

Puppy Parent Guide

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As a puppy parent you have taken on a very rewarding decision. You have the opportunity to guide your puppy into becoming a confident and loved member of your family.

The past and most common theory has been that you must be the “Alpha” dog of your “dog pack”. This out-of-date theory usually entails dominating your puppy both physically and mentally. It is theorized that you need to dominate your puppy at all times and be prepared to stop any challenge that your puppy may make toward your “Alpha” role. It is assumed, by this theory, that your puppy is constantly thinking of ways to overthrow your authority and take over leadership.

It has now been realized that the “Alpha theory” is incorrect and that there is a much simpler explanation for why your dog misbehaves – he or she has not been taught the correct behavior. Although “pack rules” apply to the relationship between dogs, they do not apply to people. Your puppy knows that you are not a dog. The dominance theory is simply unnecessary and may prevent you from fully enjoying the broad relationship you can have with your puppy.

Now that we have disposed of the idea that your puppy is constantly trying to take over your household, we can begin to build a positive relationship between you and your new puppy.

BE FAIR

Part of being fair is understanding basic dog characteristics. We expect our dogs to live in a human world, follow human rules, and give up many of their normal dog behaviors. We should remember to be fair in our expectations and understand what motivates our dogs. The following are 6 dog characteristics:

1. **Everything is a chew toy** – Dogs explore their world with their mouth. Dogs have no concept of the value of a human object. They don't understand why you have such a fit when they chew on the woodwork – isn't that what it's there for?
2. **Amoral** – Dogs have no ethical problems with stealing, cheating, or licking themselves in public. They don't know "right vs. wrong", only "rewarding vs. not rewarding".
3. **Self centered** – Dogs are not motivated to please you, unless there is some reward in it for them.
4. **Opportunistic** – Dogs act without regard to conduct or consequences.
5. **Highly social** – Dogs bond strongly and do not cope well with isolation.
6. **Predators** – Dogs are strongly wired to hunt, chase, grab, chew, and dissect.

BE A TEACHER

Being a good teacher is not about domination or forcing your will on others. It is about taking responsibility, not only for making decisions, but also for taking care of your "student". As a teacher it is your job to sort things out when they go wrong. You need to show your puppy that he can have confidence in you and that you will take care of things, especially when they go wrong. The key to being a good teacher is understanding. Only when you understand how your puppy thinks and learns will you gain his trust and respect. A teacher should give consistent guidance and not provoke fear.

Your job is to guide your puppy into making the right decisions by controlling what he learns. **Set your dog up for successes, not failures.** The word "No" does not mean, "Please stop what you are doing and do something else" to a dog. We spend an enormous amount of time telling our puppies "No, No!" or "Bad Dog!" but we do not guide them into making a decision that will be rewarded. By the same idea, we also rarely reward appropriate behavior. Don't waste time telling your puppy what not to do, instead teach him what to do, and praise him when he does the right thing.

BE CONSISTENT

Lack of consistency and predictability are two of the main reasons for behavior problems. Imagine that one day you went to work and your boss told you what a wonderful employee you are. Five minutes later he's ranting and screaming at you for no apparent reason. A half hour later, he told you how much he values and appreciates you. This kind of environment creates anxiety and distrust. Many times this is the very same environment we create for our dogs. They cannot predict how we will react because we seem so inconsistent.

BE A GOOD COMMUNICATOR

Your job is to tell your puppy when he is doing something that you like by rewarding the behavior. A behavior will be repeated if it is rewarded, if a behavior is not rewarded it will go away. **You have less than one second to communicate to your puppy that a behavior is correct.** For instance, if your puppy jumps up on you and you pet him or say "No" to him, he will continue to

jump. If he jumps up on you, you ignore him, and give him a treat *as soon as he sits*, he will stop jumping.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline: “To punish in order to gain control or enforce obedience.”

