

PUPPY CLASS

So you have just brought home a new puppy and want it to be as well behaved as possible. Where do you start? First of all it is important to be familiar with the type of dog you have and what kind of environment they have come from so you can know what you might expect from them.

In the beginning, you don't want to overwhelm them with lots of change and demands. Decide on the house rules and enforce them calmly and consistently but don't try to teach them a lot of new things right away. Spend a few days just getting to know them and forging a bond. Concentrate on house training and getting them used to a collar and leash. It is important to not allow them to do things as a puppy that you will not let him do as an adult; such as jumping up, nipping, barking or getting on the furniture.

There are two important things to remember; you want your puppy to be calm and all interactions should be positive.

It is now well established that reward based training is an effective and humane way to train your dog that also enhances the human-animal bond. You never want to use pain or fear to train your dog. You want a happy, respectful, well socialized, calm dog that wants to please you. This can be achieved by using rewards to train your dog and properly socializing them to many different people, dogs and situations.

SOCIALIZATION

Socializing your dog properly is one of the most important things you can do with a new puppy. The key time for socialization is between 3 and 16 weeks. It is important to expose your puppy to as many different places, people and dogs as possible during that time while making sure that each interaction is a positive one.

Dog to Dog

Your puppy will need to learn what appropriate behaviour when interacting with other dogs is. That means they will need to meet other dogs in a controlled environment. It is great to meet and play with other puppies as they all like to rough house but they need to meet calm, tolerant older dogs as well who can teach them some manners.

Dogs should meet offset or side to side and you need to keep an eye on them so you can interrupt if things are getting out of hand. You want the dogs to be calm and relaxed with a level head, eyes slightly averted and tail waving or circling at half-mast. You do not want a head or tail held high or a direct stare. If your puppy doesn't recognize these signs and back off a bit as it may lead to aggression. When dogs are playing you should interrupt them intermittently and allow them to calm down so there is less chance of play escalating to aggression. It is ok for another dog to snarl or growl to warn your puppy that they do not want to play. If your puppy doesn't respect this warning then you need to intervene.

To some extent they need to just figure it out but you should be nearby to remove them if necessary.

Dog to People

A lot of dog bites or aggressive behaviours are because people have moved too far or too quickly into a dog's personal space. You should never pat a dog without the owner's permission and should always let the dog make first contact.

People should crouch down and look slightly away and wait for the dog to approach them. Once the dog is calm and relaxed then they can pet them under the chin and along the side of the neck or chest. People should not make sudden moves even if the dog seems ok.

As a dog owner you should make sure that people follow these guidelines and never let your puppy jump up or get too excited. He should only be petted when they are sitting calmly and quietly. If they show signs of fear or anxiety (cowering, licking his lips, furrowing his brows, yawning, moving away, tucking in his tail or even growling or trying to snap), you should have the person move away. Once your dog relaxes you can try again but more slowly and less aggressively. Having a treat to give them will help make them think the person is good and not scary. If they are still afraid then don't have them interact with that person.

Make sure that you introduce your puppy to lots of different types of people, wearing different things and making different sounds but always control the interaction so your dog will not be overwhelmed.

Dogs with Kids

Toddlers and young children are unpredictable and don't recognize the signs that your puppy is unhappy with them or what they are doing, so it is easy for your dog to get anxious enough to nip or bite. Also kids often elicit the prey drive when they run around screaming and waving their arms so the puppy may chase and grab at them. Make sure your puppy learns self-control and provide them with a safe place away from the children. NEVER leave them together unsupervised.

Dealing with Fear

If your puppy is showing signs of fear it is important to do the right thing. First of all do not reward the behaviour by coddling or trying to comfort them. You should react calmly and perhaps give him a gentle pat to reassure him. Then distance them as far away from the fearful stimulus as is necessary to eliminate the fear response. Once they are sitting calmly in the presence of the fearful thing then you can reward them with treats. This means that they will associate the fearful thing with something good. Then you can slowly move them closer to the thing or person that they are afraid of. It may take several episodes and you must move very slowly to avoid overwhelming them again. The treat must be good enough and given frequently enough to overcome their fear. Never punish a dog that is showing fear or try to force them to be in that situation as this can make them so fearful that they will become aggressive or may never be able to conquer their fear.

