

126 -May 28, 2012 - Kids and Canines- Wisdom and Tips for Happy Living with Pets (126)

Welcome to Mom Enough.

With your co-hosts, developmental psychologists, Dr. Marti Erickson and Erin Erickson, maternal child health specialists, brought to you through a partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education and Working Family Resource Center. Content copyrighted by Marti and Erin Erickson, all rights reserved.

Here's my Grandma Marti, and here's Erin, my Mom Enough.

Marti Erickson: Welcome to Mom Enough. I'm Marti Erickson here with my daughter, Erin Erickson, and we are delighted that you tuned in today. We have two important topics for you today, and so be sure to stay tuned right through to the end, so you don't miss our monthly feature from St. David's Center. This time it is on childhood depression, and you may be surprised to learn about how early depression can affect a child's health and development. That's a part of Relationships That Nurture, which St. David's Center here in the Twin Cities brings to us each month. But our first topic today is a very interesting one for many of you. I know both Erin and I have had experience with this topic, and that is families and pets, and pets and kids, sometimes a great combination but a lot of challenges that can go along with that. So we have a terrific expert with us today, Kate Anders, who is owner of Pretty Good Dog. She's a certified pet/dog trainer and specializes in working with new, expecting, and expanding families with dogs, so she's right in our sweet spot here in terms of all of you moms out there. Kate's work merges dog training and parent education utilizing science-based methodologies as well as her own experiences as a parent and a dog owner. So welcome, Kate. We're so glad you're with us.

Kate Anders: Hi, thanks for having me.

Marti Erickson: And you're a parent. Tell us about your family.

Kate Anders: I have a son who just turned three, and we've got one dog. My husband and I are South Minneapolis natives, so a busy household definitely.

Marti Erickson: Oh, I'm sure. What kind of a dog, just out of curiosity?

Kate Anders: We have a Basenji/cattle dog cross, and until recently, we also had a second cattle dog as well, and they're sort of notorious for not being good kid dogs, so...

Marti Erickson: Oh boy. So you had some experience applying your own knowledge to that situation?

Kate Anders: Absolutely, absolutely.

Erin Erickson: Well so, Kate, you emphasize the importance of adult supervision and making sure kids and dogs are safe together. Why is that so crucial?

Kate Anders: Yeah, well I feel like the important message that parents need to take away is that all dogs, even the wonderful golden retriever, who lets Billy and Sally climb all over it, still poses a potential risk. And just like you wouldn't leave a child alone, a toddler, for example, in a room without outlet covers or baby gates to prevent them from falling down the staircase, we want to make sure that we're there, and we're awake and alert and focused both on dog and the child if they're going to be in the same space so that you can preempt any problem that could happen, you could read the dog's body language and intervene if it was necessary.

Erin Erickson: I think that's hugely important. I've had, well, three dogs in my life, and I don't currently have a dog. Actually, I've had four dog because I had a dog about a year ago, and we made the decision to find a new home for that dog because of how it was working with the kids. And fortunately, that dog is in a home with older kids and is basically a part of the family. I understand that he...or she even goes along with them for groceries and things like that, so it worked out well. But I remember with one of my dogs, who was always just the sweetest dog, her name was Bailey [assumed spelling], and she was a standard poodle, and she was wonderful with the kids. And...

Marti Erickson: And you had her before you had your children.

Erin Erickson: I had her before I had children, but she was just a wonderful dog, really sweet and really great when my daughter came home. But as she got older, the dog was about ten, I guess, when we had to put her down because she developed, what they thought, was a brain tumor, and her behavior started to change.

Kate Anders: Absolutely.

Erin Erickson: And the first sign of this was that she kind of...my daughter was petting her, and she just all of sudden got a little bit aggressive towards her. And I was there, so I was able to do something about it right away, but, I mean, if I hadn't been there...

Kate Anders: Absolutely, and it's incredibly common. We expect a lot out of our dogs. We expect them to be incredibly tolerant and forgiving. And usually when a dog does behave in a very tolerant manner, we let that go unrewarded. We just expect that from the animal. When we learn to read dog body language, and we can see how a dog is becoming uncomfortable with the situation, then it makes it easier for us to recognize, oh, maybe my older dog is stiff and the baby is crawling a little closer and now my dog is getting a little concerned, you might be able to even intervene before there is that snap or growl or tension, and in that way, support both your dog and teach your child some boundaries as well.

