

TRAINING YOUR PUPPY

A NEW PUPPY

Your puppy needs your help to learn to communicate with his new “human” family. He needs to be able to learn to trust and respect you and know that you make good decisions on his behalf. Puppies that do not learn this often have behavioural problems as adults. As he cannot learn to speak English, you will need to learn to communicate like a dog.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PUPPY

As a family, you need to decide what you are happy for your puppy to do. Is he allowed to sit on the sofa? Is he allowed to go upstairs? Is he allowed to jump up at people? Remember, it may be cute to have your eight week old puppy jumping up at you, but will people find it cute when they are about to go out, and he jumps up weighing 35kg, soaking wet and covered in mud?

Dogs learn by repeating behaviours which gain them a benefit. For example, if you decide that you don't want your puppy to go in the sitting room, and each time he goes in there you chase him round and round, then pick him up and carry him out, he will think that being in the sitting room is fantastic, because you play the best ever game when he's in there. He will then do everything in his power to get in there again. If he accidentally gets in the sitting room, and you pretend that you haven't noticed, but squeak a toy or rattle a pot of treats in the kitchen, he will race out to play/receive the treat – much better to be in the kitchen, boring in the sitting room!

Everyone involved with your puppy needs to respond in the same way to unwanted behaviours. Unwanted behaviours need to be boring for your puppy. For example, if some people allow him to bite and chew their hands because “he's only a puppy, he doesn't mean it”, your puppy will not be able to learn that this is not an acceptable behaviour and may continue to “chew” people with his grown up teeth and very strong jaw – not a happy scenario. If your puppy bites you, stop playing, and redirect the puppy onto something more suitable to chew e.g. a toy. If the puppy persists an ignoring tactic can be tried – it is better to help puppy to get it right before punishing him for getting it wrong.



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Conversely, behaviours that you like should be lavishly rewarded. Rewards can be food treats, toys, games, cuddles, praise or more work (collies and gun dogs!). As you get to know your puppy, you will learn what his favourite rewards are. Not all dogs like the same rewards, and not all dogs like the same treats.

THE CALL OF NATURE

Puppies learn at around 9 weeks of age what surface to go to the toilet on. You want this to be an outside surface of your choice, not your sitting room carpet. Take your puppy outside at least every couple of hours, and watch carefully for circling and sniffing behaviours. These mean your puppy is thinking about going to the toilet. As your puppy toilets, say a word agreed on by all of your family. Guide Dog trainers use “Busy” but any word will do as long as everyone involved uses the same word. Immediately after you say the word and your puppy has gone to the toilet, give a really valuable reward. Your puppy will very quickly connect the sound you are making with going to toilet. This will save you hours of waiting around in the rain and cold in the future. If your puppy toilets inside by accident, make sure he is out of sight before cleaning up. Use biological washing powder to soak the soiled area, and blot it up thoroughly. Many cleaning products break down to smell to a dog like old urine, and so will encourage repeated soiling in the same spot.

SOCIALISATION

Socialisation is the process by which your puppy learns what species of animal he is and which other species of animals are friends or foes (or prey!). Your puppy is most sensitive between 3 and 7 weeks so it is important to make sure your puppy has the opportunity to interact in a normal way with other puppies and adult dogs during this period, this will usually be in the breeders household.



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Once this initial period of learning has passed your puppy's sensitivity will lessen, but will not stop and your puppy will continue to develop and learn as he grows and passes through the various developmental stages until he reaches social maturity at the age of 2-3 years. He should therefore continue to mix with other dogs in a controlled and supervised way throughout his puppy period and beyond so these social rules don't become forgotten. If your puppy's chances to learn basic doggy manners are missed, or their natural expression is interfered with in some way, your puppy may develop problems with other dogs in later life. Equally failure to meet and mix with other species may result in fear or aggression towards them as your puppy gets older. It will still be possible to teach your dog these skills at a later stage but it will be harder and you may need some professional help if it is left until this time

How do I make sure my puppy is well socialised and habituated?