This definition of discipline does not apply to you and your dogs’ relationship. There will rarely, if ever, be a time that you need to discipline your puppy. Using punishment with a new puppy can lead to avoidance of family members at a time when bonding and attachment is critical. You should never have to “enforce” obedience, it will be given willingly when your puppy trusts and respects you. Trust and respect will come from your consistent and predictable interactions, ability to communicate accurately which behaviors will be rewarded, and the ability to teach the behaviors you want your puppy to learn. Young puppies are just like young children - If the only interaction they get is negative, they will learn to crave that negative interaction, and , like children, they will intensify the negative behaviors to get ever-increasing amounts of response.

If your puppy is performing a behavior that could hurt himself or others, stop the behavior by getting your puppy out of the situation before he learns something that you don’t want him to learn. Sit down and decide what behavior you should teach to prevent the behavior from occurring again. For example - if your puppy is eating and growls at a child (or anyone) when they come near his food bowl don’t yell or physically punish him, this will only increase aggression and fear. Instead, drop small pieces of hotdog into his food bowl when the child is near it, this will teach your dog very quickly that people near his bowl is a wonderful thing.

You and your puppy are a team. His job is to offer behaviors and your job is to pick behaviors to be rewarded.

A WORD ABOUT TREATS

Puppies have extremely short attentions spans, and food helps them focus. Bear in mind that a treat is not a bribe – but a salary. A bribe is used to lure an animal away from an undesirable behavior but unfortunately rewards the animal before the desired behavior is accomplished. A salary is used as a reward given after an animal has willingly complied with a request, therefore earning the reward. A reward is a salary; a bribe is blackmail. Without knowing, many of us have been bribing our animals and not feeling good about it. This is usually the reason people don’t like using treats. Now that you know the difference, you can appreciate how a reward structure can set the standard for compassionate, but disciplined control. It is also very important to keep your treat sizes **tiny** (pinkie nail size or smaller) to help keep their focus and attention

CRATE TRAINING

Crate training means to teach your puppy that he has a safe and secure area of his own. A crate is a valuable tool for housebreaking, preventing destructive

behaviors and keeping your puppy safe when you cannot watch him. Your puppy's crate is a place for him to go to get away from the crazy human world.

KINDS OF CRATES

Wire and plastic are the two most common crate types. The fold-up wire crates are easy to transport, but many puppies prefer the "closed in" den like area that a plastic crate offers. It is a good idea to cover a wire crate with a blanket to help give this effect.

The crate should be large enough for your puppy to stand, stretch out and turn around. If your puppy will be a large dog, it's a good idea to purchase a crate that will be the correct size to accommodate him as an adult. However, your puppy may eliminate in a crate that is too large, therefore block the rear area of the crate with a crate divider or a cardboard box until he is fully housebroken.

WHERE TO KEEP THE CRATE

Crates should always be placed in family areas. Crating a puppy in isolated areas where there is minimal human contact should be avoided. Often the best area is a kitchen or bedroom. Usually puppies cry at night because their crate is in a room other than your bedroom. Most likely your puppy just wants to know what you are doing without him. To avoid this, move the crate into your bedroom at night, and he will eventually settle down to sleep because he sees that you are sleeping.

WHEN TO USE THE CRATE

Never use your puppy's crate as punishment. Your puppy should learn that going to his crate is a fun and rewarding, not a punishment.

Most dogs have a natural instinct to keep their "den area" clean. Never force your puppy to eliminate in his crate by expecting him to hold it longer than he is physically able. A good rule of thumb is to go by your puppy's age. Let's say that each month equals one hour, therefore if your puppy is 3 months old, he should not be in the crate for longer than 3 hours. This rule applies until 6 months of age, after that, no dog should be left in his crate for longer than 6-7 hours.

Your puppy should be in his crate anytime that you cannot be watching him. This is a great way to "set your dog up for success" because occasionally life becomes hectic. You may be trying to feed children breakfast, read mail, answer the phone, find lost car keys, and put shoes on. During this time your puppy may be lunging or begging for food, happily shredding mail, trying to grab the telephone cord or your shoelaces, and basically learning things you do not want him to learn. Ask yourself during these times – what am I teaching my puppy? If you don't like what he is learning, put your puppy in his crate and when the situation has calmed down take the time to teach him the behaviors you need him to learn.

