

Preventing Problems in Puppy Training



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INTRODUCTION

"Prevention is better than cure"

This is very true where puppy training is concerned as during the first 18 weeks of life your puppy needs to learn and positively experience many things to enable him to live happily within your family. His



mother will have taught him everything she could in the first 7 to 8 weeks of life when he was under her care, but now it is up to you. If your puppy came from a breeder hopefully they carefully introduced the puppy to lots of everyday sights, sounds and experiences, and you will need to continue this 'socialisation'. You now face a marvellous opportunity and challenge to help your puppy grow up into a happy well adjusted dog.

This leaflet is written to help you avoid some of the potential problems that can easily develop in training and behaviour. Because dogs are so adaptable and versatile - not only providing wonderful companionship for people but also offering the willingness and ability to act as guides, guards, herders and many more services - it is easy to forget how different they are from us. However, they see the world through canine eyes; and behaviour that is totally natural and acceptable for dogs can be viewed as quite abhorrent or annoying by their owners.

So we do need to gently teach them how to behave in our households and outside, otherwise they will never recognise the boundaries of acceptable behaviour into which we expect them to fit. Puppies are particularly willing and easy to train, but in order to do this let's look at how puppies learn and consider some basic essential guidelines in dog training.

Basic training guidelines

- 🐾 *Training needs to be fun - for the puppy and for you.*
- 🐾 *All experiences need to be pleasant and positive. Bad experiences can scar the puppy for life causing indelible fears that are sometimes impossible to overcome.*
- 🐾 *Playing is a very important part of the puppy's development as it not only increases dexterity, strengthens muscles and increases social skills, but it also helps the puppy's brain to develop to full potential.*
- 🐾 *Find out what your puppy really loves so that this can be used as a reward. Does he love playing with squeaky toys, or does he like small treats? What is the best prize you can offer for good behaviour?*
- 🐾 *Always remember to give praise too - puppies need to know when they are doing well to help build their confidence.*
- 🐾 *All desirable behaviour needs to be rewarded with warm praise and tiny treats **immediately**. This will reinforce in the puppy's mind that a particular response makes something good happen, and therefore it is likely to be repeated as he will want to get more of the nice things.*
- 🐾 *Later on, when your puppy is responding promptly to each cue, you will need to gradually reduce the rewards by making them intermittent before phasing them out.*



🐾 *All unwanted behaviour should be completely ignored and the puppy will soon notice it doesn't bring any reward and realise that it's not worth doing. ('Ignoring' means not even looking at the pup but turning away and making no sound.)*



🐾 *Puppies should never be punished - it will frighten them and could hurt them. They can learn that a sharp "No!" means 'not acceptable', but you have to say it **at the point** for it to make any sense to the puppy. Never shout at or hurt your puppy in any way, even if you feel angry, otherwise you could seriously harm him and cause great fear. Shouting or telling off a dog even a couple of minutes after the event will have no effect anyway as he won't associate your reaction with his previous behaviour. By shouting you may even inadvertently reward the puppy who thinks you are joining in the fun!*

🐾 *Only spend a few minutes at a time training your puppy, as any longer could tire him out. Several short sessions a day works best.*

🐾 *Keep your cues (words you use to command your pup to do things) simple and short, and make sure that the same words are used by everyone for the same thing.*

🐾 *Never forget that your puppy is very young and vulnerable and will be missing his litter mates and mother until he gets used to you and your family.*

With these in mind puppy training should be really enjoyable and fun.

And now we'll move on....

Bite Inhibition

It is vital that your dog learns about bite inhibition while he is still very young. Once he reaches about 4½ months of age the jaw will have developed enough strength to do real damage, and a full set of adult teeth will be replacing the small milk teeth. All dogs have the potential to bite, and in certain circumstances will do so. However, a dog who has been taught a good bite inhibition during puppyhood is unlikely to break the skin, whereas an adult dog without bite inhibition can be dangerous.

Young puppies will start to learn about bite inhibition whilst they are with their litter mates, as they play and fight together. When one puppy bites too hard the other puppy will yelp causing the biter to back off for a short while. This is important feedback - the biter learns that it was too hard and will re-approach more gently. Should he not do so, he may well find that his litter-mates don't want to play with him for a while!

