

The First Weeks With a New Puppy

This can be a period of great fun or a period of great frustration. Hopefully, some of the following tips will make it the former.

Bonding

The primary thrust the first couple of weeks is to establish a firm bond between the pup, and your child. This will require extra effort from every family member. The pup must come to think that its total existence is dependent on your afflicted child. This requires extra work for the child, and requires that the remainder of the family be as invisible, as possible. Of course, other family members must have some interaction with the pup. However, this should be as passive, as possible, with no play, praise, or other emotion.

The child should be the only one to feed the pup, and that will involve a routine that you should start the first day, and continue throughout the life of the dog. The food should be put down, and the pup restrained from eating for a short time, by holding its collar, or scruff of the neck, and saying "wait". After a few seconds, say OK, and release the pup to eat. The wait time should be increased to 10 to 15 seconds by the end of the second week. During this period, you should introduce, and practice, the "watch me" command, so the pup learns to pay attention to the child.

The second major bonding procedure is to have the child and the pup "camp out" for the first two weeks, or longer. This involves the child sleeping on the floor with the pup. Ideally, they would sleep cuddled together. However, if the room is carpeted, and you feel that you cannot trust the dog, then placing the pup in a kennel, with the child as close to the kennel door as possible is acceptable.

House Breaking – Crate Training.

This is a process that requires a lot of discipline on your part. But if done faithfully, the results can be pretty impressive. The key is to never give the puppy an opportunity to relieve itself except in a location that you choose. This is possible because a puppy instinctively will not mess its bed, if it can possibly avoid it. They also seem to instinctively understand that they should not mess someone who is holding them. So the first step is to hold them while in the car on the way home, then carry them to the desired spot on the lawn, put them down and say "get busy". They usually will.

Home set up. I will describe what I consider the ideal layout. You will have to adapt it to your environment. There should be a kennel large enough for an adult dog in the child's bedroom. This is often a carpeted room, so it is desirable to have a second smaller kennel in an uncarpeted area like the kitchen. It is further desirable that this area be separated from any carpeted area with a baby gate or other suitable barrier. Don't purchase the smaller kennel without checking with other Academy members. They grow out of them so rapidly. Someone can likely loan you one for the few months that you need it. Both kennels should be partially filled with cardboard boxes or something

to limit the space for the pup, so he can just lie down comfortably. This is so he doesn't decide to use one corner of the kennel as his bathroom, and the other corner his bed. The boxes will have to be changed regularly, as the pups grow so rapidly.

The Routine. After the pup has relieved himself outdoors, he can be allowed to play in the non carpeted area for 20 to 30 minutes. Then he should be placed in a kennel. The kitchen one is convenient, but either would work. The pup may play a little or fuss a little when put in the kennel, but they usually quickly fall asleep. If they fuss, ignore it, or you will regret it! After about 4 hours, or sooner if the pup wakes up and fusses, carry him outside to go. Carrying him insures that he will not stop on the way and puddle the floor. Then back in and repeat the routine. For the first couple of weeks, this routine should extend through the night, but the sleep time can be gradually increased.

Feeding time. This is 3 times per day until the vet says to reduce to 2. They should be fed soon after coming back into the house. Then, immediately after eating, they should be taken out again. Eating seems to trigger BM's. Then again, play time followed by kennel time.

Bed time. Take up their water 1 ½ to 2 hours before bedtime. Of course, carry them outside for one final attempt, and then some brief play and cuddling is OK before putting them to bed. They may fuss the first few nights. Just tough it out and they will eventually go to sleep. If you yield, you will regret it, as it will become a habit. Set your alarm for about 4 hours. The pup may wake you earlier. Carry them outside again. When coming back in, no play time is required, or desired. Just pop them back in the kennel. They should gradually extend their sleep time and should be sleeping through within two of three weeks.

Treats

We will use treats to introduce new concepts and for special situations. However, once concepts are grasped, we will gradually replace treats with praise. Use very small treats. It is easy to over-feed a pup with treats. I like Charlie Bears.

Training Philosophy

This applies to teaching proper response to verbal commands. Discipline for miss-behavior is discussed below. Our training approach is to reward success and to ignore failure. We do not want the pup to come to fear the training process. You should do everything possible to help the dog succeed, like luring them into the desired position and even gently placing them where you want them. Then reward them, as though they had done it without your help. If they do not readily respond, don't press it. Just try again later. Rewarding spontaneous behavior can be an adjunct to your regular training. I.e., if you are having trouble teaching your pup to sit, just wait until he sits spontaneously (he will eventually) and then quickly say "Casey Sit" and reward him.

Name

You need to use the pup's name early and often. You can start the first day. Say the name, and offer a treat simultaneously. Within a few trials, just saying the name should cause the pup to look to you. Then treat him. After a couple of days, start replacing the treat with praise. It is generally good practice, when the pup is small to precede other commands with the name ("Casey Hurry or Casey Sit). The idea is that the name gets their attention so they will respond to the following command.

You can choose the pup's name, subject to our approval. Dogs respond best to names with a hard sound beginning (Dusty, Casey, Benny, Toby, etc.) Especially avoid names starting with "s". I like two syllable names that have both a diminutive form and an adult form. Like Casey when young and Case when older.

