

Puppy Learning and Socialization

The first months are the most important months in your new puppy's life. During this time your puppy is growing at a phenomenal rate - both mentally and physically. The experiences he has now will shape his outlook and his personality for the rest of his life.

The period between 8 and 12 weeks of age is called the socialization period. Your puppy learns during this time how to relate to people and to other animals. Good experiences with people and other dogs will help foster a lifetime of positive interactions, and minimize the risks of problems with fighting, biting and other problem behaviors.

Take your puppy with you to busy places and introduce him to lots of strangers, children and other pets. (Make sure you know that any other dogs your puppy interacts with are current on their vaccinations!) Give him lots of praise and petting when he is friendly and interested. Frequent short trips in the car will accustom your pup to traveling. You can also bring him in to the veterinary office on a weekly basis for treats and attention and he will be happier to visit there for the rest of his life!

You don't need to worry that all this socialization will make your dog a poor watch dog. Most older puppies learn on their own to bark at the doorbell or a knock from a stranger. What you don't want is a dog that bites the furnace repair man or your children's friends. Positive social interaction leads

to positive relations with people later in life. So spend the extra time now while he's young and reap a lifetime of rewards in good behavior!



The other important lesson to teach your puppy at this age is his place in the "pack". Dogs are pack animals - they socialize in small groups and have a definite hierarchy that tells each dog his status as a pack member. A dominant dog is in charge.

Your puppy will come to see your household members, be they people or other dogs or both, as the members of his pack. The number one rule to remember is that your dog should NEVER be the dominant member of his pack! YOU are the one in charge. You have the right to tell your dog to sit or stay or come. You are the one who decides when it's time to eat, to get the nails trimmed or to go to the veterinarian for a shot. Your puppy must learn now where it's place is in your household.

More animals are put to sleep because of behavior problems than any other reason. A primary factor in behavior problems is dominance behavior.

What do you need to do to avoid problems?

Whether you own your dog as a pet, to show, to hunt or for protection, your dog requires formal training. An unruly pet is not a pleasure to live with. Proper training teaches your dog his position and duties as a member of the household, and also serves as an outlet for his energy. It teaches your pet to accept frustration and attain patience, and it creates a love and bond between animal and human that is impossible to duplicate any other way.

Obedience is simply a repetition of exercises for both dog and handler resulting in a unified team. The owner will learn to control the dog both by voice and on leash. Training can start when your puppy is very young, by teaching the basic commands of "sit" and "come".

Sit is the simplest thing to teach.

The difficult thing is to teach when to quit sitting! The goal is to teach that sit means to sit until you give permission to get up. Say your pet's name and then the command "sit" while tilting his chin up and at the same time pressing gently down on the rump. Do this whenever your puppy wants attention or play and he will quickly learn the command. You should soon be able to forego pressing on the back end, and substitute an over-the-head motion with one hand. Your pet should follow this movement and tip his head up while starting to sit down. This over-the-head motion is the hand signal for sitting. The instant he sits, praise and pat the chest and throat.

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After about 5 seconds of sit, say "OK" and step away to communicate that your pup can now move out of the sitting position. Crouch down and praise and then keep repeating the entire procedure until sitting is achieved on the first command. Do short sessions, gradually lengthening the time of sitting. If your dog starts to get up, repeat the word sit and use the hand motion over his head to restore the sitting position.

If your puppy starts to lie down by your side as the duration of the sit increases, do not correct him at first. It is the duration of the sitting you want to concentrate on at first. Once five minutes of sitting has been achieved you may then stop the lying down behavior by using your hand motion to correct it the instant the puppy shows a sign of beginning to lie down. Be patient and consistent. Weeks are necessary to build up to a consistent sit.



To teach "come"

To teach "come" take your pup to an area that is fairly open and free of distractions. Go to the center of the area and watch the puppy closely. The instant he takes his eyes off you, call: "Spot, COME!" Immediately crouch down, turn sideways to the puppy, clap your hands and gleefully praise; "Good dog, Good dog, Good dog." Keep up the praise and clapping until Spot comes all the way to you. Pet sincerely but briefly. Then stand up and step away behind the puppy.



If his attention does not stay on you, instantly call "Spot, COME" again and repeat the entire procedure. If Spot gets distracted, repeat the call and the praise-crouch procedure.

