



New Puppy Training Checklist

The best time to start training your puppy is when you bring it home. Puppies do a lot of learning, and learn how to learn before they are 16 weeks old. This is not formal obedience, but lessons that will make your puppy a great family member and a dog that will make you proud.

RIDES IN THE CAR. Take short trips with the puppy, just around the block or so, to get it used to riding in the car. Make the trips short and pleasant. If the only time the dog gets in the car is to go to the veterinarian, it may soon dread car rides. Remember to always use a crate or dog seat belt, for the same reasons you put a child in a car seat. It keeps them from being thrown out of the car in an accident. Dogs also will run when frightened and could be hit by a car or lost in an unfamiliar place if a window breaks or a door pops open.

BRUSHING. Even though puppies have short hair, you should start brushing them right away to get them used to the brush. This is a good bonding time for you and the puppy, gets the puppy used to being brushed so it doesn't struggle as it gets over, and gives you an opportunity to examine the puppy for bumps, rashes, ear infections, or other conditions.

BATHING. Give the puppy a bath in a mild dog shampoo every few weeks so it gets used to being bathed. It is much easier to get a puppy in the tub and teach it to accept the bath than it is to try to get a full-grown dog in the tub that doesn't want to go.

EXAMINE TOES. Handle the puppy's feet often, including rubbing between the toes. This will make it easier to clip the toenails and examine the feet as the dog gets older. To start clipping the nails, sit on the floor with the puppy beside you. Pick up a foot, clip 1 nail, give the puppy a treat. The next night, clip 2 nails, give a treat; the next night 3 nails and a treat, and so on. Eventually you will be able to clip all the nails in one session. By gradually building up, the puppy will not struggle and future nail trimming will be easy.

EXAMINE TEETH AND EARS. It is very important for you to start handling the puppy's teeth and ears at an early age. It will get the puppy used to being handled, and make veterinary exams less stressful for your dog. As with the toenails, start in small steps and work your way up. First just lift a lip and give a treat, then lift both lips and treat, etc.

NEVER LEAVE YOUR PUPPY LOOSE IN THE HOUSE UNSUPERVISED. A young puppy is like a baby learning to crawl and explore, and an older puppy is like a toddler. Would you leave a toddler loose in your house, without diapers, unsupervised? Of course not. You can not housetrain a puppy if you aren't supervising it, and puppies can chew electrical cords, furniture, shoes, and other items it shouldn't. If a puppy destroys something, it is your fault for not watching the puppy.

COLLAR AND LEASH. Get the puppy used to wearing a collar and a leash right away. When you first put the leash on, do it in the house or a fenced area and just let the puppy drag the leash around. After it is used to that, pick up the leash and just follow the puppy wherever it goes without tugging on the leash. After the puppy is used to that, start gently guiding the puppy, without jerking the leash. Pretty soon it will be walking with you on a loose leash wherever you go.

GIVING PILLS. You don't have to use actual pills for this, but if a puppy learns how to take medication when young, you won't have to fight if it needs medication as an adult. Have your veterinarian show you how to give a pill, and practice with something like Tic Tacs (ask your vet. If this is OK for your puppy or what he/she recommends).

DON'T REWARD FEAR. A common mistake people make is to cuddle the puppy or tell it "it's OK" if it becomes frightened. This actually rewards the puppy for being afraid, and will cause the puppy to be fearful its entire life. Instead, let the puppy learn how to deal with the "scary" situation. At the same time, protect the puppy from anything truly dangerous that could harm it.

SOCIALIZATION. A puppy who is well-socialized will be a stable, well-adjusted adult. The puppy should be exposed to all kinds of adults, children, dogs and puppies (healthy animals that will not hurt the puppy), and other things it will be around as an adult (cats, horses, goats, motorcycles, etc.). Take the puppy different places, and have people and dogs come into your home. Get the puppy used to unusual sounds and objects. If you want a dog to be able to protect you when it's grown, this is essential. Without socialization, you will have to lock an adult dog away if someone visits, and the dog will not be able to protect you. No amount of socialization will remove the dog's instinct to protect you, so the more socialized it is, the more it will be able to protect you if the need should arise.

FEAR PERIODS. Fear periods occur at 8-10 weeks, and again at 6-18 months. Your normally well-adjusted puppy will suddenly act afraid of every day objects, such as trash bags or umbrellas. This is normal. Ignore the behavior during these periods. Don't force the issue, as this will cause the puppy to be afraid of these things the rest of its life. This will pass.

BITING/TEETHING. Puppies chew on each other when playing, and don't realize they should not play with humans the same way. When a puppy's teeth make contact with human skin, stop playing; gently take the puppy's muzzle in your hand, hold it still, and say "no" quietly but firmly; and leave the area where the puppy is. Pretty soon it will learn that chewing on people is no fun and will stop. This needs to be done by an adult or older child. Young children tend to scream and jerk away from the puppy, and/or hit it. This will either excite the puppy into playing harder or make it fearful (and many fearful dogs bite out of fear).

JUMPING UP. In order to stop jumping up, you must decide what you want the puppy to do instead. You need to replace the bad behavior with a good behavior (for example, sitting to be petted). Whenever the puppy greets you or anyone else, only pet the puppy when it is sitting. If it gets up, stop petting. Tell people this in advance, and make sure they follow your instructions. Puppies jump up to get attention, so be sure to always reward the sitting by giving the puppy some attention.

CHEWING. Keep a supply of toys and other items around that the puppy is allowed to chew on, and never leave a puppy unsupervised with furniture or other items you don't want it to chew on. Chewing is a natural part of being a dog, and necessary especially during teething. During teething, soak an old washcloth in water and put it in the freezer. Give it to the puppy when you can supervise it. Don't give the puppy things it can choke on or be otherwise injured with when you can't supervise it. Puppies have been known to swallow strange objects. Keep items away that are small enough for the puppy to swallow, or that have parts that can be chewed off and swallowed (this includes rawhide, pig ears, etc.).

LEARN THE DIFFERENCE. "Biting" and play growling are normal behaviors for a puppy. This is how they play with their littermates. With some puppies, however, you may see true biting, real growling, or extremely fearful reactions (at times other than during their fear periods). If you feel your puppy is exhibiting any of these behaviors, seek the advice of a qualified animal behaviorist at once. These behaviors can often be corrected if caught soon enough. Life with an adult dog with behavior problems can make your life difficult and often ends up with the dog being put to sleep. Most dogs are turned into animal shelters for behavior problems, and cannot get new homes because of these problems. Be part of the solution and seek professional help from a qualified animal behaviorist if you are having problems with your puppy.