You need to continue this important feedback with your puppy by giving a short yelp every time he bites you in play, and temporarily turning away and completely ignoring him. After a minute of ignoring him, when he is calm, call him to you and continue playing but repeat the yelp and turning away each time he bites. The biting should get gentler. If the short yelp only serves to excite him, (and it does with some puppies) completely ignore him and turn away. Initially reward the more gentle mouthing with praise and continue playing. But when his mouth is consistently gentle you will need to reduce the amount of mouthing (non-teeth contact with skin) until he stops doing any sort of mouth-with-skin contact. The reason for this is that you will not want your fully grown dog to be mouthing anyone, especially children, as it will cause all sorts of problems, however benign you may think it is. To teach your puppy not to mouth you, each time he does it remove your hand whilst completely ignoring him and, without making a sound or looking at him, turn away and ignore him for a minute or two. Then call him to you and continue to play, but be sure to respond to any mouthing by ignoring him. With this method the play-biting and mouthing should stop. However, if you find your puppy persists in biting, as soon as teeth touch your skin, calmly, gently and quietly put the pup outside the room and close the door for a couple of minutes. This should teach him that biting means playing stops and he gets ignored.

Home Alone

Dogs are highly sociable animals, and therefore would not naturally choose to be alone. Your puppy needs to learn to settle down and to spend time on his own, and training for this is best started during early puppyhood. Without specific training your dog will most likely suffer stress when you leave the house even for short periods, which can manifest in all sorts of unwanted behaviour such as howling, chewing things, and messing indoors.

Without a crate or indoor pen: Several times a day leave your puppy on his own in a room (ensuring it's a safe environment) and close the door but only for a minute or two at first. Do not say anything as you do this even if your puppy whines and scratches at the door, which he most likely will. As soon as he is quiet, without delay, calmly and carefully open the door (he may be just the other side) and praise him and give him a reward. By repeating this regularly each day he will gradually get used to being on his own.

With a crate or indoor pen: If you have accustomed your puppy to settling down in an indoor pen or crate, then you can use this to train him by leaving him settled with his chewy toy (ideally a safe Kong-type chewy toy stuffed with food) for short periods. This can be done initially with you in sight, progressing to you being out of sight, and then to you being in a different room with the door closed.

As your puppy becomes used to a few minutes on his own you can gradually lengthen the time, always ensuring he is settled and has something to play with.



This way time alone will become a normal part of everyday life.

When you feel he is settled enough to stay in the house on his own, make sure he is settled and safe but do not fuss him in any way. Leave quietly without saying anything. When you return greet him warmly but calmly without making a big fuss. Should you find he has messed, or chewed your things do not tell him off or show any anger, even though you may be annoyed. This will only undo all the previous training and double his anxiety. Instead, review his training and back-track a little and gradually build up his confidence again on spending time alone. Although this training takes a lot of time and patience, it is well worth the effort, and should prevent difficulties later on when you may need to leave your dog for a couple of hours or so at home alone.

Jumping up

Puppies naturally jump up at their owners as they would have done this with their mother, greeting her and licking her face to see if she had any food for them. Although there is something very appealing about your cute little 8- week-old bundle jumping up at you, and it is natural to want to give him the affection he craves, it will not be appealing later on when he is fully grown and could potentially injure or annoy someone. So it is important to teach your puppy that jumping up brings no reward whereas standing calm, with all four feet on the floor, or sitting on cue, elicits a treat and affection.

Again you need to employ the basics of training - totally ignoring unwanted behaviour and rewarding wanted behaviour the moment it takes place. Each time your puppy jumps up at you, completely ignore him, without even looking at him or saying anything, fold your arms and turn away for a few seconds. He will probably try harder by jumping up more and more, but be consistent in ignoring this behaviour. As soon as he has all four feet back on the floor, warmly praise and reward him for doing so. Alternatively if your puppy has learnt to sit on cue, ask him to sit and immediately praise and reward. Either way your puppy will start to learn that jumping up brings nothing, not even a pat, whereas standing or sitting brings lots of affection and even a treat.