Whilst it is important to protect your puppy from disease until his vaccinations are complete it is equally important to make sure he has lots of positive experiences during these sensitive periods so he can grow up to be both physically and emotionally healthy. This can be achieved as follows: -

- Start socialising your puppy just a few days after you bring him home
- Take your puppy out every day to experience all the normal sights and sounds of daily life. We can supply a socialisation chart to give you ideas of the types of experiences to try and to keep track of which ones you have completed if you wish.
- Arrange for your puppy to meet lots of different types of people. Allow these people to approach and fuss your puppy, but ensure this is gentle and positive. Don't allow people with unvaccinated dogs or dirty hands to fuss your puppy
- Allow your puppy to freely explore places where you know there haven't been any unvaccinated dogs or that have been thoroughly cleaned using a product that kills parvovirus. Carry your puppy when taking him to public or unclean places



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- Arrange for your puppy to spend some time with other friendly vaccinated adult dogs or older puppies. Allow them to interact freely: learning about interacting with other dogs includes learning how to resolve differences. However if the older dog uses too much aggression to correct your puppy's behaviour then separate them and try again a different day with a different dog.
- Also try to arrange interaction with other similar sized and similar aged puppies that have also been protected from disease in the same way as your puppy has. Again expect a few grumbles and squeals, but intervene if either puppy looks scared.
- You cannot completely control every experience your puppy has so there may be occasions when your puppy becomes afraid of a new experience. If your puppy has a very mildly distressing experience it will help to teach him how to cope with this type of thing when he is older. If he has a more seriously distressing experience then first of all remove him from the situation. You can then try reintroducing that experience on subsequent days making sure it is 100% positive to counter the one negative occasion. If your puppy is fearful in lots of situations please contact us for details of a behaviourist who can help you. Early intervention is key.

TEACHING YOUR PUPPY TO COPE WITH STRESS

It is very important that your puppy learns coping strategies which he can sensibly employ in situations he finds stressful. A good example of this is learning to be alone. Your puppy has grown up so far with the company of his littermates and his mother, as well as the breeder's family and friends. Most people then have a period of time at home with their puppy but often overlook teaching the puppy to cope in their absence. Separation anxiety is one of the more common behavioural issues in later life and can present in a number of ways – house soiling, destructiveness, barking, howling, self mutilation to name just a few. These can be avoided by working to teach your puppy that it is ok to be alone, starting at a very early age.



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This is very much easier using a puppy pen - another good reason for choosing this technique. Place your puppy in his pen or another room (ensuring there is nothing he can chew which may be dangerous) and leave him alone for a minute or two several times each day. Give him something to do during this time for example something in a kong, scattered kibble, a chew, or a new toy. This makes it positive and also distracts to reduce the chance the pup will vocalise. Just walk away, don't make a big issue of leaving. Go back to him when he is quiet and preferably amusing himself with a suitable toy. Most puppies will stop vocalising quite quickly at which point return and make a big fuss of how brilliant he has been. If vocalising continues longer go back in but pretend to be doing something else until there are a few seconds quiet then greet. This tends to reduce how long they vocalise for without rewarding them for doing so. When you are ready, make a big fuss and tell him how brilliant he has been. Slowly increase the time you leave him alone for, but mix up short 1 - 2 minute periods with longer 5 - 10 minute periods, so he cannot guess which it will be, and gradually add in longer time periods until you can leave your puppy for as long as you are likely to need to. Dogs should not be left for more than four or five hours on a regular basis.

Practice leaving your puppy in different areas of your house - , in the garden, in the car (not on hot sunny days), with friends, or in a boarding kennel so that he does not feel anxious in an unfamiliar place. This way, when the time comes that you need him to be cared for by someone else, he will trust that you will come back and not be distressed in your absence.

Welcoming a new puppy into your home is a lot of fun but it also marks the start of responsibilities for you as the owner: it is vital to invest time and effort in training. This will ensure that your puppy will grow into a loyal, loving and obedient companion. Properly trained he will obey your commands and not be a nuisance, either at home or in public places.



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BOOKS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

BOOKS

There are a number of good books available – some suggestions are:

- “The Perfect Puppy” by Gwen Bailey
- “Life Skills for Puppies” by Helen Zulch and Daniel Mills
- “Clever Dog: The Secrets Your Dog Wants You to Know” by Sarah Whitehead

DOG CLUBS

- Swan School of Dog Training—01280 847487
- Kimberley Cox—07720 714080

Other qualified and regulated trainers can be found at www.apdt.co.uk

BEHAVIOURAL SERVICES

Stephanie Hedges BSc (Hons) CCAB for 1-2-1 preventative puppy advice or behaviour modification service – 01604 269451 07969 121559 or www.inthedoghouse.org.uk



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