Continue until Spot will not leave you no matter where you walk. Then stop that teaching session. Do not hold another for at least two-and-a-half hours. Hold three daily sessions at the most for six weeks, varying the location and increasing the amount of noise and distractions as you progress.

Leash training

Leash training is another skill your puppy can start learning early on. Start by introducing him to the collar - most puppies will scratch at it at first. Give him a few days to adjust before moving on to the leash.

You probably wouldn't like it if someone 20 times your size suddenly slapped a collar around your neck and started dragging you around. Be gentle and patient at first with leash walking. Let the puppy drag the leash around at first. (Don't let him get tangled or choke himself.) Once he's not bothered by the leash, take him out in the yard and let him walk you for a few sessions, 10 minutes or so in length.

Work gradually up to leading the puppy, with lots of praise and encouragement when he follows you and gentle tugging to get him moving. Don't expect a great deal of success at first, but with time and patience most dogs soon come to love their outings with their owner. Beginning leash sessions should be short and fun. Don't walk on sidewalks or pavement at first as this is hard on a little puppy's soft bones and joints. Do your first leash walking on the grass.

To teach your dog you are the leader

To teach your dog you are the leader make sure that as you go about your business at home you are ahead of your dog. With dogs, the leader of the pack goes in front. To avoid teaching your dog that it is the leader of your household pack, you must be the one in front. Each time the opportunity comes up, such as when the doorbell rings, mealtimes, going outdoors or when you

leave the room, try this exercise: Whenever the dog starts to go ahead of you, abruptly back up, then turn around and walk in the opposite direction. The instant the dog starts to turn around toward you, say "Good dog" and keep moving until it reaches you. Then praise again and pet for a few seconds. Then, start in the original direction and repeat the process the instant your dog starts to get ahead of you. Keep up this routine until the dog follows you, or waits for your invitation to follow you.



The most difficult place to practice this exercise is at the front door, so start with the easier room-to-room times first. This exercise of turning away also works as you begin to train your pup on a leash. Turning abruptly and heading in a new direction corrects tugging forward and lagging behind and teaches your pet to follow your movements.



Handy tips for obedience

Use your pet's name only to give him a command. Use a nick-name or code word when talking about, instead of directly to, your dog. This way he will not learn to ignore his name because it is used in casual conversation, but will know he needs to respond whenever you say it.

Also be sure that every member of your household is using the same commands and is consistent in their training. Everyone needs to agree on whether your puppy will be allowed on the furniture or beds, how many treats he'll get, what rooms he's allowed in, etc. If everyone is doing something different he'll get confused and stressed by the mixed messages he's getting.

Training your family to train your pet

Starting your puppy on this simple training program at a young age will prepare him well for more advanced obedience work as he becomes older and his attention span lengthens. Six months is a good age to begin more formal training. If you have not trained dogs before, or even if you have, we recommend an obedience class for you and your dog, and also for the children in your household. Children need to understand the proper way to train their dog, and they often derive a great deal of pride and satisfaction from participating in their dog's training program.

However, children can be very cruel to small pets. Usually this is unintentional, sometimes it's not. Children must be taught how to be gentle and patient. Too many times we see children in our office hitting, dragging around or yelling at their puppy. This should not be acceptable behavior. Toddlers should never be left unsupervised with a pet. We see lots of injuries to pets who are dropped, stepped or fallen on, and also bite wounds to children inflicted by hurt or frightened puppies.

In summary:

Starting on an obedience program early is the quickest way toward a lifetime of pleasure with a happy, well-behaved pet. Integrate obedience into your dog's day, such that it becomes part of life to him. Simply ask the puppy or dog to perform some action whenever it wants something (to open the door, play ball, get dinner, etc.) Dogs will work to get something they want, which keeps you in charge and your dog interested and occupied constructively.

We want to encourage you to devote the necessary time and energy to this project while your puppy is still young, to ensure that you have many wonderful, problem free years with your pet. A good trainer and a good training program will solve, or avoid altogether, the many behaviors that fill our nation's humane societies and shelters with unwanted pets. Your dog needs your help to learn to become a good canine citizen!

Please show your
love for your pets with
good training!



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