



A New Puppy? Read This!

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Congratulations! You have a new puppy -- now what? The early months of your puppy's development will set the stage for his or her behavior later in life. Many common behavior problems that cause dog owners to seek help or to give up their dogs can be traced back to things the owners did or didn't do in the early stages of their relationships with their dogs.

All of these problems can be prevented or addressed successfully while your puppy is still young. However, don't expect it to be effortless or easy.

Nine Things You Can Do NOW to Have a Well-Mannered Dog for Life

1. Be a Good Manager

Understand that your puppy is a dog and will do "dog things" -- no matter how many times you tell him not to! Scolding is a natural human approach, but it is much more effective to *manage* your puppy's activities. If your puppy chews on your favorite shoe or has an accident on your carpet it is because you were not watching him. Puppy-proof your home by removing low objects, closing bedroom doors and *watching your puppy*. You can bet that if your puppy is not in sight or in his crate, he is getting into trouble and a bad habit is developing!

2. Get Your Puppy Used to Human Handling

Early puppy handling helps puppies bond with you, gentles them to human touch, calms excitable puppies and helps them grow out of the biting stage more quickly. Kneel on the ground with your puppy sitting between your legs facing away from you. Put your hands against your puppy's chest to steady him against you. Your puppy should not be able to reach your hands or arms to bite. When he is calm, start petting him all over very slowly with one hand, leaving your other hand in place. Speak slowly and calmly. Work up to being able to easily cup your puppy's chin in your hand so that you can massage his muzzle with your fingers. Done correctly, most puppies will soon be feeling very, very sleepy!

3. Respond Positively to Behaviors You DO Want to Encourage

In order to recognize these "good" behaviors, you have to know what to look for. Calm behaviors like sitting or lying down are almost always appropriate choices for your puppy to make. If you were to praise your puppy and give him a treat whenever he happened to sit instead of jump, you will soon have a puppy who sits more and more often and jumps less and less. He has learned that, in the human world, sitting "works." Think ahead about various situations your puppy is likely to be in and decide on the behavior you WANT from him rather than waiting for bad habits to develop on their own. Teach the desired behavior in a rewarding way and your puppy may never even try the unwanted behaviors!

4. Refuse to Respond to Behaviors You Don't Want to Encourage

This can be challenging because these are usually the behaviors that are most annoying! If you don't want your dog to bark for attention, don't acknowledge him or go to him when he is barking. If you don't want your dog to jump on people, don't pay any attention to him until all four feet are on the floor. Keep in mind that you are giving your dog the gift of your attention even when you are reprimanding him. To many puppies, this is better than no attention at all and will actually *encourage* behaviors you don't want.

5. Arrange for Positive Socialization Experiences

Up until between four and five months of age, your puppy is still very impressionable. This is your window of opportunity to give your puppy positive experiences with different types of people and the sights and sounds of everyday life. Don't let your puppy form his own opinions by chance -- SHOW him that new people and things are fun. Praise and give your puppy treats when he meets children or when strangers pet him. Take him places with you. Certainly follow your veterinarian's advice about avoiding exposure to diseases, but do not neglect your puppy's socialization needs!

6. Resolve Not to Walk When the Leash is Tight

Leash pulling is the number one problem in obedience classes. By the time the owners seek help, the dog has spent his or her entire life pulling on the leash. If you allow your puppy to pull against the leash now when he is small, he will continue to pull as hard as he can when he is bigger and stronger. Prevent this problem by resolving to stop right in your tracks whenever your puppy makes the leash tight. Just stop and wait for your puppy to try a different behavior like looking at you, sitting, taking a step back, etc. When he does (and he will -- be patient!), praise him and give him a treat as you encourage him to walk with you in the opposite direction. Show your puppy that people don't walk with tight leashes. Let him think this is just another funny thing about the human world.

7. Get Chew Toys and Bones Your Puppy REALLY Likes

The goal is to give your puppy chew toys that he or she will *prefer* over your furniture, shoes, carpeting, etc. Some long-lasting options are the Kong toy, sterilized beef bones, and knotted rope "bones." It's a good idea to make the toys appealing right from the start by putting some dog treats inside the Kong and stuffing moist dog food or small amounts of cheese or peanut butter inside the hollow beef bones. When your puppy is teething, you can plug the small hole in the Kong and fill it with broth and freeze it. Similarly, moistened rope bones can be frozen to soothe and numb tender gums. Rotate your puppy's toys to keep them new and exciting.

8. Actively Work to Prevent Aggressive Behavior from Developing

To help prevent protectiveness of food and toys, approach your puppy when he is eating and *put something better in his bowl*. You can do something similar when your puppy is chewing one of his toys. Exchange the toy for a treat and then return the toy to your puppy. Your puppy should welcome your approach by wagging his tail and perhaps even backing away from his food or toy. This will even make it easier to retrieve stolen articles from your dog without confrontations.

9. Go to Puppy Training!

A good puppy class will save you a lot of effort by teaching you exactly how to teach your puppy basic commands while providing your pup with essential dog-to-dog socialization in a safe, controlled environment. Preventing problems is always easier than fixing them later!

If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,
San Diego Humane Society is here to help!
Visit our website at www.sdhumane.org to view our behavior and training options,
or call our **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.