LEARNING

Dogs learn by finding out what behaviours' have a positive association. If they do something and they are rewarded then they will do it again. If they do something and a negative thing happens then they are less likely to do it again. Rewards can be instinctual like the inherent reward they get when chasing prey or caring for offspring, or they can be learned like getting food when they get into the garbage.

Rewards that we can provide are food, attention and play. You want to always be thinking – is this a behaviour I want and if so provide a reward, or is this something I don't want and so you would remove or withhold the reward. The more consistently you reward a behaviour the faster it will be learned and you must always remove the reward for undesirable behaviour or they will still sometimes try it.

There are a few terms that are useful to know:

Classical conditioning - when the dog associates one thing with another by having them paired together. For example; learning that a bell means a food treat by ringing the bell just before giving a treat or learning that the crate is bad because he is in it when he has a scary experience like going in the car.

Counter conditioning - when you teach them to associate a negative thing with a positive experience. For example; feeding him in his crate so he associates it with something good.

Desensitization - using a step by step approach to slowly increase the strength of the negative stimulus so he gets used to it bit by bit. This is usually paired with counter conditioning.

Operative conditioning - a dog will repeat behaviours that produce a positive outcome or reward. So he will try many different behaviours but only continue to do the ones that he gets rewarded for.

Reinforcement - this will increase the chance that the behaviour will be repeated.

Punishment - will decrease the chance that a behaviour will be repeated.

Positive reinforcement - when you add something he wants, like food.

Negative reinforcement - when you take **away** something he doesn't like. ie; removing tension on the leash when he does the right thing.

Positive punishment - when you add something he doesn't like. ie; like booby trapping the garbage.

Negative punishment - when you take away something he wants. ie; ignoring him (removing attention) when he jumps up.

The best way to train your puppy is to combine positive reinforcement and negative punishment. In other words reward what you like and ignore what you don't like.

It is important to understand that it takes time for a behaviour to become extinct and it may even get more intense before they stop. If it worked before then doing it more intensely should make it work again. That is why it is so important to ignore an unwanted behaviour every time even if it doesn't seem to be working. It may take what feels like a million times for a behaviour to be changed. Be consistent, persistent and fair.

It is also important to remember that dogs can learn from other dogs too. They will mimic other dogs behaviours so make sure that they interact with dogs that are well behaved and don't let them do or observe their bad habits.

LEADERSHIP

It is extremely important that you are an effective leader. This does not mean that you have to be tough or micromanage your puppy. You just need to set the rules and abide by them. They do not get away with something one time and not another and you always enforce the rules calmly and fairly. You are always in charge and calling the shots and you control resources. They do not get something (food, attention, play) by demanding it - they must ask for it by sitting nicely. This will teach your puppy to respect and obey you. Think of it like being the leader in a dance. You must have a plan, be able to communicate clearly and effectively with your partner, use your body to send the signals and be consistent. This will insure that your partner (your dog), will trust you and follow you wherever you lead. Above all it is important to make it fun for both you and your dog.

TRAINING

There are a few rules that you should keep in mind when training your dog. Be clear and consistent.

Have the right timing. Reward needs to be provided or removed almost instantly.

Give a reward that is strong enough and frequent enough to reinforce the desired behaviour.

Do not move too quickly. Do things in small steps especially when teaching something complicated. Do not talk very much. Use your energy and body language.

Always be calm and patient. Do not get frustrated.

Do things often enough that they become habits and never let him get away with things you don't want.

Make it fun and try to turn it into a game whenever possible.

Try to find ways to train that are positive. Punishment can lead to such negative outcomes as aggression, suppressing warning signals, decreasing their ability to learn, being less predictable and a poorer relationship with you.

As you need to provide a reward within .5 seconds of your dog doing a behaviour it is difficult to get a treat to him within that time frame and hence let him know what you want. To get around this problem you can use a bridging stimulus to signal to your dog immediately that he has done the right thing so it gives you a little bit of time to follow up with a treat. First decide on a marker- a word or sound or clicker- that you then pair with a reward so the dog knows that when he hears that sound he will get a reward. Then use that sound the instant he does the right behaviour and be sure to follow up with a treat asap. This means it will be easier for your dog to know just what the desired behaviour was.

Make sure that he gets a treat only when he has actually done the behaviour and not as a bribe.

