

Dogs helping with the bedtime routine



When it comes to the bedtime routine we have found it really useful to look at getting children into as calm a state as possible before bed. This usually means starting 3 hours before bedtime, involving the dog wherever we can, looking at everything that could cause anxiety in the lead up to bedtime and see if we can ask the dog to help alleviate that anxiety.

For example, children might come back from school after having to sit still and cope with so much during the day, they may need to go for a walk or play in the garden with you and the dog to get rid of excess energy.

Then you might feel that teaching the dog to head rest or to settle with them while they watch their favourite TV programme to continue to help them calm down is helpful (please remember more advanced tasks such as this should be introduced once the dog is settled in the home and if they are a young dog, they should be at least a year old). When encouraging resting with children, please make sure this is supervised.

If children are worried about teeth cleaning or putting pyjamas on etc., it doesn't take any advanced training to get a dog to lick some nice chicken flavoured paste off a toothbrush, or wear a safe bedtime bandana for example to help children at this time.

Once children are a bit more settled, some children are choosing to read a story to the dog or the dog can be taught to put their paw on a book to 'choose' a story, again making bedtime a bit more fun (this is a more advanced task). We can then encourage the dog to lie on the bed or in the room, again to help settle children, although stay close by to make sure they are always supervised. This often isn't suitable for puppies so this is something we advise to do with an adult dog.



Once children have drifted off to sleep, the dog should be brought out of the bedroom to allow them to have their own time. This is advisable because dogs have different sleeping patterns to us so you can end up with dogs waking children up and visa versa. It is also not safe to leave a dog unattended in a child's bedroom, even if using a crate for the dog. Dogs will also become accustomed to having company all of the time, which again can cause anxiety should this change for any reason. Dogs need to be taught to be on their own so they don't find this stressful should the situation arise.

This can all help with getting children off into a more settled sleep, where they sleep for longer, deeper, and wake up less. If you feel that the dog will be a distraction at bedtime or children may wake up worried when the dog isn't there, then we advise that you don't use the dog for this part of the bedtime routine.

Where children are accustomed to drifting off to sleep with the dog, in some cases children can find it harder to settle, and feel anxious if for some reason the dog isn't around (e.g. the dog's ill or you are on holiday). Therefore the dog participating at bedtime should be a short term aid for you to then look at encouraging the dog to settle on the floor in the room at bedtime, then eventually outside the door etc., so children don't become reliant on the dog being there all the time.

