfortable for her (1:58 – 3:16).
 - In this lesson we bring Addie to a popular local playground to expose her to children, keeping a safe distance, and slowly getting her used to them by using treats and obedience commands.
 - We begin to show her that when you go to areas with little kids lots of great things will happen to her in a context of familiarity and connection with you.
 - We will assess when it's safe to go closer and have kids come around with treats.
 - We will see how to continually evaluate your dog to see how much she can handle.
 - We learn to look for signs of distress and when to back off and try again a bit later.
 - Throughout the process you will learn to keep your dog focused on you, keep her positive and work her in short increments that she can handle without triggering her fear.



Lesson 1 – Addie *(continued)*

- Notes on how to approach children using the leash (3:54 – 4:45).
- When approaching a child, especially if your dog is nervous, DO NOT cinch up on the leash to hold it tight. This is likely to trigger “barrier frustration” which can quickly launch a kind of aggression cascade.
- Instead, learn to walk your dog on a loose leash, making sure there’s always a little “J” curve in the leash and try to focus your dog on you and your treats as you pass by kids.
- A few comments on why fenced playgrounds are such a great place to practice with your dog (4:51).
- General comments on how to evaluate your dog’s sensitivity and appropriately match training exercises to it including how to handle kids that want to come up and pet your dog (5:06 – 5:48).
- The importance of tone of voice and attitude when entering potentially challenging situations (6:11).
- On the importance of having your dog do familiar and comfortable things in an unfamiliar context (6:29).
- On when and how to hang out in more challenging places and evaluating whether your dog can handle it (7:20).
- Work to keep her in a loose, relaxed frame of mind as you push the envelope (10:00).
- On finding the balance between pushing the envelope in terms of what your dog can handle without creating risky situations (10:10).



Lesson 1- Addie *(continued)*

- Starting to teach the dog that if she looks at a kid and then turns to look at me, she gets a treat. This is key! (10:24 - 10:55)
- Transitioning from standing near the playground to going in. Of course, you'd never do this if you thought there was a real chance that your dog might bite a child. Duh! Remember, safety is always first (13:00 - 13:44).
- Once inside, continually ask her for familiar, easy-to-do, obedience commands and reward with favorite treats - or toys for some dogs - while always keeping your tone and attitude upbeat and positive (14:09 - 14:29).
- There is no room for physical corrections of any kind in this context. It's all about the treats and keeping it positive. If your dog is sloppy on commands practice them in a separate context away from children and only bring them into this training program when your dog has mastered them and enjoys doing them for treats (14:56; see also Bill, 8:25 - 9:04).
- As you're working your way past children always keep an eye on your dog's head and reward the instant the dog turns her head away from a child and toward you in anticipation of a reward. Paying close attention even to micro-movements is absolutely essential (15:14 - 16:20).
- On the importance of "situational learning," that is, teaching your dog to associate certain kinds of situations with certain kinds of behavior. In this case your dog will begin to associate the presence of children not only with good things from you but with certain types of behavior - simple obedience commands - and a focus on you and your leadership (18:31 - 19:30).
- Know when to quit. And quit while you're ahead. Learn to recognize when your dog has had enough or when you feel like she's had enough exposure and experience to take a positive impression away and look forward to coming back for more (23:45, see also Bill 17:13 - 17:43 & 18:13 -19:00).
- And even if your dog is doing really well, like Addie was, remember never to get too cocky if your dog has a history of nervousness around kids. Always keep safety at the very forefront of your mind (24:09 - 24:27).
- Look for opportunities to have kids give your dog treats (24:36).
- Wrap up and summary (24:58 - 29:45).



Lesson 2- Bill

In the second lesson we will meet Bill, a beautiful, 2 year old Golden Retriever who, like Addie, is extremely shy and hesitant. By and large we will cover the same territory as with Addie but use our time with him to deepen and expand on previous points.

- Brief Summary of the basics of systematic desensitizing (3:10, see also Addie, 1:58 – 3:16).
 - Expose your dog slowly to things he's uncomfortable with while connecting it to something he really loves and behaviors that are familiar, easy and comfortable for him.
 - Be sure to give your dog a treat immediately every time he looks at a kid and then looks at you.
 - We want to generate a knee-jerk response where the dog sees a child and reflexively checks in with you expecting something wonderful.
 - This, in your dogs mind, connects the presence of the child to something positive from you and moves his attention to you. To put it differently, this not only moves the dog's attention away from the child to you and makes the whole experience positive, but it also puts it in the context of structure, guidance and authority from you – all of which makes life feel predictable and safe for your dog.
 - Learn to monitor your dog's sensitivities and if it seems too much, back out and give him space. Also, always give yourself an escape route when working in proximity to kids with a dog who's nervous around them.
 - On the other hand, to the degree your dog is getting increasingly comfortable around the kids, work the edge of his sensitivity by continually trying to get him closer.