Command "Come"

For the dog's future safety, and your child's safety, this is the most important command that you will ever teach your pup. Give the pup a few days to get settled in, and then start with this one. First, just say "Casey Come" from within a foot, or two, indoors, offering a treat simultaneously. Repeat often, gradually hiding the treat in your hand and giving it only when they come. Gradually extend the distance. When comfortable that they have the concept, move outdoors. There are many more distractions here, so to insure success, you may need to revert to your early indoor methods. Slowly backing away from the pup often helps. Also squatting down to their level usually brings them to you. As a last resort, you can use about a 20 foot length of clothes line rope as a leash. If the pup doesn't come promptly, just reel him in while repeating the "Come" command. Treat at first, but then graduate to praise. Only when they become proficient with the rope should you try the off leash test. We want them to succeed whenever possible. So if it doesn't work off leash, back to the rope. Also use the command "Come" when calling them to eat, as this is a powerful re-enforcer of the command.

"Sit" & "Down" Commands

After a couple of weeks, you should start with these simple commands. They could be taught much later, but we use them early to start establishing authority. The "Sit" command is accomplished by simply holding a treat near the dog's nose and then slowly moving it up and over his head towards his rear. His natural reaction is to sit, at which point he gets the treat. Again, give treats until proficient, then taper off to praise. The "Down" command is similar. It is most easily executed from a sit position, but also works from a stand position. Just hold the treat by their nose and move it down to between their front feet. The only way that they can comfortably get it is by lying down.

"Wait" Command

This is another command that we introduce early (second week), as it helps establish you as the Alpha in your relationship. These animals are basically wolves and retain a lot of their instincts. When

there is a kill, the alpha wolf eats first, and then notifies the other wolves when they can have a turn. You will do this by placing the food in front of the pup, but restraining it from eating, by holding its collar, or scruff of the neck and saying "Wait". Wait just 5 or 10 seconds, at first, then say "OK", and let the dog eat. This time should be gradually increased to about 30 seconds before they get to eat.

Gentle Leader

This is the brand name of a type of collar that can improve dog handling. Although not all dogs benefit from this tool, we will learn, and practice its use for all pups. It can be dropped later if not required. The basic principle of the Gentle Leader is that it constrains the dog's neck, as well as its muzzle. I.e., if the dog misbehaves, or tries to tug, it puts pressure on the muzzle, as well as the neck. At our first training session (pup's age =~ 9 weeks), you will learn how to put it on and how to use it. However, the pups tend to fight it at first. It is important that it be tight enough so that the pup cannot "paw" the nose section off, which he will try to do. To make the pup comfortable with it requires some patience. Things that help are to play with the pup when it is on. Also always put it on when he eats. It does not act as a muzzle, so they can eat comfortably with it on.

Discipline

We do NOT use physical force to discipline our pups, with the mild exception outlined below. Even small pups respond to verbal tone and volume. It is OK to loudly reprimand your pup! Your tone should be firm and assertive, but not angry sounding. Pups interpret anger as a weakness on your part. Ask your child to speak to the pup in the lowest tone that they can manage. The more that you can sound like a mother dog, the more responsive they will be. There are schools that say that if you do not catch the pup "in-the-act", there is nothing gained from post action discipline. I disagree! I feel that an intelligent dog, like ours, can learn from this. For example, if the dog messes on the floor, it is OK to take the dog to the mess and verbally reprimand it, then take it outside. No rubbing their noses in it!!

There may be times when the pup is doing something unacceptable, such as chewing on furniture, tearing up rugs, etc. If the dog does not respond to verbal correction, it is acceptable to use "mother dog" correction. This involves grasping the pup by the scruff of the neck and removing it from the temptation, accompanied by verbal correction. Do not shake the pup, as a mother might do. They have better senses of what is acceptable than we do!

There might be instances where the pup gets over-excited and is completely out-of-control, and unresponsive to verbal correction. In this case, the ultimate "alpha assertion" technique can be used. Put the pup on its side, using the scruff handling technique, if necessary. Then sit over the pup with your face directly in the face of the pup. Make loud, authoritative noises. They don't have to be intelligible, just sincere. After 20 to 30 seconds of this, let the pup up and give it lavish praise, petting

and cuddling. I.e. let it know that you still love it in spite of the wrongdoing. Sounds inconsistent, but it works. Whenever possible, have your child perform this routine, with your supervision.

Bathing

Avoid, if possible! In our dry climate, bathing can be very irritating to a dog's skin (especially pups). Most soil, such as mud, and even feces, will readily brush out, when dry. If the pup gets into something especially obnoxious that will not brush out, be sure to use a vet approved shampoo, and finish the job ASAP.

Exercise

A tired puppy is a good puppy. If your pup is biting too much, getting into everything, etc., it either needs more appropriate exercise/mental stimulation or a good nap. The best exercise is long walks with some obedience commands thrown in. General guidelines - a 10 week old pup might need 3 or 4 shorter sessions/day (15-20 minutes of a good walk or play time). A 16 - 20week old pup will need at least one good long walk - 30 to 45 minutes. Watch the pup for signs of tiring or overheating (long, red, spoon shaped tongue, or rapid panting), and take breaks in the shade if needed.

During their growth phase, their joints can be easily injured from excessive stress. Some of these types of injuries are semi permanent and can only be repaired by surgery, if at all. Therefore, the following guidelines should be enforced.

Do not encourage them to jump up on anything higher than their shoulders.

When playing with other puppies, running and keep-away is OK, but no wrestling!

Avoid any rough play with adult, or larger, dogs.

Avoid extreme joint extension, like paws up on a counter or wall, until they are at least 9 months old.

Consultation

If you have any questions, please feel free to call or email me. Some puppy raisers have expressed a concern that they are keeping me from "what I do", by bothering me. Well "what I do" is to advise puppy raisers. So, by not bothering me, you are keeping me from what I do 😊.

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