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Puppy Training

General Principles

The basic principles behind successful dog training, regardless of the goal, are *consistency* and *positive reinforcement*. If you consistently reward the desired behavior, your puppy will quickly learn what is expected of him. If you are inconsistent, or you unwittingly reward the wrong, undesirable behavior, you are in for a long haul. At all times, you want to *reward* the desired behavior with lavish praise. We do *not* recommend “corporal punishment” as a tool in puppy training. Hitting your dog will only teach him to fear you or to become aggressive.

Housebreaking Tips

It is important, when teaching your new puppy appropriate elimination habits, that you give him a lot of opportunity to display the proper behavior so that you can reward it with praise. This means that you should take your puppy outside every 1-2 hours during the day, and as needed at night. Times that your puppy is most likely to eliminate are after sleeping, playing, and eating. That is one of the many reasons to offer “meals” to your new puppy as opposed to “free-feeding”. It is best to always go to the same spot in the yard and to use a phrase consistently, such as “hurry up”. When your puppy eliminates where you want him to, be sure to praise him—tell him he is just the *smartest* puppy—he’ll know what you mean! It is also very important that you watch your puppy closely during the housebreaking period. Watch for subtle clues that he needs to potty such as sniffing, circling, whining, or seeking a corner. Soon you will recognize the particular behavior your puppy displays as clues. If you see these clues, quickly scoop him up and take him out to his “potty place” and of course, praise him if he is successful. If you are not ever vigilant and your puppy can sneak off and potty in another room with no one noticing, it may take you a long time to housebreak him. With no one there to tell him that is not appropriate, he thinks it is OK. If you should catch your puppy “in the act” of eliminating in the house, you can scold him with a stern “no”, scoop him up and outside, then praise him lavishly. Never hit your dog and don’t rub his nose in it, and don’t even bother scolding him if it is “after the fact”—puppies cannot understand the connection if it is even a few minutes later. Just clean up the mess and try to watch your puppy closer next time! It is best to use an odor neutralizer such as FON when cleaning the accident so there is no residual odor to confuse the puppy. Don’t use any cleaners with ammonia.

If you are having trouble keeping an eye on your puppy, you can try the “umbilical cord” method. Attach your puppy to a long leash that is tied around your wrist or waist. This allows him a certain amount of freedom while ensuring your constant supervision. He cannot wander away undetected and have an “accident” and you are more likely to notice when he needs to “go”.

Using an airline kennel (crate-training) can really speed up the housebreaking process. Puppies have a natural tendency to avoid eliminating where they sleep, so if you place the pup in a crate when you need to be away from the house, or at night, you will be encouraging the pup to “hold it”. You should be able to crate a older pup for 6-8 hours overnight successfully, but limit daytime crating intervals to 2-4 hours. Don’t use crates as a crutch! Pups used to crates tend to enjoy the feeling of security they get from them—it is their “den”. Initially, though, they may whine for your attention when placed in them and it is important not to “give in”. Just as you wouldn’t reward a “tantrum” with a child, don’t let your pup out of the crate while he is

whining or barking—wait until he is quiet, then open the door and praise him. If the crate you purchase is for the pup when he is full grown, you may need to block off part of it with a box during the training period. Otherwise, he may be able to eliminate on one side and sleep on the other, and it won't encourage him to "hold it".

A word about paper training—while some people may be successful training puppies to use newspapers, we feel this sends a mixed message. It is difficult for the pups to distinguish just where they are allowed to go in the house and they are likely to miss the paper and generalize acceptable places from the papers to the whole house.

Socialization

Hopefully you will have a lot of time to spend with your new puppy as there is so much to teach him! The first thing he must learn is to be properly socialized. There are some critical periods in his life, and the socialization period is from 3-12 weeks of age. If you want your dog to be good with people, other dogs, cats, new environments, car rides, noises, etc, it is critical that he be exposed to these things at this age. Invite all your friends and family over, on a regular basis, to meet your new puppy. Take him on errands so he gets used to the car. Take him to the school grounds when you get your kids. Expose him to a variety of items such as vacuum cleaners, umbrellas, bicycles. Make his experiences as varied as possible. Many people recommend that you keep your puppy confined until he is 16 weeks and fully vaccinated, but I personally feel that is too late if you want your dog to be comfortable around other dogs. You do have to be careful, however. If you own another dog, you are in good shape, but if not, hopefully you have friends that have healthy, vaccinated, friendly dogs that you could invite to meet your puppy. It isn't wise to take your dog to a park at this age, where unknown dogs congregate, as exposure to these dogs, or their feces, could cause illness. These lessons must be reinforced throughout the juvenile period (up to 6 months of age) but if they weren't started at 6-12 weeks, you cannot completely undo the damage. The experiences he has at this early age will stick with him, so make sure they are pleasant ones.

