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Preparing Your Puppy to Learn

Your puppy wants to please you. If he learns that learning is fun, he'll learn quickly and you'll enjoy each other more. Your goal in the beginning should be to forge a bond of trust, mutual respect, and understanding with your puppy. That bond will see you both through your dog's adolescence (something like the “terrible twos” that children go through) and beyond.

Never hit your puppy, not with your hand, not with a rolled-up newspaper or flyswatter, not with anything. There's no reason to hit a dog, and hitting him won't teach him anything you want him to learn. Some dogs will react to being hit by becoming afraid of people and of people's hands coming toward them. Frightened dogs often become shy, nervous, and withdrawn, and some bite out of fear. Other dogs will react to being hit by trying to fight back. Either way, you will end up with a very unhappy (and possibly dangerous) dog, and you probably won't be very happy, either.

Doggerel



Positive reinforcement is the process of rewarding your dog with something she likes for doing what you want her to do. Praise and a treat for sitting on command provide positive reinforcement.

Positive reinforcement is the most effective and fair approach to training a puppy. Some people use purely positive reinforcement, meaning that they don't use corrections in training. Others use a combination of positive reinforcement for correct behaviors and fair, gentle corrections for unwanted behaviors.

Training should start as soon as you bring your puppy home. That cute little roly-poly guy is going to grow into a dog, and he needs to learn what you want from him. The number one reason people get rid of their dogs is that the dogs have bad manners—and that's nearly always the owner's fault. Your puppy wasn't born knowing what you want. He's a dog, and his instincts tell him how to live with dogs, not people. Luckily, with your help your puppy can learn what he needs to know to make you the happiest dog owner around.

Remember that puppies have short little attention spans. Make your training sessions short, fun, and frequent. Focus on one behavior—“Sit” or “Down” or “Come”—during each session. If your puppy does what you ask two or three times, then quit for a bit and just play with him. You can do a few more minutes of training a little later.

Be sure all your human family members understand and apply the same “puppy rules.” You need to be consistent to help your puppy learn. If you tell the puppy to stay off the couch but your

spouse invites him up, he'll end up confused and you'll end up frustrated. (Be aware, though, that family members are much harder to train than puppies are!)

Most of us have to work for a living. If you have to be gone all day, plan for your puppy before you bring him home. Remember, he's a baby. It's unfair to ask a puppy to spend eight or nine hours alone, and more than unfair to ask him to wait that long to potty. If you can't come home at lunch time to let him out, play with him, and check on him, consider hiring a pet sitter or other reliable person to come in once or twice during the day to walk him, play with him, and feed him if necessary. He'll be happier, and you won't have quite so much pent-up energy to contend with.

Make sure the pup has plenty of toys, but don't give him everything at once. I've seen puppies chew on shoes and furniture despite having puppy toys all over the floor. If all the toys are there all the time, your puppy may lose interest. So give him two or three toys at a time—maybe a hard chew toy and a soft puppy toy or rope that he can shake and “kill.” Put everything else away. Every day or two, switch the toys—take those away and give him a different two or three toys. If he sees each toy only sometimes, it will be a lot more interesting.

You'll do most of your puppy's training at home or out and about, but it's still a good idea to take him to a good class. Your best bet for a young puppy is a puppy kindergarten class with a qualified instructor who can answer your questions, help you get your pup off to a good start, and encourage socialization. If your puppy is older than six months, look for a basic obedience class.

Grrrrrows



Don't let problem behaviors start. Let your puppy explore your home and yard—his home and yard—but only when a responsible person can supervise him. If you can't watch him, confine him. It's easier to prevent mistakes than to correct them.

If you plan to go on to compete in obedience, agility, conformation, or other sports, try to find an instructor who understands where you and your pup are headed. The groundwork for advanced training can be laid very early with good puppy training. Consider taking more than one class, possibly from more than one instructor so that you get more than one point of view. No dog is fully trained in six or eight weeks, and even if he's doing very well, it's good for your adolescent puppy to continue to have contact with lots of dogs and people.

Beware of any school or trainer who claims to be able to train your dog completely in just a few weeks. Training takes time, and if the claims seem too good to be true, they are.

If you plan to compete eventually, you may be able to find puppy “competition” obedience or agility classes. Young dogs shouldn't jump until their bones mature, but they can start on low obstacles and learn to follow directions.

Start teaching the behaviors you'll want in your grown-up dog while he's still a baby. If you don't want your dog to jump on you or lie on the couch when he's grown up, don't let him do it as a pup. It's not fair to change the rules after your puppy gets well into the game of living with you. Of course, if he's doing something you can't allow, then you do need to “change the rules” and retrain him. But it'll be a lot easier on both of you if you think ahead and train for the future.

NOTE: Desert Wind Labradors offers Kinder Puppy Training as well as complete Training Packages. Visit <http://www.desertwindlabradors.com/home/dw-services-resources-more/training-overview/> for complete details.

For more information check out this article:
Training Basics for Your Dog