

Puppy Behavior and Training – Training Basics

At what age can I start training my new puppy?

Your new puppy is learning during every waking moment! Every interaction you have with your puppy from the first time you meet will be a form of training. Housetraining, household manners, and social experiences are all forms of training you'll be doing with your puppy from the first time they come home. In some situations, puppies will even begin some amount of formal training before they go to their new home, such as a start on housetraining, greetings, and how their actions can lead to rewards.

How do puppies learn?

Puppies, like all animals, learn by doing what works for them. They will do what is effective, from their point of view. Puppies will repeat behaviors that have a good result. If it leads to a treat, attention, a toy, a desired interaction, the ability to explore, sniff, or run, the puppy will do it again in the future. In general, teaching puppies what to do through praise and rewards (positive reinforcement) is the best practice. Setting puppies up for success using management, supervision, and positive reinforcement training plans is effective and safe. Waiting until the puppy does something you don't want and then trying to punish the behavior can lead to problems such as avoidance, fear, and confusion.



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What should I teach my puppy?

In general, the best approach is to consider what you want your puppy to do; what is the desired course of action in a situation or in response to a cue? Some examples include:

- When the puppy sees a person
- When the puppy hears her name
- When the puppy sees another animal
- When the puppy hears the doorbell
- Where the puppy should rest or sleep
- How to get his leash and/or harness on
- How to respond to grooming, brushing, and veterinary care

How much time should I spend training my puppy every day?

Training happens all the time. Whenever you're with your puppy while she's awake, you're guiding her choices by how you respond and how you provide rewards. Individual training sessions for cues or skills should be no more than a few minutes long at first and can be done a few times a day. Teach quiet skills like going to the crate, going to bed, or lying down when your puppy is feeling calmer. Teach exciting skills such as to come when called or to retrieve a toy when your puppy is more energetic.

What can be done if my puppy is too distracted or excitable to control?

Training should begin in a quiet environment with few distractions. The chosen reward should be highly motivating so that the puppy focuses entirely on the trainer and the reward. Although a small food treat generally works best, a favorite toy or a special dog treat might be more appealing for some puppies. It might also be helpful to train the puppy just before a scheduled mealtime when he is at his hungriest.

If you feel frustrated or like the puppy is highly excitable or difficult, reach out for professional guidance. A skilled positive reinforcement trainer will help you enjoy your puppy so much more as time goes on.

When should I start socializing my puppy?

Socialization should begin as soon as you get your puppy and, often, this is at seven or eight weeks of age. Puppies naturally accept new people, other animals, and new situations during the socialization period, which occurs between 7 and 14 weeks of age. This period provides an opportunity for a myriad of introductions that will provide positive memories that last a lifetime. Puppies are eager, exploratory, and uninhibited during this period and it is important to take advantage of this enthusiasm. Be sure to protect your puppy during this period and ensure that all experiences are positive, fun, and safe.

Why does my 16-week-old puppy seem afraid?

There is a normal, natural fear period that begins around 14 to 16 weeks of age. During this period, a puppy may become wary and suspicious of new people, animals, or experiences. This is a normal adaptive process. Watch your puppy closely for signs of fear (cowering, urinating, and refusal of food treats). Avoid pushing or overwhelming your puppy during this developmental stage. Always let your puppy guide the pace of experiences, especially during sensitive periods.