

Small dogs should not be treated any differently to big dogs and owners should keep in mind that there's a huge difference between loving your dog and spoiling them rotten – which can do them more harm than good

DO small dogs have BIG issues? Without a well-behaved dog, things around the home can become more hectic than they need to be, but it's not just large dogs that can prove problematic – small ones can disrupt a household just as much.

Pint-sized pooches frequently “rule the roost” and jump on furniture, beds and laps as they please – basically because they're small, cute and hard to resist. While it can be adorable, it can also make things unnecessarily challenging.

These early intervention tips will help avoid some of the common “small dog” pitfalls to ensure life around the home is peaceful and fun.

*** Walk your small dog:** Many people falsely assume small dogs don't need much exercise, but dogs that aren't walked regularly can sometimes lack socialisation skills, may be less obedient and may not be lead-trained. This makes them harder to handle in the home because they may have too much energy and not enough experience in social situations.

*** Set boundaries:** If you don't, you're allowing your dog to practise “behaving badly” and risk increasing the intensity of their bad behaviour. Set reasonable boundaries at all times in your home, including when visitors arrive, as well as in the presence of joggers, passers-by, cyclists and other dogs.

*** Avoid trivialising misbehaviour:** When small dogs growl or generally “play up”, their behaviour is often overlooked (because the size of the dog can make it seem comical or cute to some people) or is pacified with baby talk.

Doing this can encourage continued challenges around the home, so ensure you deal appropriately with such behaviour.

*** Be pro-active with toilet training:** Many people mistakenly believe toilet training will take longer with a small dog, but with vigilant training, in most cases it's possible by the 12-month mark.

*** Try not to humanise or justify their “misgivings”:** It's common to treat small dogs like a child and assume they don't know any better. For example, accepting that they will bite people if handled when they are on their bed because they need their space. This type of treatment can reinforce behaviour that could cause a dog to bite, so nip it in the bud responsibly.

*** Avoid “mind game” traps:** Often labelled as “fussy” eaters, small dogs regularly convince their owners to feed them human or canned

food or even handfeed them. Rest assured, dry biscuits are perfectly appropriate for small dogs, who are also capable of feeding themselves (unless they are unwell).

*** Refrain from inappropriately picking up small dogs:** It's easy to get scared that your small dog may be in danger when around bigger dogs, but always rushing to pick them up can make your pet overanxious so unless you're sure they're in danger reinforce the security they should feel when standing on their own four paws.

*** Ensure your dog is independent:** Instead of creating a situation where your pet only treats well the person who gives them the most attention, ensure they spend time with others. This minimises the chance of them growling and snapping at people.

The bottom line is that, by and large, small dogs are no different to big dogs and should

KATHY KOPELLIS McLEOD



The respected WA dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions

be treated the same with regard to behaviour and safety issues.

There's a big difference between loving your dog and spoiling them rotten – which can do more harm than good – and many of these issues can easily be avoided with early intervention and solid training.

With some thought and planning, it's possible to have a wonderful, well-balanced and socialised small dog that is an integral part of the family unit.

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