Marti Erickson: Well I just hear such an important message there that you can't expect that a dog will always behave the way he or she has behaved before, and so it comes back to your first and foremost point again that you just have to really supervise and especially with young kids who are so impulsive

and can be so rough and quick, you know, without even realizing it. And I think that can just be a very dangerous combination, as you say, even with a dog that's been very sweet. So supervision...

Kate Anders: Absolutely.

Marti Erickson: ...is crucial.

Kate Anders: Yep. I mean, if you think about it, as a parent of a three-year-old, there are definitely times I'm afraid a little bit of my child. He's certainly impulsive.

Marti Erickson: I know that feeling.

Kate Anders: He's erratic. He makes incredibly loud noises and does things spontaneously that I would never predict. So if as an adult who is incredibly intolerant, I'm still sometimes caught off guard or surprised or uncomfortable with his behavior. Imagine what an older, relaxed dog may feel there, you know, what is this thing.

Marti Erickson: Yeah.

Kate Anders: So I think it's especially important to, like you were saying, with younger children and where that line is when it becomes safe to allow older children, you know, an older child unsupervised access. I think that's one of those things that every parent is going to have a good gauge for. Because in some households, a six-year-old may do okay, and then other households, you want supervision with that, you know, busy ten or eleven-year-old child even.

Marti Erickson: Yeah, good point. Kids vary so much. Well, okay, supervision, but let's be realistic. How can you always supervise? And so what steps can you take for those times when you just can't be hypervigilant? You know, what are things you can do, precautions you can take that will make sure that both your child and your pet are safe?

Kate Anders: You got it. I think it's important to absolutely...you know, every parent is busy, and there is a lot going on, but if we have some strategies that we put in place in advance. So even before babies arrived, if we can think about things like, when you're doing tummy time, where is the dog going to be in your household? And if you have to leave the room because the phone rings or you're going to rush to the bathroom while your toddler is engrossed in play, how is there going to be something to...you know, what are you going to use to limit access? Are you going to use a tether, maybe tying your dog to something on the far side of the room before you have a mobile child so that there's definitely a physical barrier preventing interaction. Once we have a mobile child, maybe we need to use a gate, a kennel, a door, but a physical barrier, or maybe we just bring the dog with us to the other room. Maybe we bring the child with us. So, again, just planning in advance, thinking about your home, how things are laid out, thinking about how with an older dog. Erin, you know, it's unreasonable for you to have asked your older poodle to come with you every time you left the room, but it might be easy to bring your child

along, or it might be easy to, when we're having playtime that's only semi-supervised, use a physical barrier such that we're sure the dog and the child can't actually interact.

Marti Erickson: Well you also point out, I know, in some of your speaking and materials that a baby in a playpen or in a bouncy seat is not adequately protected. I mean, you know, a lot of dogs could jump into a pack and play or something like that, so really, really knowing exactly what your pet is capable of, and, you know, where your child is going to be safe.

Kate Anders: Absolutely. I think it's one of those, even if your dog has never jumped a baby gate before, it's best to assume that they could if they were very interested. I mean, why would we want to take that risk, essentially. But it's also worth realizing that it's not just about protecting the dog...or, excuse me, the baby from the dog, but it's also about protecting the dog from the baby.

Marti Erickson: Sure.

Kate Anders: So if we've got a dog who's behind a gate or kenneled, we want to make sure a child can't just approach that barrier and stick fingers through or harass the dog or tease the dog, so...

Marti Erickson: They want toys...

Kate Anders: You've got it.

Marti Erickson: I've seen kids go to a gated animal and, you know, take one of their just ordinary toys, and that can really do harm, poke the dog in the eye or the belly or whatever.

Kate Anders: Absolutely, absolutely.

Erin Erickson: Or, I mean, just trigger an aggressive response from the dog.

Kate Anders: Sure.

Erin Erickson: And I think, you know, back to what my mom said before is, you just can't predict these things. Like here, I have this dog who was just so sweet and tolerant, but, you know, she was going through some changes because of health reasons, and it was like, I mean, I was standing right there and my daughter was petting her in a way she normally would, but it was just like, the dog just got sensitive, and so it's just...you cannot leave the child with the dog, and I think this really is important.