TEACHING YOUR PUPPY TO LOVE HIS CRATE

Begin by placing the crate with the door open in an easily accessible area. Toss treats into the crate and reward your puppy for getting the treat. Allow him to eat his meals in his crate with the door open so that he can leave anytime he wishes. Play "Crate Fairy" and hide special toys and treats in his crate such as rawhide

bones and stuffed Kong* toys when your puppy isn't watching you. Encourage your puppy to explore his crate to find these treasures. Anytime your puppy enters his crate on his own make sure to make a big deal over the event! As your puppy becomes accustomed to his crate and enters on his own; begin shutting the door for a second or two (without latching the door) while pushing a tasty treat through the cage door. Your puppy will begin to learn that the shutting of the cage door only means that he will get yet another treat. As your puppy progresses, begin latching the door and opening it immediately as you toss your puppy his reward. The next step is latching the door, leaving for brief moments and rewarding your puppy for staying quiet with a treat.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Never open our puppy's crate door when he is barking or crying or you will inadvertently teach him to vocalize in his crate.
- Keep a very special toy on hand (like a stuffed Kong) and only give this particular toy to your puppy when he is in the crate. This is comparable to putting a Nintendo game in a child's bedroom!
- Your puppy should spend some time in his crate when you are home. This will teach him that going to his crate does not always signal that you are leaving.

*A Kong toy is a hard red or black rubber dog toy that looks like a hollow beehive. The hollow center is perfect for putting treats inside. Because the hollow center is long and narrow, it can take a bit of time for your puppy's tongue to work the treats out. Frozen stuffed Kongs last even longer. Some treats you can use to "stuff" your Kong with are: Kix cereal, peanut butter, dog cookies, carrots, mashed potatoes, and plain unsalted popcorn. The small hole at the top of the Kong is a perfect fit for the nozzle of "squeeze cheese", and a small amount creates quite a challenge for your dog to get to.

HOUSE TRAINING

The best time to start training a dog to eliminate outside is between 7 ½ and 8 ½ weeks of age. This is when a puppy is best able to start to choose a preferred area and act on that choice. The key to accomplishing house training is **supervision**. The length of time that it will take you to housetrain your puppy is *directly* related to how well you supervise him. Your puppy must be supervised any time he is out of his crate. The following are some helpful hints to assist you in the house training process:

- **Take turns** – When your puppy is socializing with the family, put someone in charge of watching him. It will be that person's responsibility to know where your puppy is and what he is doing at all times. It is helpful to use a collar with a bell on it so he can easily be located, however, never leave a collar on your puppy while he is in his crate.

- **Confinement** – There will be times when you cannot be watching your puppy. During those times that your puppy cannot be supervised he needs to be confined.
- **Know the routine** – Even if your puppy has just recently been outside, he will still need to eliminate after he plays and wakes up, but especially after eating and drinking. The act of chewing and swallowing stimulates the intestinal tract to move, which is why a bowel movement is so likely after a puppy eats. A common mistake made by new owners is feeding their puppy after he has been outside to eliminate, and then immediately crating the pup, causing defecation accidents that the puppy is powerless to control. To avoid this, take your puppy out after waking, back in to eat, and then back outside again. Allowing your puppy unlimited access to food makes house training more difficult. Therefore scheduled feedings (at least 3 per day) will make it easier to predict when your puppy needs to eliminate.
- **Know if your puppy is running on “empty or full”** – If you take your puppy outside and he urinates but does not have a bowel movement (or vice versa) and you know it is time for him to have one, bring him back inside and put him in his crate for 5-10 minutes and take him out again after that time. You are not punishing your puppy by putting him in his crate (so don't stuff him in there obviously irritated because he didn't go). You are simply setting him up for reward (success) by not allowing him to eliminate inside.
- **When accidents happen** – if, in spite of your diligence, your puppy eliminates in front of you, **ignore it**, and take him to the appropriate elimination area. If you find an accident on the floor, **do not punish your puppy**; clean up the mess while repeating to yourself “I will supervise my puppy better”. Never punish your puppy for accidents. Learn from *your* mistakes. Make sure that you clean any areas where accidents have happened with an odor eliminator such as Natures Miracle or Simple Solution (found in most pet stores) to remove any smell that may draw your puppy back to that area.
- **When you catch your puppy “doing the right thing”** – When your puppy eliminates outside make a big deal about it, after all it is a big deal! Your puppy is learning that it is better to eliminate outside because you are making it rewarding for him. While your puppy is young, *always* go outside with him. You need to tell him that you approve *the second* that he has done something that you like. The only way you can do that is to be there with him. Reward your puppy with delicious (but tiny) treats and shower him with praise. Make him think he just did the most wonderful thing in the world by going outside.

