



Puppy Training

A lot of factors go into making sure your new puppy becomes a well-behaved member of your family. First, make sure you know what you are looking for in a dog; that way you can select the breed/mix of breeds that are likely to fit your idea of what a dog should be. Second, decide what your puppy will be and won't be allowed to do. Third, make time for your puppy. The more time you put in to your puppy's development the better dog you will have. Lastly, make sure your training experiences with your puppy are positive ones. You want the training experience to be a good one for both you and your puppy. With the proper forethought and with adequate investment of quality time your new puppy can grow up to be a fantastic part of your family.

Picking a New Puppy:

First have realistic expectations. Don't expect your puppy to know things that you haven't taught him/her. In adopting a puppy you are inviting a baby animal into your home. He/she will not be perfect. There will most likely be some potty training accidents. He/she will have to be taught what is appropriate to chew on and what is not, as most babies like to explore the world with their mouths. There will be a significant time commitment especially in the beginning. The more time you can devote to training at the beginning the more likely you will have a good dog later on.

Also, picking the right kind of dog for your family is a key part to being happy with your choice in the long run. Make the time to do research into the dog breeds you are interested in and pick the one, (or mix of ones if you are picking a mixed breed) that seems to fit your life style the best. Your veterinarian is a good reference to use, even before you select your dog/dog breed. Another good reference for dog breeds is "The Perfect Puppy" written by Benjamin L. Hart, DVM and Lynette A. Hart, which explains what kind of temperament/behavior to expect with many popular dog breeds. Even within a breed there are different temperaments and so it is important to Temperament Test a puppy to determine what kind of personality a puppy has. In general, watch and see how friendly the puppy is, how it responds to a sudden noise, and how it responds to being held in a submissive (on his/her back) position. Doing this will give you an idea of how independent, fearful and dominant the puppy's personality is. There are multiple published temperament tests available either in books or on the web for more information. Also, when picking your new puppy, consider such things as do you have

the time, space, and financial ability to provide for a dog. Please see the article on “Are You Ready for a New Pet” for more information on these topics.

House Rules:

Ideally, before you get a new puppy, all of the members of the household where that puppy is going to live should get together and come up with a set of House Rules for the puppy. If you have your expectations laid out ahead of time it may help you pick the right type of puppy for your household, and it sets you up to give the puppy a consistent experience which will lead to faster learning and a better experience of puppy training. Puppies thrive on consistency and structure; these things make the puppy feel safe and comfortable. (If you already have a puppy, it is still important to consider what your House Rules are; it is never too late to start being consistent.) Remember things may be cute when the puppy is young, but not so cute when the dog is fully grown, so consider what you will want the puppy to do for his/her whole life. The following are a list of questions and points to ponder in developing your household’s set of rules. Every household is different so some of these may not apply to you and you may have other points that are important in your household that are not mentioned here; these are just to get you started.

How should your new puppy ask for things such as attention, food, to go out?

If you give your puppy what he/she wants for barking at you or jumping on you then you teach him/her that these behaviors are what he/she does when he/she wants something. If you would prefer that your puppy sat near you to solicit attention, sat near his/her food bowl to solicit a meal, and sat by the door to ask to go outside, then you cannot reward barking or jumping by giving them what he/she wants. Instead, if your puppy barks at you when he/she wants his/her food, make him/her sit quietly first and then give the food. Even an 8 week old puppy can learn that he/she needs to sit in order to be fed.

Likewise, if you want your puppy to solicit attention by sitting beside you and waiting quietly, then only reward your puppy with attention when it is sitting quietly. You may ask your puppy to sit before giving attention, so he/she will learn what he/she has to do. Often puppies, although already excitable creatures, are taught to be even more so because people pay more attention to them if they are wound up and excited. It is important to give your puppy attention when it is calm and obedient so that he/she learns that being settled down is a good behavior.

There are many ways that dogs can tell us that they need to be let outside. Many dogs have their own way of asking that the owners recognize as their signal. Just make sure that you respond to their request only if it is phrased in a way that you find acceptable. If

your dog both barks and sits by the door when asking to go out, and you would prefer that they wouldn't bark, wait until he/she is sitting by the door quietly and then let him/her out. You can also teach your pet a specific behavior to let you know that they need to be let out. For instance if you want him/her to ring a bell to signal that he/she needs to go out. Make a bell accessible to your pet and ring it yourself before letting your pet out. Your dog should begin to associate the sound with being allowed outside and should begin to ring the bell by himself/herself.

Where should they eliminate? (Will this be an acceptable spot for their whole life?)

Puppies need to eliminate many times a day; most people have an idea of where they want that elimination to occur. Once you have the spot picked out, it is important to stick with it; for instance, don't paper train a puppy if you don't want him/her to go to the bathroom on paper in the house when he/she is an adult. Make an appropriate location to go to the bathroom available when the puppy is probably going to need to go to the bathroom. In this way you make it possible for the puppy to choose the correct place to go so you can reward good behavior.