Kate Anders: Absolutely. And I think that brings up the issue of the need for ongoing training, essentially. And not just training for the dog, but training for you as a parent. Some of the programs that I work on are specifically parent education. So you think, what does parent education and dogs have to do with each other, but it's incredibly important because most incidents or conflicts that are going to happen between a dog and a child seem to the family to come out of nowhere. But if we've been sticking with training, we're continually reading...learning to read our dogs' body language better, we're improving our own communication skills, then we can maybe recognize some of those very subtle signs and

anticipate problems. With ongoing training, we're also teaching our children appropriate boundaries, and we're continuing to learn ourselves, and it just gives us more options.

Erin Erickson: So what can you tell us about the most safe and effective means for training a dog, especially when there are kids in the house?

Kate Anders: Well there are a lot of different training methodologies out there, TV personalities who do all sorts of training, tons of books written on the subject. And people who have taken the time to train their dogs, I applaud them all. Once we've got kids in the home though, I would say it's imperative that we make sure that we use aversive-free or punishment-free training techniques, and that's for a couple reasons. Science very clearly shows us that if we use physical punishment with our dogs, we increase their arousal level, and we also increase the likelihood of aggression. So we just got to minimize that risk once there are kids in the home for sure.

Marti Erickson: Yes.

Erin Erickson: It's a lot like parenting children.

Marti Erickson: Parenting, that's right.

Kate Anders: Absolutely.

Marti Erickson: If you use harsh, punitive methods, your kids are learning more from that...

Kate Anders: Absolutely.

Marti Erickson:...than you may intend.

Kate Anders: Oh, and learning theory is learning theory, so it's amazing how much positive reinforcement-based dog training becomes applicable to your parenting skill set as well. But in addition to risk of aggression, we also have some sort of more subtle followup that can happen. Your child is going to try and do anything they see you doing with the dog, so if your training techniques are all based on force, your child may try and use those same techniques and probably not with much success. And then in addition to that, we've also got the problem that punishment-based techniques are like a big no. They say, no, that's the wrong answer, but they don't tend to provide any guidance about what the right answer might be. So they tend to be really slow in terms of teaching you, teaching your dog, I suppose, what behaviors you actually are expecting from them. So positive reinforcement-based training, science-based training is going to do a much better job of showing your dog or your child, for that matter, what the right answer is and then rewarding or encouraging that behavior.

Erin Erickson: Now you talk about too like choke chains and prong collars. I mean, I would also imagine that could be kind of dangerous, like if a child is yanking on something and doesn't appreciate that, you know, you can really hurt a dog's neck by pulling too hard on them.

Kate Anders: Absolutely. Physical punishment-based training is, first of all, not the only option out there. There are lots of ways to train dogs successfully without any of those types of tools, prong collars, shock collars, choke chains. And once you get comfortable with using those types of skills, you can have the same success you were having even if you had been previously dependent on one of those. And certainly, not only is there a risk to the dog, especially a small dog and a strong child, but there's also risk of retaliation, essentially. So a dog may be willing to tolerate something that's painful when it's coming from an adult owner and may instead turn and discipline the child right back.

Erin Erickson: So what methods are good? What do you think are effective? I mean, I've read about the clicker method. I mean, it seems like it's hard to know what to do. So what methods do you think are helpful?

Kate Anders: You got it. I do like clicker training quite a bit, once we've got kids in the home, especially. But reward-based...there's a lot of different names for it, positive reinforcement training. LIMA is the technical term that I use to describe what I do, which is, least invasive, minimally aversive. But, generally, what we're going to use is a strategy of rewarding or reinforcing behaviors that you like and using a strategy to redirect or avoid reinforcing unwanted behaviors.

Erin Erickson: Okay.

Kate Anders: And if you're not sure how to actually make those play out, there's a number of good book resources even available on my website or training classes in the Twin Cities that do offer this type of positive training.

Erin Erickson: Great.

Marti Erickson: And we link to several resources to your website certainly, which is really a great source, and some of the other resources in the Twin Cities, but people anywhere can come to your website and really learn a lot...

Kate Anders: Absolutely.