Basic Training

In the beginning, you will need a safe place to put your puppy. Again, airline kennels work well for this. Not only will crating your puppy minimize destructiveness and speed up housebreaking, it will prevent injury to your puppy when unsupervised. By introducing the kennel as a resting and feeding place, it can be a pleasant place for him. Don't overuse this. If you work 8-10 hours a day, you should consider confining your puppy to an outdoor run, or hire a pet sitter to come over midday for a play period. Puppies that are left to roam freely about the house when owners are gone are very slow learners when it comes to acceptable chewing and elimination behaviors. That is because no one is present to instruct them when they are misbehaving so they think it is OK!

You can begin training your puppy from the time you get him. Teaching him commands will help to control him and establish you as the leader. Young pups can be taught basic commands such as sit, down, and come. Remember, the foundation of all puppy training is positive reinforcement of the desired behavior with praise, petting and treats. You can also use "life rewards", such as asking the pup to sit before being let outside, or prior to delivering the food bowl. There is no place for hitting or spanking your dog. If your pup needs a reprimand for a misdeed, a stern "no" or "bad dog," accompanied by a glare, this should suffice.

Accustom your puppy to handling early on. Daily run your hands over him, handling his feet, looking into his ears, opening his mouth, and rolling him on his back. Encourage his

cooperation with praise and treats. This will make things easier when you need to retrieve an unacceptable item from his mouth, or he has a health problem that needs attention.

It is also important from the beginning to get your puppy used to having his food bowl and possessions touched. Daily handle your puppy and his food bowl while he is eating. Have children in the family add tempting morsels such as cooked chicken to the food bowl while he is eating. Take and return toys he is playing with, or take a toy in exchange for a treat. These actions will reduce the chance of possessive aggression later in life.

Play biting is normal behavior in puppies. Your job is to teach your pup not to bite you. No biting or mouthing should be allowed. When your puppy mouths you, a sharp “No” and ignoring the pup for a few minutes will discourage the behavior. You may also give a high pitched “yip”, which is what other pups do when bitten too hard. If necessary, walk away from your pup or give him a 1-2 minute time out. They just want to play, so by withholding attention you are teaching them what is acceptable for play. Again, don't hit the puppy for play biting. Also rough play and tug of war games are discouraged as they can aggravate the biting tendency.

Chewing behavior is also normal. It becomes unacceptable when it occurs in the wrong place. First, do your best to “puppy-proof” your house. No puppy wants to hear “no” all the time. Provide 1-3 acceptable chew toys that are different from normal household items. No old shoes here or your new ones will be fair game! Now, watch your puppy when he isn't crated and give him a stern “no” and maybe clap your hands if he is chewing something unacceptable. Then offer an acceptable chew toy and praise him if he takes it.

Another annoying habit you need to avoid in puppies is jumping up. While this may be cute when they are little guys, it is not much fun when they are 60 lbs. and have muddy paws! Never pet or talk sweetly to a dog that has only two feet on the ground. Turn around and ignore him! When he has all four feet on the ground, kneel down and praise him. He just wants to see your face better!

Obedience Classes

We recommend all puppies at 4-6 months of age *and their owners* take a basic obedience class. There are many good trainers available in the Pikes Peak region. Copper Ridge Canine Solutions (ph. 392-8852) holds classes in Monument. We also recommend Cool K9's, www.coolk9s.com, phone 1-719-683-6741.

Raising puppies does take some time. Puppies require constant reminders to learn what is expected of them—kind of like kids! The payoff of an outgoing, well-mannered pet is well worth it. Good luck!

The library has many good books on dog behavior and puppy training. Check it out!

Recommended reading:

The Dog's Mind by Bruce Fogle

How to Teach a New Dog Old Tricks by Ian Dunbar

The Perfect Puppy by Gwen Bailey