



Chicken & Kids: Teaching Moments

Kids love chickens, and it's easy to see why. Chickens are active, colorful, and lots of fun. Plus raising chickens teaches kids responsibility and is a great way to help kids learn the value of caring for an animal while being rewarded with a useful product . . . eggs!

Raising chickens as a hobby or for your own egg production can be a great idea for families with kids. Whether your children are young enough to just enjoy watching chickens from afar or are old enough to help care for the flock, they will experience hours of fun and learning, courtesy of your birds.

Handling Birds

The first lesson you should teach kids about chickens is how to handle them. Kids five years and older are old enough to hold



a chicken under supervision. Younger kids can pet a chicken if an adult is present, but aren't old enough yet to handle a bird.

To teach a child to hold a chicken, start by making sure you use a bird that is comfortable being held. The last thing you want is a bird that panics and tries to get away, or worse yet, pecks at the child.

Next, have the child sit on the ground in a comfortable position. Gently hand the child the chicken, demonstrating how to hold the bird's wings against its body. The chicken will feel most secure if it's pressed up against the child's torso, with the child's hands and arms holding the bird gently but firmly in place.

Some chickens love being held and will quickly settle down and relax in the child's lap. Instruct the child to stroke the bird's head or back in a quiet, gentle manner, being careful to keep the bird snug against the chest.

Care & Breeding

Chickens provide kids a great chance to learn to care for farm animals. While an adult should always be responsible for the flock's care, kids can help feed the birds, provide them with fresh water, and retrieve eggs from the nest box. Kids love performing these tasks and quickly learn their chickens' favorite foods and how often the birds lay eggs.

Hatching chicks as part of your chicken-keeping goals can provide your kids with a great learning opportunity. If you have a rooster, you can let one or more of your hens keep some of her eggs so she can hatch them in the coop. Seeing a hen care for her chicks is among the most fun you can have when it comes to watching chickens. Help your kids notice how protective the hen is of her babies, how she helps them find food, and how she encourages them to sleep under her wings at night.

If you plan to hatch eggs in an incubator, your kids will love waiting for the chicks to emerge. Put up a calendar and cross off the days until the first chick breaks its way out of the egg. Have your older child help you feed the newborn chicks and gently handle them so they get used to being held.

When it comes to fun and learning, chickens are hard to beat. And, an added plus is the responsibility instilled by having your child help care for the flock.

Audrey Pavia is an award-winning freelance writer specializing in animal subjects. She's authored hundreds of articles for pet, trade and farm publications, including Veterinary Practice News, Western Horseman, Hobby Farms, Chickens, Urban Farm, and Dogster magazines.