Marti Erickson:...so I appreciate that. So, you know, you talk about the importance of involving the whole family in the training, and I think that's so important. In fact, I was remembering an experience from when I first got a dog, and I had grown up in a household that had no pets. My parents didn't want any animals in the house, so I had no experience. And when I was in, oh, I guess in my late thirties, close to forty, I got this urge to get a puppy. I know it was tied to all sorts of things that were going on in my personal life at the time, and it was a very impulsive decision on my part, and my kids, Erin and her older brother, were about eight and eleven at the time, and they were very excited. In fact, we sort of ganged up on dad, and the three of us got this puppy when he was away on a sailing trip with his guy friends. This was really one of the worst things...

Erin Erickson: I probably would recommend not doing that. We're not advocating...

Marti Erickson: No. And, you know, we loved the dog. She was an adorable little Welsh terrier, which is a really...as you know as a dog expert, those are really hard dogs to train.

Kate Anders: Yep.

Marti Erickson: And they love to run away and...

Erin Erickson: Especially when their mother lives just behind us.

Marti Erickson: Yeah.

Erin Erickson: So the puppies were on our block and so...

Kate Anders: You guys didn't set yourselves up for a nice easy ride, did you?

Erin Erickson: You know, the dog would like run home.

Marti Erickson: Yeah, it was really...it was just such a dumb thing, and, you know, I think of dumb things I've done in my life, and that is just right up there at the top of the list. But what I'm remembering is, when that puppy was still very young, and we had barbecue ribs for dinner one night, and somehow, you know, somebody put the garbage there where the puppy could get at it, and she got into some of these bones that were really kind of sharp and splintery...

Kate Anders: Sure.

Marti Erickson: ...and we knew that was really dangerous, and, Erin, who was eight at the time, being very helpful doing this for a very good reason, went over to grab the bone away from this little puppy, and the puppy bit her.

Erin Erickson: I still have a scar.

Marti Erickson: Totally predictable, you know, it was not a horrible bite, and, you know, she survived it, but it certainly was just a lesson in, you know, how much we had not done as a family to really kind of prepare all of us for the things that we might have to deal with. So that's my story, but, anyway, go on and answer the question about how you involve the family then and imagine, you know, maybe it's kids who are old enough to, you know, to really play an active part in caring for the dog and helping with the training. How do you go about that?

Kate Anders: Absolutely. And I think your story is just so classic. I mean, who...

Marti Erickson: Classically stupid.

Kate Anders: No, and it's...hindsight is so clear. But, in the moment, these are exactly how these sorts of things happen, and they're so understandable, and they're also so preventable. So I think education really is power here, and that's one of the reasons that training is so important. A training...a basic group

training class, manners class of some type, and this is a great way to tell whether or not the training techniques really are sort of positive and science based. A good training class should welcome everyone in the family to come, and if they have, for liability reasons, they need some members to simply observe, that's fine, but there certainly are some classes that do include whole families right in the class. Private trainers, definitely in the Twin Cities, but all over the country, are starting to specialize in working specifically with new and expecting families, with families that have kids of all ages, so it's pretty easy to find a professional who you can work with who's going to involve every family member, and we need skills that are...techniques that are adaptable to everyone's skill level, so something that a six-year-old child can do and something that that ten-year-old child can do and something that the adult can do that are all tied to the same, working on the same skill with the dog, coming from the same methodology and strategy, definitely positive. There certainly are some programs that are specifically geared towards educating children on bite safety and prevention. Doggone Safe offers an educational program called, Be a Tree, that's very specifically about teaching children how to recognize when a child is...or when a dog is friendly and wants to be greeted and then the safe steps that they need to take in order to greet that animal, so...

Marti Erickson: Be a Tree, is that...

Kate Anders: You got it. Even knowing the skill sets that are described in Be a Tree might have been something that could have really changed the scenario that you described in your household with that bone and the puppy, so...

Marti Erickson: So do as I say, not as I do, all of you listeners.

Erin Erickson: We say that a lot around here.

Marti Erickson: Yeah.

Erin Erickson: What are some resources families can turn to when they're thinking about adding a dog to the family or perhaps when they're going to be having a child and they already have a dog?

