

A Guide To Training Your Puppy

Think Puppy.....

Your puppy needs to learn to communicate with other dogs, various breeds, people and other species of animal. This is called *socialisation*.

Your puppy needs to be exposed to all manner of life experiences every day. They will become used to these experiences, gradually becoming part of everyday life and they will not be frightened. This is called *habituation*.

Noise, vets, travelling, household objects and spending time on their own are just a handful of experiences your puppy needs to become used to. This will enable them to become a happy, well adjusted family member.

To successfully habituate your puppy to a new experience they should be in a calm, relaxed state of mind to start with and offer them lots of encouragement for showing interest but always ensure your puppy remains calm. Don't try to introduce a new experience to your puppy when they are already excited. Keep 'learning time' short but try to show your puppy something new every day and then repeat the experience on a regular basis.

Did you know that how your puppy learns and reacts is partly determined by their mother? Their 'stress thermostat' is affected by stress levels from their mum. This is a good reason to find out about their mum's behaviour if possible before you take your puppy home.

How long do you have to socialise your puppy?

Your puppy's learning peak is between 4 and 12 weeks of age.

They were born helpless, and traditionally they have remained in the den area for 6-8 weeks with their mum and siblings and so have had no reason to develop fear! The beauty of being born helpless is that the final part of brain development is completed under the influence of the outside world. This means that your puppy is highly adaptive to their environment and you can use this to your advantage - to make a well mannered loving companion!

In these few short weeks their brain is developing rapidly, and they are forming a template of what to expect from normal life. Anything they do not experience during this period is more likely to cause a fearful response in adulthood.

Don't forget...

Your puppy needs to get used to being alone! Not experiencing periods of isolation predisposes them to separation related behaviours like crying and destructive behaviour as your puppy tries to attract your attention. Puppy pens are a useful item to have. As well as aiding in toilet training they can be used to put your puppy in for a few minutes at a time, gradually increasing the time as your puppy becomes happier and more contented in the pen on their own.

Please ask one of our veterinary nurses for advice on using a puppy pen.

Guidance for things you can work on everyday

i) Begin by examining your puppy on a regular basis. This will help both you and your vet when your puppy has their regular check ups.

This should include:

- massaging their ears, lifting up their ear flaps and stroking their head and shoulder areas
- opening their mouth and touching their teeth
- gently grasping the excess skin of the neck area
- lifting up their tail
- examining each paw above, below and between their toes
- grooming regularly with a suitable soft brush for about a minute

ii) When introducing a collar for the first time, put the collar on for a minute or so either when playing or giving affection so the collar is associated with happy experiences. The time your puppy wears the collar can be increased as they become accustomed to it. The same theory can be applied to introducing the lead once your puppy is familiar with the collar.

iii) Introduce a new person or animal (ensure they are fully vaccinated and healthy) or experience a new place or sound.

iv) Introduce your puppy to travelling in the car. Spend short periods of about 5 minutes together in a stationary car and then move on to short trips to somewhere your puppy enjoys (not always to the vets!) on an empty stomach. Make sure you give lots of praise if your puppy is settled and well behaved.

v) Experience a short period of time alone (in a safe environment for example a puppy pen). Begin with a period of about 5 minutes. Increase this time as your puppy hopefully begins to learn to stay calm and quiet and that you will eventually return.

Developing social skills

Puppies are not born knowing how to communicate any more than babies are! During the socialisation period, your puppy learns to communicate with other dogs and learns the consequences of their behaviour through trial and error.

Your puppy must learn to communicate with other dogs using subtle facial and body posturing. Bear in mind each breed has different expressions due to their individual breed features. Therefore puppies must be exposed to a variety of breeds in order to communicate effectively, and learn different 'accents'

Puppies are also constantly looking at our facial expressions and picking up signals - this is how dogs learn about people. Puppies watch people to work out what behaviours are significant to them.

For example, what face do you pull when you come home to find a mess on the floor?

It's this face that your puppy knows means he might be in trouble, and therefore causes him anxiety. It's not the case that your puppy feels guilty because he knows he has done something wrong! It is important to remember that your puppy will have accidents in the house but they will decrease in frequency and scolding your puppy will not help- ignore the bad behaviour and reward the good!

He bites everything!

While your puppy grows to 12 weeks old they are learning their 'bite inhibition'. This is how hard they may bite everything, including you!

It is therefore important that puppies are given the chance to engage play with other dogs and puppies and teach each other the consequences of their bite.

"When I bite this hard, the game stops."

Your reaction to their mouthing on your own skin is critical. Puppies must be taught that touching your flesh with their teeth means games stop and they are deprived of your attention. With every bite give a short sharp OW! or NO! and then avoid giving your puppy attention for 5 minutes.

To teach this lesson properly means no picking up of your puppy, no arm flapping, squealing or other actions that are all great fun and attention for your puppy. It's worth making sure children have a routine in place that is well rehearsed as they may be fun for puppy to cut his teeth on and ultimately hurt most.

While we're on the subject of children...

Interactions between puppies and children should always be supervised and begin from an early age (for the puppy). Accidents can easily happen as a result of miscommunication between dogs and children, so it is essential to educate children about appropriate interaction with dogs.

It is a useful suggestion to make it a rule that children should not pick up your puppy. This will avoid accidental problems during handling and ensure that your puppy learns to see children as friendly and nice to be with.

Also make it a rule that children should not disturb your puppy while they are sleeping or eating.

If you don't have your puppy yet consider these points...

Have a basic knowledge of puppy behaviour, healthcare and your chosen breed's specific features and requirements, ideally before you bring them home.

Ensure you have enough time to devote to a puppy.

Book a place at a puppy party, but research first what you should come to expect from a well run puppy party. Your veterinary practice runs regular puppy parties to help with socialisation. Charts and training aids are also available. Please ask for more details.

Find out about further puppy and behaviour training. There are often local run meetings that can be recommended by your veterinary practice.

Remember, everyday is like gold dust and your puppy is relying on you to provide successful socialisation and habituation so it's worth making the effort to get things right now so you can look forward to a happy settled new member of the family.

Please feel free to speak to any of our veterinary surgeons or nurses to discuss any worries or problems about training your puppy.

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