

bringing up puppy



by
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Bringing Up Puppy

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Introduction

Congratulations on your new puppy, a family member who, with luck and love, will be with you for many years to come!

If you acquired your puppy from a breeder, he is coming to you with the beginnings of a very good education. He has had good experiences with his mother and littermates and he's met and been handled by a wide variety of people, including children. Some of these experiences have exposed him to mild stresses and frustrations so that he's better equipped to deal with what life will offer.

If your puppy is a rescue whom you've gotten from a shelter or breed rescue, or if your puppy is from a pet store, then he may well be coming to you without the education you might hope for. In this case, your work with him will be doubly important.

Whatever primer he has had up until now, it will be up to you to continue your pup's education in order to raise him to be a well-socialized, even-tempered dog. These first months are absolutely critical to his development, as there's no way to make up later in life for lessons missed now. To this end, **WoofGang** offers you this handbook to help you chart your lessons for puppy nursery school. It is a mere start. To raise a dog to his full potential, there is kindergarten (puppy kindergarten group class) and grade school (obedience training) – even college (advanced sports) if you wish!

And so our lessons begin...

The Sensitivity Period

All young animals experience a developmental stage during which they discover the things that are necessary to and the things that threaten their survival. For dogs, this sensitivity period lasts until somewhere between 13 and 16 weeks. The things they have not experienced during this time will be things that, later in life, they will be cautious of or, worse, aggressive towards.

Every moment is valuable. *There's no such thing as over-socialization!* Here's what your puppy needs to learn before it's too late...

Socialization to Dogs

Puppies get their early educations from play with their mother and siblings. If your puppy is from a breeder, she has seen to it that the puppies are not removed from this important learning experience too soon. You must continue your puppy's education when you take him home.

There is an unfortunate conflict between the importance of socialization and the health considerations in immunizing your puppy. Many vets will try to persuade you to cloister your puppy until he's fully vaccinated. They are concerned about the possibility of his contracting diseases such as parvovirus. However, there is a new breed of vet who understands that such cloistering is in direct contradiction with this most crucial sensitivity period and that there can be heartbreaking repercussions later in life for dogs who have not been properly socialized. R. K. Anderson, DVM, is leading the field in educating puppy parents that inoculation and socialization *must* go hand-in-hand. (His letter "*Puppy Vaccination and Socialization Should Go Together*" can be found on the internet at www.apdt.com/po/rk_anderson_letter.aspx.)

Puppy Kindergarten

First and foremost, sign up for a puppy kindergarten group class. Reputable training facilities will require proof of age-appropriate shots from all puppies attending the kindergarten class. A well presented class will include off-leash play as part of its curriculum. This will be a time when your puppy can have her first early experiences playing with pups who are not her siblings. In addition, most likely your instructor will do some narration of the play that is occurring so that you learn what polite play looks like as well as what rude play looks like. Pushy players will be given time-outs, which will mold their actions to more acceptable behavior.

As you might imagine, each breed has its own play style. Little poodles play very differently from little labs and from little terriers. Your pup must learn to be a respectful player with all types of dogs. She must also learn how to turn off other dogs when she no longer wants to play. She will learn these important skills most quickly while she's young and adaptable.

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Play Dates

The dog park is not an appropriate arena for puppies to gain their education in dog play. Aside from the health implications, bad experiences with other dogs in the dog run can leave an indelible mark in the heart of an impressionable puppy. Also, you are exposing your puppy to an education in dog play from dogs who themselves may not be good players.

Instead, choose play dates wisely. Find other puppies who have had age-appropriate shots with whom your puppy can play. Even gentle adult dogs can be good teachers; just make sure they are fully vetted and that they are tolerant of puppy antics. With dogs as with people, not all adults like youngsters.



Trista and Alex play

Socialization to Other Animals

If you anticipate bringing other animals – cats, for instance – into the family, it's important that your pup is socialized to them early, during the sensitivity period. First introductions should be done carefully and positively, perhaps by offering each animal their favorite treat so that they start to associate the presence of the other with pleasant things rather than simply a time of sharing their favorite resource, you! Give them distance so that neither feels cornered or threatened.



Chatzi and Trista

In the beginning, do not leave the two alone together. You want to make sure that you are the master of all interactions – a negative interaction without you present may cause irreparable damage.

Keep in mind that some breeds will have innate difficulties sharing their lives with other animals such as cats. For instance, since so many types of terriers were bred to chase rodents and small animals, a cat may experience a stressful life of constant playful chasing, even in the best of circumstances. So do some research before you begin your search for a puppy.

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Suggested Reading

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About the Author

LAURA GARBER, CPDT, is a canine behavior counselor and trainer living in Hoboken, NJ. Her company *WoofGang, LLC* (www.myWoofGang.com) is committed to deepening the bond between dogs and their people through positive training and behavior modification techniques, and it is these same topics that inspire her writing. Email her with questions at Laura@myWoofGang.com.

Laura shares her life with her husband Mike, their dog Trista and their three cats Shani, Chatzi, and Jazz. They have each, in their own way, taught her what it means to have a mutually respectful and loving relationship. She is grateful to them all!

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