Kate Anders: There are a ton of great resources out there. Internationally, the Dogs and Storks program and the Dog and Baby Connection program are both fabulous parent education programs, so these are specifically targeting families that are expecting or planning or adopting but don't yet have a baby, and that would be the Dogs and Storks program. These are just wonderful in terms of giving you food for thought as opposed to telling you specifically, there are five right things every home should do. The Dog and Baby Connection, sort of the sequel program, is for families that have children birth through three, and it's those early steps, so how am I going to manage the relationship between my dog and my young child, what are some safety tips. The Doggone Safe Be a Tree program, I already mentioned, is education for kids that are a little bit older. And basic training classes are just abundantly available. There certainly are also now, thanks to things like YouTube, fabulous videos available for free and wonderful book resources as well.

Marti Erickson: That's really good to know that there's so many things families can draw on. One last question for you, Kate, and I just so appreciate you bringing your wisdom to share with all of us. If families already have kids, and they're thinking about getting a dog or getting a puppy, when is the best time, and what words of wisdom can you offer to those families?

Kate Anders: Well that one is a little bit tricky because I firmly believe that, just like with parenting, there isn't one right way to be a dog owner. There's not one right way that it should work or it should look. And a dog really is another family member, so we're trying to figure out what is going to be the best fit for your unique family. That often means that consulting with a professional is going to really help you figure out both what your expectations and your needs are. So before you go out and start looking at puppies or surfing the web, you may want to consider talking to a professional so that you get a clearer picture about whether that puppy who has sharp teeth and a lot of energy, and you may not be able to predict what their personality as an adult is going to be like, whether that puppy is going to be the right choice for your family or whether you maybe are going to do better being placed with an older dog where you know exactly what you're getting right from the get go. So sorting out some of those things and deciding, you know, a pure breed versus a rescue animal. Those are things that, certainly do some research online, but probably contacting a professional for recommendations or advice is a great idea.

Erin Erickson: Well and I would just think, and this was my personal experience when we got a dog, and, I mean, I was very good about training the dog, she was a wonderful dog, but she was a big dog, and she had a lot of energy, and why we ended up not keeping the dog was because when the kids were playing, she would kind of walk through their play space, and they wanted me to just put her in the kennel all the time, and it was just kind of this, like they weren't meshing. I mean, they were sad about giving the dog away, but I just felt, you know, in this environment, I cannot provide for this dog in the way that this dog needs because the dog wanted to be around the kids. And so, you know, looking back at that experience, I'm thinking about, you know, we were all so super busy going to different places. It was so hard to have a puppy. So, I mean, do you have specific advice about like if you're, you know, maybe both parents work and the kids are in school, I mean, is it feasible to get a puppy? Is it okay to have a dog...

Marti Erickson: Is it time to get a puppy, I think is...or a dog, I think is the question.

Erin Erickson: Yeah, is it time to get a dog even? Like, do dogs want to be in a home where everybody is gone all day?

Kate Anders: Those are great questions, and I think there's some easy answers, which is, really, if you're gone from the home hours and hours, probably no, it isn't the kindest thing to get a dog in that extreme situation. However, I will say that there are individual dogs that are a good fit for all sorts of different types of households. So while a very busy, active family may not be as happy with a puppy, there may be an older dog, a rescue greyhound that wants to sleep on the couch a minimum of eight hours every day anyway that could still be a good fit. So recognizing what your situation is actually like and maybe not romanticizing it, I think often that can really happen with the, well, we really want the dog or we really

want the puppy or we really want the idea of growing up, my kids growing up together with this dog. And if we can sit down, again, with a professional and sort of sort out what your actual expectations are, what life with a dog is going to be like, I think then it becomes clearer whether or not a dog is appropriate at that stage of your life, or what are the signs that you're...to a place where a dog would be a good addition.

Marti Erickson: So just as you think very carefully before you have a child...hopefully. I realize not everyone does. But you really do need to think carefully and get a whole lot of information. I think your point about not romanticizing is a really good one.

Erin Erickson: I love that.

Marti Erickson: Yeah, and, you know, if you just want that romantic connection with the dog, you know, go volunteer at the Humane Society...

Kate Anders: Absolutely.

Marti Erickson:...or, you know, offer to babysit friends' pets when they're on vacation or something. There might be ways to have some of that experience but really think about what the responsibility entails for everyone.

Kate Anders: Yep. You know, and young children, I often hear from parents that, you know, my children have been pestering me. They really want the dog.

Marti Erickson: Yeah.

