

Simple Steps For Training Your New Puppy

In The Beginning:

Start by setting yourself up for success. Whether you are obtaining a pup from a rescue, shelter or breeder, make sure that the pup was raised with her mother and litter mates until at least seven weeks of age, preferably eight to ten weeks of age. While growing up with her litter mates she will have learned a lot of lessons she will need to know about getting along with and respecting other dogs. The constant care of the humans raising the puppies will have ensured that the pups feel safe and comfortable around people. She should have learned from her caretakers that contact with people is rewarding and pleasant, which will enable her to seek affection from people for the rest of her life. From her litter mates she will have learned how to deal with frustration, competition and stressful situations such as learning to go up and down stairs. The constant tussling she did with the other pups will have taught her about bite inhibition, meaning that when she mouths another dog or person, she will know exactly how hard she can bite without causing pain. If all the right experiences were there for her from birth to the time she comes home with her new owner, training will be very simple.

Step One: Crate Training

Most breeders/caretakers will have done some crate training with the pups as they grow. For safety reasons puppies should be transported to and from the veterinarian in a crate. Starting at around four weeks of age it is perfectly appropriate for the caretaker to put two or three pups into a crate at night to sleep. This helps pups learn to keep their area clean—and employs peer pressure from the other pups to exercise control. If your pup has experienced feeling safe and secure in a crate with her litter mates, your job of crate training will be a natural extension of what she already knows.

The reason crate training is so simple and effective is that dogs are naturally denning animals. Dogs in the wild will dig a hole in the ground or the snow to stay safe and away from the elements at night. Mother dogs will dig a den for their pups to keep them warm and safe from predators. Puppies instinctively seek cover in an open space because of the danger of hawks and other winged predators. You are going to use her natural preference and instinct to slowly teach her that eliminating outside is where she needs to go. You are also going to keep her away from dangerous things and keep her from tearing things up in your house.

Make sure you get an appropriate sized crate for your puppy. Resist the urge to go buy a giant crate that will fit your dog when she is full grown! You want the crate to be big enough for her to stand up, stretch, turn around and lie down comfortably, but that is all. If you get the crate too big, she will be more likely to soil in it because she will still be able to stay far enough away from her poop and pee that she will be comfortable sleeping in one corner, while eliminating in another. The best crate for sleeping and quiet time is a plastic airline crate—not one of the folding wire ones. A large folding wire crate is handy for setting up in your main living area so that the pup can be near the family during activities without being under foot. But because it feels open to your pup, she won't feel safe and secure.

Keep your pup with you as much as possible—but always in her crate or on a leash. Dogs are social animals and want to be part of their pack. But don't give her more freedom than she can

handle. If you let her wander off when you get distracted, she will be able to reinforce to herself that it is ok to soil in the house. Remember that a four month old dog is equivalent in age to a two year old toddler.

Make sure you take your dog out to eliminate right before bed time. Upon waking, be sure to carry her quickly outside without giving her a chance to squat and eliminate. When she eliminates outside, be sure to praise her. She wants to please you—use that desire to your advantage.

Remember that her success depends on you and your consistency. If she is having accidents in the house, it is time to look in the mirror and ask yourself where your training is breaking down. Nothing is ever the fault of the dog. Only the fault of the trainer.

Step Two: Sit.

Even a tiny puppy of eight weeks old is capable of learning to sit. The best time to practice this is at feeding time. At first you will “mold” her behavior into a sit. Give the command and then lift up on her chin while gently coaxing her rear end into the sit position. Keep insisting that she stay in a sit until you have the food on the floor a few feet away from her. Then give a release command. Do this every day at feeding time for a few days and then you can move to the next command.

Step Three: Stay

Here you will have her sit while you back a few feet away. Make sure you use body language to tell her to stay. Give her the voice command “stay.” Stand upright and raise your index finger up to let her know you want her to “stay” before you back away. (If you are bent over facing her as you back away, your body language is telling her to come to you. It is a mixed message.) If she breaks her sit and starts toward you, quickly move towards her and firmly put her back into a sit in the exact position she was in before she broke.