Lesson 2- Bill *(continued)*

- Look for opportunities for kids to offer your dog treats.
- If your dog is actively aggressive toward children you should NOT do this. Get professional help and don't put anyone at risk.
- It's a really good idea to take advantage of fenced playgrounds nearby because the fence provides a buffer zone that allows us to get the dog closer to children without sudden and unexpected approaches by wild, young kids (3:28).
- Once again, the dog looks at a child and looks at you, he gets a treat (4:50 – 5:09). This can ultimately lead to him taking treats from the child.
- If you can't get him near the kids right away work around places where there's a lot of kiddie noise (5:40 – 6:30).
 - Focus him on you, keep a happy tone and attitude.
- Entering the playground (7:33 – 8:25).
 - As you enter be sure to focus your dog on you and reward him with treats (for some dogs toys might be more effective – see Module 1, Lesson 5, Posie for more on this).
- Bear in mind that we are a lot less interested in super tight obedience and a lot more interested in keeping the dog focused on you in a positive frame of mind. Therefore, don't worry if your obedience is a little sloppy. Improve it in a separate context away from the kids. And under no circumstances give any kind of physical corrections in this context (8:25 – 9:04; see also Addie, 14:56).'
- It's a good idea to introduce your dog to kids who would take some time to get to know him and work with him like this (11:20, also see Lesson 3 of this module – Louie – for a lot more on this).
- You can also work with infants by having them in slings or Baby Bjorns near your dog while they're getting treats (11:50, also see all of Module 1 for this).
- Many dogs are wired to be suspicious of novelty and it takes a long time to generalize from specific incidents to an entire category. In other words, a dog can get used to the presence of one particular child and then another but it will take a fair amount of exposure to get them to generalize to the category of children. The point? Repetition is key. (13:20 – 14:10).
- What if a dog does act out unexpectedly toward a child while you're practicing all this? While it's not okay to correct harshly it is important to interrupt him with a verbal and possibly a mild physical reprimand. He has to know when he's crossed a line. At the same time, there's no room for harsh corrections when working in this context. It runs the risk of making your dog more afraid of children (14:10 - 14:44).

Lesson 2- Bill *(continued)*

- If at any point you see your dog getting nervous be sure to give him room and options to back out. Do not allow him to become cornered in an uncomfortable situation. Be sure to keep your attitude positive and keep your dog focused on you (17:13 – 17:43, 18:13 – 18:44). Also know when to quit (see also Addie, 23:45).
- Always work incrementally and in short, fun sessions. Learn to read your dog and when to back out and do as many sessions per week as your schedule allows (18:44 – 19:00).
- If appropriate check with your friends to see if they'll let their kids work with your dog. With older kids, teach them to work gently with the dogs (see Lesson 3 in this module, "Louie") and with very young children work by developing proximity and body contact (see all of Module 1).
- Never, ever under any circumstances comfort, cuddle or reassure your dog in any way if he's fearful. It will make him worse extremely quickly (20:15 – 21:03, 22:33 – 23:07, see also Bonus Lesson 2).



Lesson 3- Louie

In the third lesson of this module we will meet Louie, an adorable little terrier mix who is acutely terrified of children, considerably more so than either Addie or Bill. Fortunately, Louie's parents have friends who have four children and have offered to let us work with them to see if we could make some inroads in Louie's fear.

In this video we will discover how it's possible to work with a dog that is quite reactive to young children if we can get the help of some cooperative kids and trusting parents.

- We start with the kids sitting on the sofa being quite still. I tell them to gently offer Louie some treats but to avoid attempting to pet him. Often fearful dogs will appreciate, even if tentatively, receiving a treat, but being petted or even reached for can simply be too much (2:16 – 2:23).
- Louie will have not of it and starts barking madly. Even with me sitting next to the kids he goes into a barking frenzy. Through a slow process of having mom close by, me sitting between him and the kids and putting a very small amount of pressure on him to focus on me we are able to begin to calm him down and get him to cooperate a bit (2:49 – 3:27).
 - Start getting him to do familiar things in an unfamiliar context (3:28, see also Addie, 6:29 & Bill, 3:10).
 - A few things of note to take away from this beginning segment (3:29 –
 - I did not encourage the kids to continue to offer Louie treats while he was barking and posturing. We gave Louie space and an escape route (see also Bill around 2:50 as well as 17:13 – 17:43 & 18:13 – 18:44).
 - I did not reprimand Louie for his outburst (4:03). All Louie was doing was letting everyone know that this situation was making him very uneasy. If we were to start reprimanding him in this context it would quickly make him that much more uneasy in any context involving children (see also Addie, 14:56 as well as Bill, 8:25 – 9:04).
 - Instead, I focused him on me and brought mom – a source of comfort and security – into the picture and refocused him on what's familiar – sits and downs for treats.
- Here I break one of my own rules and don't allow Louie to escape even though he wants to (5:01 – 6:31). My sense of it was that putting a little pressure on him and trying to refocus him on something positive and familiar – treats and a command – could turn him around pretty quickly whereas letting him run off would deprive him of this learning opportunity. This is where things get to be more art than science, as the old saying goes.
- As it turned out I was right. From here on we are able to have Louis start taking treats from the kid in exchange for sits and downs. I've essentially refocused him, built up his confidence and now start to transfer that confidence to the kid (6:40 – 7:10).