Even with the best training, accidents will happen. Be prepared for these accidents with a good enzymatic cleaner such as Nature's Miracle, Urine-off or Anti-Icky Poo. Clean the area well and apply the enzymatic cleaner. Don't bother punishing your puppy, it won't help with the training and make your puppy feel secretive about going to the bathroom so he/she runs and hides and goes in harder to find locations. Instead make a stronger commitment to being more aware of your puppy's bathroom needs. And if you catch your puppy in the act of going in the wrong location, scoop him/her up and take him/her to the correct location to finish going. Then you can praise the act of going in the right location.

There are many methods of housebreaking and since this is not an article on that subject I will just give a couple of thoughts on my favorite method: crate training. I really like crate training because it works with the puppy's instinct not to go to the bathroom in his/her bed. It also gives the puppy a safe haven where he/she can always feel comfortable. This comes in handy if the puppy should need to travel in a crate or need to stay in a cage/run at the veterinarian or groomer. Any time that the puppy is not being directly supervised he/she should be in a crate, playpen or secured in the vicinity of a supervisor (i.e. tied to the person or a sturdy table near the person who is supposed to be watching the puppy.) This is done to prevent your puppy from having accidents because the fewer accidents he/she has the quicker the potty training will go. One would never allow a toddler to run around the house unattended, not only to avoid all sorts of messes, but also for the child's safety. The same is true for puppies. One

mistake that people often make is giving the puppy too much freedom too early in the course of training. Make sure you can trust your puppy to be accident free for at least a month before giving him/her unsupervised time in the house.

If you want your puppy to go outside to go to the bathroom, you must go outside with him/her and reward the puppy for going to the bathroom in the right location. Rewards can be with verbal praise and/or food treats. The act of going to the bathroom itself is rewarding to the puppy because that biological need has been relieved. What you are rewarding is not the act of going to the bathroom, but for doing it where he/she should. You need to go out and make sure that the whole process happens. If you just let him/her out and then reward them when he/she comes back in you are only rewarding the puppy for coming back in and not reinforcing the puppy for going to the bathroom where you want him/her to go. Now, if you're taking your puppy outside and he/she is not going to the bathroom, but shortly after you come back in he/she has an accident in the house, he/she is not getting the message that outside time is potty time. Try to get a better idea of his/her schedule so that you can take him/her out closer to the time that he/she actually needs to eliminate. You can also work on a command to eliminate by repeating the command as they are going to the bathroom as well as praising him/her.

Where should they be when your family is having a meal?

Some people don't mind if their dog sits under the table during a family meal, just remember, it is healthier for your pet, to not receive table scraps. Other people do not want their pet begging from the table. If you have a preference, give your puppy something appropriate to do. Some people pick a spot, a rug, a dog bed, or the dog's crate, and train their puppy to wait there while the family eats. It comes in handy to have a command that means settle down and wait here for awhile. To train this behavior direct him/her to an appropriate location and give your puppy something to chew on; a favorite toy or a food stuffed toy such as a Kong (recipes on www.kongcompany.com). Begin to associate a command such as "settle down" with this routine so that the puppy begins to get the message that this is quiet time. When you are ready to have your puppy with you again you can call him/her over, have him/her sit and give him/her lots of praise.

How should they greet people?

Is jumping on people as a greeting OK? If not this is a much easier behavior to discourage before it gets started than to eliminate it once it is part of the puppies routine. If you don't want your puppy to jump as a greeting, try teaching him/her to sit while meeting a new person. You may even want to keep a treat bowl by the door so your guests can offer a treat and ask your puppy to sit before greeting it. Invite people

over so that your puppy can practice this good behavior. Also, try to keep greetings calm and low-key. If everyone the puppy meets is calm and quiet when greeting him/her, the puppy will learn to greet people calmly. You may also teach your puppy to go to a certain area when visitors are over, much the same way as described above with the settle down command.

Will you allow rough play inside the house?

Just like children, puppies can be taught that there is behavior that is only appropriate outside. If you would prefer that your puppy not rough house inside, don't encourage this behavior. If your puppy is in a rambunctious mood, take him/her outside and play.

Are they allowed on the furniture?

This is something important to decide as early as possible. It is much easier to teach a puppy not to get up on the furniture if they have never been allowed up on the furniture. Be consistent. Some dogs can be taught that they are only allowed on the furniture when they are given permission, but it is much less confusing for a puppy to have fairly distinct rules.

Is your puppy allowed to put his/her mouth on people?