Avoid paper training. Paper training is taught by encouraging a puppy to eliminate on newspapers spread over the floor in a designated area. This can lead to several problems. By paper training, you unintentionally teach your puppy that it is acceptable to eliminate inside your home. Though some puppies stay on the paper, many more do not understand and “miss” the

boundaries set for them. You may think your puppy clearly understands that it should void on paper, but instead he may learn that it is acceptable to eliminate anywhere in that room and may even begin soiling in a variety of areas in your home. Another problem that arises with paper training is that when, and if, your puppy learns to void on newspapers, it must then be retrained to eliminate outside. You will confuse your puppy by teaching him twice what he only needs to learn once.

Some owners of small breed dogs (or owners that live in high rise buildings) prefer to continue paper training for convenience, but this definitely should not replace daily walks.

SOCIALIZATION

Puppies benefit from positive exposure to as many different life experiences as possible. Between the ages of 4-14 weeks your puppy is in his most important developmental stage, the socialization period. Your puppy's personality will not only be determined by his breed characteristics and parentage, but almost equally by his socialization period.

It is your responsibility to introduce your puppy to as many different experiences as possible and to make each experience pleasant. If you do not socialize your puppy, he runs the risk of being frightened or aggressive toward objects or situations that he was not exposed to or had a scary encounter with during his socialization period. Think of the socialization process as a way of "vaccinating your puppy against scary things".

Your puppy's thought process is pretty simple, good = food. With this in mind, you should never be without a food treat during your puppy's socialization period. Carry them in your pockets, purse, car, baby stroller, fanny pack or backpack. Allow your puppy to approach, investigate and observe new experiences at his own speed. Talk confidently to your puppy when he encounters a new object (something as simple as a leaf blowing across the sidewalk can be scary to a puppy!), person or event and give him one of the many tiny treats you have in your pocket.

If your puppy becomes fearful during an encounter, be careful about what you may be communicating to him when he is afraid. Do not try to comfort him. This will only reward your puppy's fearful behavior and convince him that it is good to be afraid. Instead, use a confident voice and coax your puppy with a treat. Puppies are bottomless pits and always seem to be hungry; therefore a reliable sign that your puppy is very frightened or overwhelmed is if he will not take a tasty treat. If such a situation occurs, get your puppy out of the situation and reduce the level of the scary event and start again. Ask your puppy to "sit" and

reward the behavior, this way you are substituting a behavior that you can reward for his fearful response.

Help your puppy become a “social butterfly”. When meeting new people, give a treat to the new person to give to your puppy, after all, who can resist such a cutie? While you are at home get your puppy accustomed to things like brooms, umbrellas, strollers, and slippery surfaces. Things that move and make noise (like vacuum cleaners) can be a little more challenging. In those situations the key is to progress slowly. Try first having the object still and silent, then “on” in an area far away (another room), then “on” in the same area etc., all the while sprinkling treats on and around the object. As with any situation, if your puppy won’t take a treat, you moved forward too quickly. Back up to where your puppy was comfortable and try again.

