

MEDIA RELEASE**16 April 2009**

Creating a harmonious home for kids with dogs

- ***Expert says new puppies integrate better into a family home when children have responsibility for feeding them***

As the Obama family officially welcomes a new dog into the White House this week, Purina is encouraging New Zealand families getting a puppy to be mindful of a dog's needs when introducing them into a household with children.

Shivaun Statham, a dog behaviour expert and pet care adviser for Purina, says educating children about how to relate to and care for a dog is vital for creating a safe and harmonious home environment for both kids and dogs.

"Dogs don't naturally see children as leaders or even equals, so adult supervision is essential for monitoring and guiding behaviour of both children and dogs to create mutual respect," she says.

Ms Statham says that putting children in charge of feeding the dog, properly supervised by an adult, helps raise their status and encourages respect from the dog.

"Like their ancient wolf ancestors, dogs are highly instinctual when it comes to their food, so establishing this feeding relationship early on will show the dog who is in charge, while also helping the child share the responsibility of care."

Ms Statham says children should also be made aware that they should not try to handle dogs while they are eating, toileting or sleeping, as they can snap if startled or frightened.

"Children can often be over-enthusiastic in handling a dog due to the excitement of the dog joining the household. They need to understand that dogs often need their own space. If a dog runs away from a child, it has had enough."

Ms Statham advises that children under the age of seven years should never be left alone with a dog, and suggests setting up a space in the house where the dog can retreat and relax away from kids. Children must then know to leave the dog alone when it is there.

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Ms Statham also recommends that parents do research into how their particular breed of dog interacts with children, and learn how to 'read' the dog's body language so that they can assess whether their dog is becoming stressed in certain situations with children.

"For example, a wagging tail doesn't necessarily mean a dog is happy. A stiff, straight wagging tail often indicates that a dog is feeling uncomfortable or frightened. Other body language like growling, raised fur and ears set back can also indicate a fearful dog," says Ms Statham.

Dogs and babies

Ms Statham says that there are several simple steps that can be taken to ensure that introducing a dog into a household with babies or very young children goes smoothly.

"If you have a baby on the way, it is important for the dog to see and smell the baby's things before the baby arrives. Teach your dog to stop and wait at the door to the baby's room and introduce all of the baby's things (cot, toys, nappies *etc.*) to the dog. If possible, introduce your dog to other babies so they get used to the smell and noise," says Ms Statham.

"Dogs can be distressed by a baby's crying when they first hear it, so once the baby arrives, make sure that the dog receives lots of positive attention, particularly in the presence of the baby so that they form a positive association with the baby."

For more information and advice on introducing a new dog into your household, visit: www.canineproblemsolutions.co.nz

For more information on best feeding practices for new puppies, visit www.purina.co.nz

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About Nestlé Purina New Zealand

- For over eighty years Purina has been a leader in the advancement of pet care and pet nutrition.
- Purina's expert nutritionists, food scientists, vets, and animal behaviorists are constantly discovering new ways to help pets lead healthier, happier, longer lives.
- No one invests more in research and development, and as a result Purina has made more breakthroughs in the field than any other company.
- Today Purina is one of the world's leading pet care companies, producing some of the best known pet food brands; many of which have served pet owners for generations. Each is the result of the very latest advances in quality, taste and nutrition.
- Purina products are designed to give pets and their owners the best possible choice of recipes and formats, for every life stage and lifestyle.
- Purina is also a committed member of the wider pet care community, supporting charitable organisations, working closely with the communities in which we work and operate, and promoting responsible pet ownership in New Zealand and worldwide.
- With over seventy per cent of New Zealand households owning pets, Nestlé Purina is servicing a growing market.
- Throughout the company's long history in the pet care business, it has built strong brands such as TUX, FRISKIES and FANCY FEAST.
- In 2002 the company acquired Ralston Purina, which saw the introduction of brands such as Purina ONE, BENEFUL and PRO PLAN.