Remember that dogs learn at different paces and in different ways so don't compare your puppy to others and watch your dog closely so you can tell which the best way to train them is. Learn to recognize what gives your dog the strongest reward and how best to give it to them.

It is imperative that your dog stay calm. Excitement; whether happy, angry or fearful only leads to a poorly behaved dog who can't control himself and can't learn.

The most important thing to realize is that every time you interact with your dog you are teaching them something - just be sure it is the right thing.

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Perfect Puppy in 7 Days

How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves

SIT TO STAY PLEASE

This is the mainstay of a good dog. They must learn that they don't get anything unless they are calm and sitting. It reinforces your roll as leader -you are in control and they don't get resources just because they want them but because they showed respect and asked for them by sitting. They should do this before getting fed, getting in or out of the car, getting in or out the door, getting his leash on, getting attention....

Start by letting them know that you have a treat but hold it in your hand so they can't get it. Ignore them completely until they eventually sits. This may take some time but be patient. As soon as they sit then give them the treat and continue giving them as long as they are sitting quietly. It is helpful to do this when they are hungry and only use a noise to get their attention not their name. Repeat this until they just come and sit in front of you focusing on your face. Start in a quiet, confined area and then move to a place with more distractions as they learn. Once they get the idea then only give them treats intermittently. Once they have it down then you can add in the word sit just before they do it so they learn the word too. But you should not have to rely on saying the word - they should just do it most of the time. You can also make it fun by running backwards, moving side to side or getting excited and then waiting for them to calm down and sit in front of you again.

Make sure you expect them to do this before they get anything for the rest of his life. Nothing is better than a calm dog sitting and waiting for the next fun thing to happen!

TAKE A TREAT NICELY

We never want a dog to grab a treat out of our-hand. They should always take it gently and respectfully. Hold a treat in your fist and let the dog sniff or lick at it but don't let them have it. As soon as they pull their head back or sideways then open your hand and give the treat. If they grab at it then close your hand again. Make sure you time it perfectly and never reward lunging or grabbing.

HOUSE TRAINING

This is a critical aspect of training. It is much easier if you use a crate for when they are alone, at night or when you can't watch them closely. The crate must be big enough for them to turn around in comfortably but not big enough so that they can eliminate in it and not care.

Always take the puppy outside to the same place after eating, sleeping or playing. You can have a word that you say once shortly before they pee or poop and then reward them after they have done their business. If they do not do both then put them, back in his crate again for 15 minutes and then try again. This way they are less likely to go in the house. If you catch them in the act of eliminating in the house then make a sudden noise to startle them into stopping, then wisk them outside to the right area and praise when they go there. NEVER punish them after the fact. They do not know that it is wrong to do it, just that it is wrong to be there with it.

Be sure to keep a very close eye on them inside as their cue to go outside might be quite subtle and keep them on an impervious surface that can be properly cleaned until they are trained. If they make a mistake do not despair - just go back to the basics and keep trying.

ENERGY

It is very important what kind of signals and energy you are projecting. Dogs are very intuitive and are not verbal so they gather a lot of information from your body language and attitude. If you are calm and relaxed then your dog is more likely to be calm and relaxed. If you are frustrated or anxious or unsure then there is a greater chance your dog will feel that way. We must strive to always be in control of our emotions and then we can ask that of our dogs as well.

You must always project calm confidence. You must have a plan and implement it clearly and consistently. If things go wrong then just take a deep breath and repeat the exercise. Try to figure out why the dog isn't getting it. Are you giving the wrong signals, are they not clear enough, are you rewarding the right behaviour at the right moment, are you providing a strong enough reward and giving it often enough? Ask yourself these questions- usually the answer to why the dog is not behaving correctly is there. Getting angry or frustrated will only be counterproductive.

Remember dogs are not people and may not understand what you are trying to tell them even if you think they should. If you are giving the wrong signals or rewarding the wrong thing then they will just be confused and a confused dog is much more likely to be a bad dog. As they are nonverbal, they will listen to your body language before your words so be sure that your signals convey the same message as your words. Most of the time when a dog does something wrong they are not stupid or bad they just don't understand. It is up to us to explain it to them properly in terms they can understand and to be calm, composed and clear so they can learn. Remember positive energy usually leads to positive outcomes.