

WESTIES AND CHILDREN

When choosing a breed, you should always consider what they were bred to do. Westies were born and bred to 'go to ground,' trap and kill small critters. This was once their job and sole reason for existing. A lot of frantic movement and action tends to 'get them going'. A young child's activity can bring out the Westies' natural instincts. Often people will say, 'The child didn't do anything to the dog and he bit her without provocation.' This is often because most people do not recognize just what provocation is to a Westie. When the child is jumping on the couch and waving his hands and making noise, this can be provocation even though the Westie isn't directly involved. When the child walks past the food dish and the Westie hasn't been properly taught his 'food manners', this can be provocation. When a person rushes towards one of the family members to hug them, the Westie may interpret this as aggression and attempt to defend his 'person'. And a Westie is a small dog with not a lot of patience for children who are pulling hair or hurting it in any way. Some larger dogs, such as a Lab or Retriever, will often lie there and let kids do almost anything. This is not a Westie's nature.

Most Westies WILL defend themselves. (A retriever was bred to 'retrieve' without doing injury to the bird; they are meant to have a very 'soft' mouth. If I were looking for a dog to have around my child, would I want one who was bred to kill with its jaws or one that was bred to retrieve without doing injury?) Always remember that a Westie's jaws are very large and powerful in contrast to its relatively small body. A Westie should never be left with young children unsupervised. You need to be able to be there to supervise whenever the dog is free and be committed to crating the dog when you can't supervise. (And you must make sure the children know that the crate is off limits at all times. This is the dog's 'safe' place.) A Westie cannot be left free to run and play in an unfenced area. If your yard isn't fenced, and your kids want to play outside with the dog, the Westie must still be kept on leash.

Finally remember, that you not only have to train your own children on how to behave with a dog, you will also have to train all of the neighborhood children too. Some Westies come to us even though they are doing fine with the family children. But they have become overprotective and are nipping at and threatening to bite the neighborhood children when they are roughhousing. Then there is the Westie who is just the opposite. He/she isn't the least bit aggressive. In fact the kids are so overwhelming to this type of Westie, that they will do their best to avoid the children. Often the Westie will hide whenever the kids are around. Westies come into Rescue because the owners say, 'He just wouldn't play with the kids!' They often feel the Westie should play 'fetch'. Some Westies live to play fetch with their ball. Other Westies seem to feel that fetching a ball is 'beneath their dignity' and they wouldn't be caught

considering such an activity. Westies are not 'retrievers' by nature so if you have one who does enjoy a game of fetch, consider yourself fortunate.

We are always sorry to discourage anyone from owning a Westie because they can be wonderful dogs, BUT we feel it is our job to present to you this side of the issue. Hopefully, you will take this information and continue your research before making a final decision.