Often people find this behavior cute in little puppies (in spite of the sharp teeth), but this can become a frightening and unwanted behavior as the puppy gets older. It is better, if you don't want your fully-grown dog to be mouthy, to not allow your puppy to put his/her mouth on your body. Don't play with a puppy with your bare hands; always have a toy in your hands while playing with your puppy. Some puppies get mouthier when you pet their head; if your puppy is like this try to pet his/her body instead of the head. If your puppy puts his/her mouth on you say 'Ow' and stop play time, your puppy will begin to get the message. Thumping your puppy on the nose and other rough play just encourages your puppy to be rough with you so this method does not work well in discouraging mouthing.

What is your puppy allowed to chew?

Puppies, just like babies are liable to put their mouths on anything. It is necessary to teach puppies what is acceptable to chew upon and what is not. In general, children's toys, old shoes, and furniture are not appropriate. Try to keep your puppy from having access to these items and when you catch him/her chewing on them redirect your puppy to chew on something more acceptable to chew. One common mistake is to get your new puppy a variety of toys. The puppy has so many different things to chew on that he/she doesn't distinguish between what are toys and what are not toys. It is good

for your puppy to have many chew toys, but try to keep them fairly similar. Start out with a bunch of one kind and when your puppy is consistent about chewing on his/her toys and only his/her toys you can add more variety. Also try to keep your puppy's toys novel by swapping them out every few days. You don't have to keep buying new toys, just rotate what your puppy already has. Good toys can be nylon, rubber or stuffed toys made for dogs and rawhide (if the puppy will not swallow large chunks of it). Never give your puppy something harder than what you can make a fingernail impression into, as things this hard can break their teeth.

Make Time:

Research has shown that more behavior problems are seen in puppies obtained during the winter month probably because the family has less time flexibility and the weather is poorer so outdoor training is not as consistent. Realize that especially during the early phases of training your puppy will require a lot of time. Develop a routine with regular time for play/exercise, training, body handling, social time, independent time, and of course potty breaks.

Play Time: Exercise will help your puppy burn off excess energy. Without exercise many puppies can become hyperactive and difficult to train. Different breeds of dogs need different amounts of exercise. If you have a high-energy puppy, like one of the many working breeds, make sure that you are able to put aside enough time to properly exercise your dog. Some dogs really benefit from off-leash running. Look for a place where you can legally have your dog off-leash. There are several off-leash dog parks and dog beaches in this area. Just remember not to bring your puppy to one of these places until after he/she is fully vaccinated. Until then, exercise your puppy in your backyard or take him/her to a friend's house that has healthy, well-vaccinated dogs and let them socialize.

Training Time: Make regular time for training, but also remember that your puppy learns from every interaction he/she has, so be consistent, even if it is not officially training time. Puppies have short attention spans, so it is better to have multiple short (less than 15 minute) training sessions a day than one longer one. Consider hiring a trainer to come to the house to get you started, or enroll your puppy in a puppy class. The difficult part about a puppy class is that it is usually a collection of partially vaccinated young puppies and if one is incubating an illness it may spread to the rest of the puppies. However, young puppies are more open to training, so the age during which puppies are being vaccinated is also the best time to initiate training. Working with a trainer, no matter how much experience you have training dogs, can be helpful

because it makes you practice and helps you focus on the puppy learning as an individual. I don't usually recommend sending your puppy away for training because then you are not learning how to be consistent with your puppy. Often they do well at the trainers, but when they come home, you are inconsistent with reinforcing what they were taught and their training dissolves.

Body Handling: Spend a little time each day examining your puppy's body, especially the ears, teeth, paws, and under the tail. Not only may you catch health problems at an early stage, but you will also accustom your puppy to this type of handling which will make future examinations by a veterinarian less stressful for your puppy. You can also start a program of teeth brushing during this time. Starting while the puppy still has his/her baby teeth will allow you to slowly accustom the puppy to the act of brushing when you don't have to be concerned about making sure you get all the teeth at once. Please see our handout on How to Brush Your Pet's Teeth for more information about this topic. This is also the time to start working with your pet on being held still, as for an exam. A lot of puppies do not like restraint, so you want to start practicing when they are tired and already still. Praise him/her for being still and then let him/her go before he/she gets wiggly so that it is obvious that the still behavior is what is required and that they shouldn't struggle. Doing this regularly will also make veterinary visits less frightening for your puppy. You can also make going to the veterinarian a more happy experience by going there when there are no vaccinations due so the puppy can have a good visit in the waiting room. Try bringing some of your puppy's favorite treat and have the staff feed your puppy and handle him/her so that he gets used to them in a friendly context.