Lesson 3– Louie *(continued)*

- To continue to bolster his confidence I have mom get closer simply as a base of support but instruct her never to coddle, comfort or reassure a fearful dog in any way (7:26 – 7:44, see also Bill 20:15 – 21:03, 22:33 – 23:07 as well as Bonus Lesson 2).
- Next (7:46 – 10:49) I encourage the kid to let Louie lick and nibble at the treat without fully giving it to him in order to encourage at least a little bit of sustained physical contact. I also start stroking Louie under the chin as a bridge to having the kid take this over and initiate his own careful first physical contact. It's key that the first contact be under the chin and not above the head, which tends to spook dogs like Louie.
- If, during any of this, Louie wants to pull away, I let him. However, I remove the treat simultaneously so that he learns that moving away from the physical contact also ends the yummy treat.
- Another strategy to help build Louie's confidence involves having Louie's mom take the child and put him in her lap while Louie is encouraged to take more treats from him. This kind of merges mom, whom Louie loves, with the child, whom he is worried about and can provide just that nudge of confidence to help move things forward. Then we run this together with the petting under the chin (11:21 – 13:18).
- With this starting to work pretty well we bring the next child into the picture and have him start doing "puppy push ups." Louie very slowly starts generalizing his slowly growing trust to an additional person (13:20 – 14:28).



Lesson 3– Louie *(continued)*

- Then I put Louie in my lap and introduce the 3rd child and before you know it Louie is taking treats from all three kids while receiving moral support from two adults that he trusts – his mom and myself. Slowly Louie starts to visibly relax, lie down and take treats and allow himself to be petted by three kids (14:33 – 15:40).
- At one point one of the kids starts encroaching in a way that I think Louie might not like and I back him off a bit. We want to learn how to manage a dog's boundary. It's important to be careful not to push things too far too fast and know when we're beginning to approach that line. Remember, give your dog space and try not to push him to any breaking point when it comes to his growing tolerance (15:40- 16:34, see also Bill around 2:50 as well as 17:13 – 17:43 & 18:13 – 18:44).
- Throughout all this I'm also petting and stroking Louie and talking to him in an upbeat and happy way. Since he likes and trusts me this helps provide a steadying influence as we're pushing the edge of his sensitivities (16:58 – 17:37).
- Once again, I'm kind of insisting that Louie not escape, though in previous lessons I've said always to give him an escape route. I've found that often, if the dog is not too panicky, putting a little bit of pressure on them to actually stay around the thing that makes them uncomfortable can be helpful. Again, it's more art than science but it's part of learning to read your dog and become attuned to the intensity of their sensitivities (19:15 – 20:30).
- After a while of this we give Louie a break. I want to give him a breather and some time for his nervous system to recuperate. I also asked the kids to leave the room to see how Louie reacts after a few minutes without them when they come back in. (20:40 – 22:00).
- Spend a few minutes talking about "latent learning" (22:00 – 22:49, see also Bonus Lesson 2).
- After a fifteen-minute break I have the kids come back in calmly. They crowd around, give some treats and then I have them go out again and repeat. Throughout this process we are building Louie's tolerance levels in tiny, repetitive increments. Soon he can handle more and more of it (22:58 – 25:42).
- Next we move on to having the kids use a leash to walk around with him a bit and discuss how useful leashes, properly used, can be in this process (25:37 – 27:39).
- Next we shift to a totally different context – the kid's bedroom – with the kids suddenly crowded around him in a narrow space. Still lots of treats in the picture but Louie has come a long way. Mom is still there as an anchor and security blanket and Louie has lightened way up. (27:39 – 31:46).