To ensure this training continues successfully, as with all lessons, you will need to get everyone to respond in exactly the same way as you. When the puppy is old enough to go out walking on a lead, there will be lots of people, especially children, who will want to say hello to him. You will need to ask them to ignore him until he is either sat calmly or standing still before they greet him. Likewise when visitors arrive at your home, ask them to do the same; it may be helpful to have some treats near the front door so that prompt rewards can be given easily.

Recall

Teaching your puppy to come when called is another vital lesson. He will soon learn to recognise his name and will eagerly come to you when he is very young. Call his name and give the cue "Come" once, immediately praising and rewarding him as he does so. You can start this training as soon as he knows his name by calling him for meals, play sessions and all the things he enjoys. As he gets older and more confident, you may find that when he is outside he is more easily distracted by things such as interesting smells, other dogs and people, and he doesn't come when called so promptly. However, recall does need to be reliable so that he can be kept under your safe management when he is exercised off the lead.

Unless you have access to a safely fenced outside public area you should keep your puppy on a long lead to practise recalls until you are confident that he will come when called. Always praise and reward him immediately he comes when called, so that he sees coming to you is a good thing. Although he will try your patience by seemingly not hearing you at times, never show your anger or punish him when he finally does come as this would be counter-productive. There will probably be times when you have to go and get him, but again do not show you are cross, just clip his lead on and walk on without saying anything. When his recall has become reliable outside, always keep an eye on him and call him to you if you feel there may be a distracting problem ahead - that way you will be able to keep him safe.



As with all training, when a behaviour is reliable rewards need to become intermittent and then given just on the odd occasion. However, praise can and should always be given for good behaviour, however young or old a dog is. Recall training takes a lot of work and can be challenging but it is well worth the effort during puppyhood as it will make walks thereafter a much safer and pleasanter experience for you and your dog.

Fearfulness

A normal reaction for people when faced with a puppy who has been frightened is to try to offer reassurance and lots of cuddles. However, in canine eyes this only goes to confirm that indeed there is something to be frightened of, and the fearful behaviour is reinforced thereby making it more likely to occur again in the future!

So instead of trying to reassure your pup, just move on, apparently ignoring what has happened; and then stop and ask your puppy to do something easy, such as a sit, so that you can praise and reward him, thereby offering him something positive. By ignoring the fearful reaction you send out a message saying "Look, it's no big deal", thereby minimising the event in your puppy's eyes. However, try to work out what has frightened him so that you can broaden his socialisation programme to include that sort of experience in a controlled and positive way that does not cause fear.



As mentioned in the introduction, early socialisation - where your puppy is safely and carefully introduced to as many people, other animals, situations, sights and sounds as possible - will help him to grow up without being too easily spooked.

Once they have reached a certain age, at around 18 weeks, this particular window of wonderful learning opportunity closes, making socialisation much more difficult. Remember, a fearful dog is more likely to bite, or run off in a panic, and generally suffers more stress, so it is well worth the effort that goes into successful socialisation.

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM EASE

BOOKS:

TITLE	SUBJECT MATTER	PRICE
<i>Caring for your Pet</i>	A guide for young children about caring for pets	£4.50
<i>Pet Bereavement Activity book</i>	Activity book for children experiencing loss of a beloved pet	£4.50

BOOKLETS:

TITLE	SUBJECT MATTER	PRICE
<i>Can you be a dog's best friend?</i>	A practical guide for prospective new dog owners or dog fosterers	£1.50

LEAFLETS:

TITLE	SUBJECT MATTER	PRICE
<i>Small animal guide</i>	Choosing the right small animal for your child	95p
<i>EASE animal care guides</i>	12 leaflets in the care of rabbits, guinea-pigs, hamsters, mice, rats, gerbils, ferrets, parrots, chinchillas, budgerigars, chickens and doves	95p each
<i>Pet Bereavement support services</i>	An introduction to the EASE support service	50p
<i>When the time comes to say goodbye</i>	A practical guide to after-death services for pet owners	50p
<i>Blemie's Will</i>	By Eugene O'Neill	50p

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