Step Four: Here

A young puppy will always want to come to you if you call in an excited voice. Using body language by bending down and clapping your hands—even quickly backing away will naturally pull the pup into you. Make sure to give the puppy lots of affection and/or play with her when she gets to you. Let her know that you are really pleased with her for coming to you.

Step Five: Down

Start your puppy in a sit position facing you. Give your dog the “down” command and then slowly and gently pull her front feet toward you until her elbows rest on the floor. She may be very resistant to this and try to immediately pop back up. Repeat several times, each time gently insisting that she stay in a down position. Praise her for the down and ask for a longer

down each time. When she completely relaxes and stops trying to get back up, let her know how pleased you are.

Step Six: Place

There are times when it is necessary to have your dog stay in one place for convenience or safety reasons. Your pup's "place" can be a dog bed, a bathroom rug or a piece of furniture. Start out close to the spot where you want her to place. Once she is there, give the down command. Praise her for a good place. Once she is doing the place command from close by, start moving farther away and asking her to go to her place. Eventually, she will learn to go to her place from anywhere in the house.

Step Seven: Wait

"Wait" is a very important command for everyone's safety. Whenever you go through a doorway or open a door your dog should wait for you to go first. So many dogs are allowed to push through a doorway even if that means knocking someone else out of the way. And too many dogs are allowed to develop frenzied behavior when someone knocks or rings a doorbell. And worse, they are allowed to push out of the door and right into an unsuspecting guest or visitor. Sometimes they are even allowed to run outside and just keep running, right into the danger of cars motoring down the street. Start by having your pup sit before you walk through a doorway. Be sure to turn and face the pup, backing away while giving your visual signal for stay. Do not bend down or use pup's name. Simply say, "Stay." If your pup moves, go to her and put her back exactly where she was supposed to stay. Repeat until you get compliance. Do the same when opening a door. Start on a door that does not lead to danger. Tell her to stay, while backing away from her. Open the door slightly. If she moves, put her back where she was when you told her to stay. Repeat until you can step through the doorway without any movement from her.

Step Eight: No Pulling.

There are a number of ways to teach your dog not to pull. One way is to simply give a sit command every time the pup pulls away from you. Another way is to use motivating treats such as food or toys. Make a game of having your dog look at you when walking with you. Treat often when the dog is right next to you and looking up at you. Likewise, play with the dog with a toy often when she looks up at you.

Step Nine: No Jumping

Your pup learned to jump up as a tiny puppy when competing against litter mates for attention. In a sense, she was trained by circumstances to jump up from the very beginning. Now you must teach her a different behavior. Using your knee and raising it up carefully as she starts to jump up on you allows you to remain standing upright, instead of bending down to push her off. (When you bend down, you are inviting her with your body language to jump up—so it is a mixed signal.) You must be careful not to use too much momentum with your knee. Be firm, but

very careful and gentle. If your knee meets her each time she jumps up, she will soon learn not to bother about jumping on you.

Step 10: No Barking

Consistency is key with this one! Do not allow your pup to establish a barking behavior. Redirect her quickly to some other activity when she barks. Do some obedience, bring her quickly in from the yard and into her crate, give a quick snap and release on her collar, rattle the door to her crate, etc. Be consistent and be sure to interrupt barking behavior immediately.

Step Eleven: No Biting, Nipping Or Chewing On People

When even the pup begins to chew on you, simply insert your hand into her mouth carefully. She won't like having your hand in her mouth and will quickly become discouraged about mouthing you. You can give a quick tug on her collar with a leash to interrupt or press her lips to her teeth firmly but carefully. Remember that corrections should be meaningful but only enough to make a point. Measure your corrections carefully.

Embrace Your Training!

Mindset is important for anyone training a dog. Think positive and approach every challenge with the goal to solve a puzzle. Keep training to very short sessions. Fold it into your daily routine. And most importantly, make sure that training your pup is high on your list of priorities.