Lesson 3- Louie *(continued)*

- At one point (30:30 – 31:46) Louie lifts his paw to do a “shake hands” with one of the kids. This strikes me as a breakthrough because it’s the first time Louie actually reached out to make physical contact – the very opposite of trying to run away, which is where we started the session.
- This soon leads to increasing physical contact from all the kids.
- After a while we take a break with the reminder that although we want to work his edge of tolerance we want to be mindful of when he’s had enough and give him a break.
- After his break we reconvene in the living room where, 45 minutes earlier, Louie had lunged and barked at the kids. He is much more at ease but it’s also clear that by this point he really has had enough and we start winding the session down (33:12 – 34:00).
- We take Louie away and return some time later back into the living room with the kids on the sofa as they were when we first showed up and he’s much different now – calm, relaxed and at ease. The kids can randomly come up and pet him without much stress on Louie’s part. That’s where we officially wrap it up (34:37 – 37:00).
- Then I encourage them to go with these four kids, with whom Louie is now comfortable, and go to playgrounds like we did with Addie and Bill. There, using these kids as a bridge to the presence of other kids, I encouraged them begin to practice there in the way demonstrated in lessons 1 & 2.

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. Thank you again for taking this journey with me and the best of luck in all things to do with your dog and baby.



Bonus Lesson 1- Spencer

Spencer is a gigantic Pit Bull who is very sweet but cannot bear having his nails clipped. So we will use all the principles we have learned so far and apply them to Spencer who literally needs a muzzle and tight leash on his neck in order to have his nails clipped. This demonstrates just how powerful the process of systematic desensitizing is and how much applicability it has across a wide range of issues.

- The one new concept that I introduce is the use of massage and physical affection as a positive motivator in the process of systematic desensitizing (8:06). Like the use of toys, this is something that's commonly overlooked.
- That brings the total possible motivators to use in the process of systematic desensitizing to four: high value treats, toys and games, physical affection and, as an extension, deep and deliberate massage and handling.



Bonus Lesson 2- Learning Supplements

There are six segments in this bonus lesson. Most are out takes from other segments but several are new material I'm adding to fill everything out.

- Bonus Segment 1 – On the role of social status and the use over aversives in training (2:24).
 - The role of so-called “rank management” (of which my “doggie twelve—step” program is an expression) has become highly controversial these days. Some trainers argue that social status plays no role whatsoever in managing our dogs. I strongly disagree and have many reasons for doing so. I am currently working on a book on the subject: “Hey, What’s with the Collar? Inside the War in the World of Dog Training.”
 - Alongside their insistence that “rank” plays no role in a dog’s psychology, these trainers argue that any use of aversives – from squirt bottles filled with water to training collars of various kinds – is always inappropriate and abusive. Again, I disagree strongly.
 - In my view there are three elements that make up an effective training program:
 - Managing a dog’s social status.
 - The use of positive reinforcement in the forms of operant conditioning, classical conditioning, systematic desensitizing, counter-conditioning and so on.
 - The intelligently applied and sparingly used application of aversion – any unpleasant experience that will decrease a problem behavior, effectively suppressing it while we develop opposite behaviors through the processes of positive reinforcement.



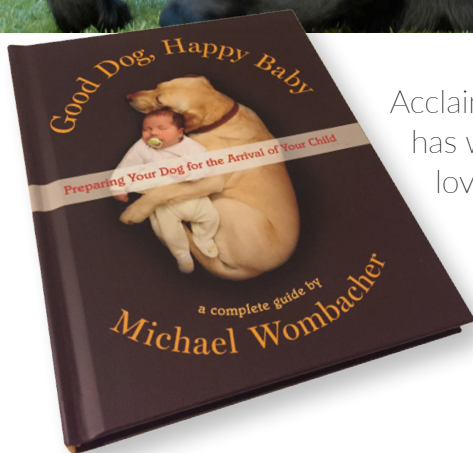
Bonus Lesson 2- Learning Supplements *(continued)*

- Bonus Segment 2 – More miscellaneous tips on the processes and procedures of systematic desensitizing (9:10).
- Bonus Segment 3 – On the importance of never coddling, comforting or reassuring a fearful dog in any way (16:24).
- (see also Module 1/Lesson 1/General Peaches/4:22 – 6:42)
 - (See also Module 1/Lesson 2/Jack 1/6:50)
 - Bonus Segment 4 – On the importance of creating a safe place for your dog (18:14).
 - Bonus Segment 5 – More on preparing a dog for baby’s crawling including a few words about “hyper-specificity.”
 - (See also Module 1/Lesson 4/Oliver & Rye/15:31)
- Bonus Segment 6 – And a couple of really great tips on how to teach your baby “gentle” when it comes to touching your dog.
- 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. Thank you again for taking this journey with me and the best of luck in all things to do with your dog and baby.



Good Dog, Happy Baby

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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.

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