Social Time: When your puppy is young, especially less than 12 weeks, is the perfect time to start getting him/her used to everything you expect him/her to be comfortable with as an adult. Try to expose him/her to a variety of people (old people, young people, people of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, bearded people, people wearing hats, people in uniforms, people with speech or physical impairments, tall people, short people, people carrying umbrellas, etc.), different sounds, and lots of types of experiences. You can buy a recording of various sounds (fireworks, thunder storms, garbage trucks, etc.) so that your puppy learns not to be frightened of sound. If you plan to travel with your dog, make sure to take your puppy for car rides. You can go for short rides around the block or longer commutes, but make sure that not all car rides go to the veterinarian for vaccines. Make these happy, but low key exposures. Make sure your puppy does not become fearful. A frightened puppy will have big pupils, pin his/her ears back and crouch as low as possible. If your puppy begins to look frightened remove him/her from the situation. Do not try to cuddle or vocally reassure him/her as this nice attention just

rewards the fear behavior. Instead, act very matter-of-factly so your puppy learns that there isn't any reason to be frightened.

Independent Time: Just as a puppy needs to have time and experiences to learn how to be social with other people and pets, he/she also needs regular independent time to help prevent separation anxiety. Your puppy needs to know that even if he/she is left alone, if he/she just waits patiently you will come back. Have a place for your puppy to be that he/she finds soothing and comfortable. If you are crate training your puppy, their crate works well for this. Periodically, when you are home, close your puppy up in his/her area with a good toy and give him/her some (5-30 minutes) quiet time alone. Do not let your puppy back out with you unless he/she is quiet so that you don't encourage barking to get out. If this is distressing for your puppy you can start by closing him/her behind a baby gate so you are still visible, but not reachable. This kind of activity is important to keep your puppy from being completely dependent on contact with you for their well being. Also, on a regular basis, put your puppy in their safe spot with a good toy and leave the house. Vary the time you are gone; sometimes be gone for 3 minutes, sometimes 30 minutes, the next time be gone for 15 minutes. Again don't let your puppy out unless he/she is quiet and don't make a big deal out of leaving or coming back. If this process is all taken matter-of-factly your puppy will learn that it is OK to be alone for short periods of time. Of course, never leave your puppy alone for unreasonable periods of time, as your puppy also needs regular feeding, play, and bathroom time.

Potty Time: In general, puppies need to go to the bathroom after playing, sleeping, and within an hour after eating. It is best not to feed your puppy, right before he/she is going to bed or at other times when you won't be available to let him/her have access to an appropriate place to go to the bathroom. Every puppy is a little different, so keeping track of when your puppy goes to the bathroom and how that relates to his/her other activities will help you better plan for when a bathroom break is going to be necessary. A general rule of thumb is that puppies can hold it for an amount in hours equal to their age in months plus one. (So if your puppy is 2 months old, he/she can only go about 3 hours in between bathroom breaks.)

Positive Reinforcement: In training a young puppy you should set your puppy up to succeed. Everyone is much happier to learn something new if it seems like an achievable task and if previous learning attempts have been successful. Instead of punishing a puppy for doing an undesirable activity, redirect the unwanted behavior to something more acceptable. For example: Your puppy is happily chewing on your dining room table. Instead of yelling at your puppy and taking it away from the table, get

his/her attention (perhaps by rattling a treat can) and asking him/her to sit (or some other command that he/she knows) and then reward them by giving something appropriate to chew. Harsh punishment will make your puppy anxious. In the early stages, they are just trying out different activities. Instead of saying, "No, don't do that." Say, "Why don't you do this instead?" Remember a lot of problem behaviors with puppies are normal doggy behaviors that need appropriate outlets. Whenever possible, try to provide a comparable activity such as appropriate chew toys or an acceptable spot to dig.

Certain things can also make your puppy more open to training. One of these is socialization (see socialization time above). The more positive experiences your puppy has with the world especially between the ages of 3-12 weeks the less likely he/she is to develop fear based problems, the more adaptable he/she will be, and he/she will also learn faster. Some of this time your puppy is with the breeder, which is good for the puppy. During the first 8 weeks of life the puppy's mom and siblings can teach him/her a lot about how to be a good puppy. But as soon as you have access to your puppy you have the ability to influence what he/she experiences. Take the opportunity and you can increase your puppy's ability to learn. (For people raising dogs under 8 weeks please see our article on Tips for Raising Well Adjusted Puppies.)

Something else that may help your puppy learn better is nutrition. Good nutrition is important for many reasons, but Eukanuba has recently performed a study that indicates that certain nutrients may also influence puppies' ability to learn. They did a study regarding adding DHA (a fatty acid that is added also to baby formula to promote brain development) to puppy food. They found that puppies learned more quickly when being fed the enriched diet. There is good evidence that in combination with a good training program, proper nutrition has the ability to improve learning ability.

This is just an overview of many of the aspects of puppy raising. There is more in-depth information about all of the topics mentioned. There are many books available that focus on different parts of puppy raising. Your veterinarian may also have more information. Just remember that with conscientious selection, forethought, and investment of quality time your puppy can become a wonderful dog.