Kate Anders: I always love talking to kids about what they think they want to do with the dog, and often what they really want is that stuffed animal, that stuffed toy, that thing to play with, the thing to hug and cuddle. And if you explain to a child, you know, almost every dog is not going to appreciate hugging, and you sort of set some rules, then often children will be able to tell you in their own words, you know, I would rather go pick out a really great stuffed toy than get a puppy.

Marti Erickson: Well good advice. Thank you so much, Kate Anders, for being with us on Mom Enough. We really appreciate all the information you've brought. And, again, people can learn more by going to your website, which we link to, but say the name of it for us.

Kate Anders: It's pretty simple. It's prettygooddog.com.

Marti Erickson: Okay. [Prettygooddog.com](http://prettygooddog.com). Check it out and lots of other resources you can draw on wherever you live so that you make a very informed and thoughtful decision and get the training for you and your children and your dog that everyone needs. Thanks so much for being with us, Kate.

Kate Anders: Thanks for having me.

Marti Erickson: And stick around here because we're going to move now into talking about a very different topic, childhood depression. In our monthly feature, Relationships That Nurture, brought to you by St. David's Center.

Erin Erickson: It's easy to assume that young children don't get sad. I mean, of course, they're out playing, having fun. But the reality is, depression is not defined by age, and it is very real across the lifespan. It's critical that you take your young child's emotions seriously. Their feelings are equally as deep and as intense as an older child or even as an adult. However, they have yet to develop the skills to manage or verbalize their intense range of emotions and will need safe adult relationships to help them.

Marti Erickson: If you're looking for symptoms of depression in young children, it's important to remember that all children can present with what we call, symptoms of depression. What's important is the duration of those symptoms. So if symptoms last for longer than two to three weeks, it's time to check in with your pediatrician regarding physical health, first of all. And then if your child's pediatrician is able to rule out any physical health concerns, it's time to check in with a mental health professional that specializes in young children.

Erin Erickson: Young children with depression often present as irritable or withdrawn. This can look many different ways. So, as a parent, you might want to pay attention to some of these symptoms which could be a sign that something is going awry for your child. Sadness, grouchy or crabby, if your child is defiant, has low energy, low motivation or fatigue, if your child has swinging emotions or is highly sensitive or has excessive crying, also notice if your child is withdrawing from activities that they used to enjoy or if they become aggressive or consistently negative during play. Other important changes to notice would be changes in eating and sleeping patterns and poor coping skills.

Marti Erickson: So all of those are important things to pay attention to, but, of course, you might be listening to that list and thinking, well, yeah, my child does all of those things. Again, what's important is the duration of those symptoms, and I would add also, the intensity of those symptoms. So if you're seeing a really persistent pattern, you need to pay attention to that. One of the things that we often talk about in children's mental health is something that a famous psychologist or psychiatrist in California used to refer to as the Disneyland test. So if you tell your young child that you're going to Disneyland on Saturday, and your child doesn't get excited about that, something is amiss. You really want to pay attention if your child is not showing joy in the sorts of things that a young child would expect to be joyful about. So early onset depression can often become persistent and recurring throughout the lifetime. It's not necessarily something that just shows up once and doesn't come back again. It's commonly associated with other mental health disorders as well, including anxiety and disruptive behavior. However, it's important to know that depression is treatable. With young children, it's important to be engaged as a family in your child's treatment. A parent is a child's safest adult, and you will need to team with both your child and your child's therapist to create a treatment plan and change. Pay attention to these symptoms. Seek help when you think that something is amiss. Treatment can really make a difference. And we thank St. David's Center, a wonderful early childhood education and

children's mental health development resource in the Twin Cities in Minnesota for providing Relationships That Nurture, this monthly feature, on Mom Enough. We also thank St. David's for being a supporting partner of Mom Enough. We're delighted to have them working with us to bring evidence-based information to all of you parents so that you can feel supported and informed as you do the right thing for your children and for yourself. Thanks for tuning in to Mom Enough. I'm Marti here with my daughter, Erin, and we hope you'll tune in again next week.

If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's healthcare provider or call 1-866-693-GROW, that's 1-866-693-4769, to talk to a professional and find out ways in which you can get connected to various resources in Minnesota.

Do you think I'll have a show called Kid Enough someday? [Music]