

[<< Back](#)

## Famous fathers and their dogs

By Elizabeth Wasserman

FROM THE PAGES OF **THE DOG DAILY**

Famous fathers have a way with words when it comes to describing their relationships with the top dog of the house:

"No man can be condemned for owning a dog," said the 1930s film cowboy Will Rogers, who had four children and a series of pets. "As long as he has a dog, he has a friend; and the poorer he gets, the better friend he has."

"If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog," said the 33rd U.S. president, Harry S. Truman. He had two dogs while there -- Feller, a cocker spaniel, and Mike, an Irish setter.

Even President Obama noted the special companionship that Bo, the family's Portuguese water dog, provides in a house otherwise full of females. "I'm surrounded," he told an interviewer recently. "It's me and Bo."

There's a reason dogs became known as "man's best friend." From hunting partners to guard dogs to running companions, dogs have bonded with men. Experts even believe that having a dog can help men with their human relationships, particularly when raising kids.

### Dog Ownership Benefits Dads

The American Kennel Club's 21st Century Dog Owners Study found that 72 percent of dads think dog ownership is good for their health, which has been backed up by numerous studies. In 2002, researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo determined that spending time with a pet was associated with lower stress responses than spending time with a human. A 2006 study by Saint Louis University researchers found that nursing-home residents felt less lonely after being visited by a pooch than they did after spending time with people.

### Dogs Help Men in Human Relationships

"You can't be macho around an animal. They don't relate to that. They need fairness and consistency," says Chris Hamer, author of *Parenting with Pets: The Magic of Raising Children with Animals*. "So do children."

In fact, raising a dog can be a wonderful way for Dad to spend time with his children and teach them a thing or two. "Having a dog in the house provides a great way to teach children responsibility," says Lisa Peterson, director of communications for the American Kennel Club. "It's also a great bonding experience, not only for Dad, but also for the kids as well."

Here are four lessons dads can learn from dogs:



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### 1. Be better communicators

Men sometimes have difficulty with communication, particularly with children. "A pet can sometimes be a conduit to open up communication," says Hamer. She recommends that dads do tasks with their children involving the family dog, such as brushing, washing or walking the dog. While doing these tasks, conversations start naturally, and dads can talk with their kids.

### 2. Don't react in the moment

"Working with an animal, especially if you're doing training, you have to be thinking ahead of time about what you are trying to get out of the situation," says Hamer. The same techniques can be applied to parenting, she says. "Be proactive, not reactive."

### 3. Soften up

Many men tend to react to complex situations by becoming more dominant or forceful, when sometimes the opposite approach is actually more effective. "I try to get them to soften their voice and give a lot of praise," says Hamer. "A dog will teach you that you're not going to get anything by being more aggressive. They're going to cower. Or sometimes they may become aggressive back."

### 4. Devote time to the relationship

Involving kids in taking care of the dog is a great way to teach responsibility, build confidence and experience a great family dynamic.

*Elizabeth Wasserman is a Washington, D.C., area-based freelancer who has been writing about pets, among other topics, for more than 15 years. Her love of dogs, in particular, was handed down through the generations from her great-grandfather, Eric Knight, who wrote the book Lassie Come Home in the 1930s.*

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