Get friends (with treats) to help create different situations such as riding by on a bike, bringing over their child and/or dog, or wearing a hat, helmet, costume or uniform. Even dancing, jumping and hugging. Invite your loud, animated neighbor over to meet the puppy. All of these odd situations will help your puppy conquer, with confidence, what might cross his path in the future.

BITE INHIBITION

Puppy biting is a normal, natural puppy behavior. Although often thought to be a teething behavior, nipping, mouthing and biting is a form of social play. Teething is more likely to involve gnawing or chewing on toys or household objects.

Puppies are like young children; they are very energetic and can make mistakes in both the objects and the intensity of their play behaviors.

Puppies rarely bite with the intention of hurting someone, but sometimes things out of our control happen – Dogs get stepped on, surprised or fearful, and feel they have no other option but to bite. A dog that has been taught how to inhibit his bite may someday bite, but not leave a mark on the person that he bites.

Because **all** dogs can and will bite at some time bite inhibition not only protects your skin, but also may someday save your dogs life.

When puppies mouth and bite humans they are trying to play. Unfortunately, their mouthing can be painful and they need to be taught how to control how hard they bite, and that touching a human with their teeth is not rewarding.

When puppies play, if puppy A bites puppy B too hard, puppy B will yelp, if that does not work, puppy B will leave. This sends the message to puppy A that his bites were too hard, he lost his playmate, and the game ended. Something a puppy definitely does not want to happen! However, people often do not send this message to their puppy. In the beginning, people often allow their chew on them and play “hand games” and then the puppy assumes that he behavior is acceptable. Rough play stimulates rough play do not perpetuate the cycle.

Instead, the message people should send is that mouthing and chewing on your hands is painful, and not rewarding. *It is not necessary to discipline your puppy.* Discipline will usually make the problem worse by increasing your puppy's excitement level, and by causing fear and distrust.

To teach bite inhibition, when your puppy bites exclaim with a sharp "yip" and act mortally wounded, while ceasing all play and attention immediately. (The volume on the "yip" will depend on your puppy. Some puppies need only a quiet tone while more forceful puppies will need a loud "yip" to get their attention.) Begin play again, making sure you always have a toy while playing, if your puppy bites you again, do the same routine as before only this time stand up, fold your arms, turn your back on your puppy, and ignore him. Do this until he eventually sits and becomes quiet, *and only then*, may you return to playing. If it still continues leave the room entirely for a minute or two. This will teach your puppy that humans have the most delicate skin on earth and if they are not careful, they will lose their playmate entirely. Your puppy will learn that his behavior caused the game to end.

Make sure to provide your puppy with ample opportunity for exercise like long walks, short jogs, and aerobic play. (A tired puppy is less likely to start play biting!) Also provide plenty of social play that could involve chase and retrieve games. Although tug of war games can be fun, they may lead to play that is too rough or rambunctious.

To play "tug of war" appropriately, the following rules should be observed:

1. Only you can initiate the game, your puppy must sit and wait until the toy is offered.
2. Always give the command "take it" before offering the toy, train your puppy to wait to take the toy until the command is given.
3. Keep tugging gentle; **do not** swing the puppy around by his teeth. This could cause neck injury, dislocation of the jaw, and fractured teeth.
4. If the dog grazes any body parts, or grabs at your hand instead of the toy, follow the same rules as if he bit you directly.
5. You decide when the game is over by announcing a command that it is time to stop like "enough", "stop", or "that's all" train your puppy to sit for one of these commands and retrieve the toy. You should always win.

If all of these steps cannot be followed, do not play tug of war. You and your pet will be safer.

Wrestling should be avoided, especially when children are involved, as it can also lead to rough play.

Some owners often believe that they can teach their dogs to be protective by wrestling with them. This is mistaken, dangerous, and wrong. If a dog is going to protect a family when a threat is present, they will do so regardless of whether they play roughly. All such "training" does is to teach the dog to treat the family roughly, and that is certainly not what you want your puppy to learn.

Always using a toy when playing helps a puppy understand the differences between play and threat.