

Having To Do With Puppies

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Feeding

Puppies attain 80 percent of their full growth within six to twelve months. In the process, they burn nearly double the daily calories, pound for pound, that mature dogs do.

From weaning (around five weeks) until six months of age, feed the best puppy-kibble (dry food) that can be had. Feed the pups three times daily – morning, noon, evening – until they are fourteen or sixteen weeks old. At sixteen weeks old (approximately 4 months) switch to morning and evening meals. This establishes the feeding pattern to follow throughout adult life. At about a year, switch to a maintenance-grade kibble that has a healthy amount of fat and protein.

Though you should never remove a dog's bowl while he is in mid-bite, allow your pet only ten minutes or so to consume a meal. Then remove, wash and store the dish until the next scheduled feeding. Dogs are naturally fast eaters, hence the existence of expressions like "wolfing one's food." In the wild, a canine's natural setting, one eats as fast as possible, in case other animals covet the meal or circumstances cause its abandonment.

Avoid *on-demand* feeding, whereby food is always available. The practice can cause boredom, finicky eating habits and obesity. Of equal importance, it eliminates from the animal's emotional menu the possibility for intimate daily contacts between dog and human, the essence of which has as much to do with positive bonding as with proper nutrition. Scheduled meals also afford the advantage of letting you know right away if your pet should go off his feed, which can often represent the first sign of numerous physical and emotional disorders.

Cool, Clear Water

Dogs of any age should have fresh water available during waking hours. If your dog will spend any amount of time outdoors it is especially important that a clean source of water is readily available. A collapsible or portable water dish is an important running, walking, and traveling item. With practice a boxer can learn to easily drink from a water bottle for drinks on walks or runs.

Snacks and Such

As far as when tidbits are appropriate and when they aren't, present a biscuit to your puppy when he arrives indoors after you have called him into the house. Rather than making this a constant practice, reward about two to three times out of four. That way, curiosity whether there will be a tidbit can operate and draw him to you. The same method can be used to teach a puppy to easily enter his crate. If a puppy learns that a biscuit will always be offered, the little one may begin to take the practice for granted.

Don't bribe. Don't stand by the door and wave the treat as you call the pooch. Then you'd be offering the pup a choice whether to come, which is not a good idea at any age: Pooch could decide that he would rather persist at whatever he is doing than stop for a snack. Get him inside, then present the morsel.

You may include small amounts of table scraps in scheduled feeding. Do not feed chicken or other soft bones, which can be harmful - even deadly, as part of scheduled feedings. Permissible between-meal snacks are dog biscuits, which should be given in moderation. Charcoal-based biscuits can be a helpful treat for boxers, who tend to have bouts of gassiness.

Teething

A puppy begins to cut permanent teeth around sixteen weeks. Ease this uncomfortable time by providing Kong brand toys, rawhide chews, Nylabones, and the like. Puppies also lose their “baby teeth” at this stage. Do not be alarmed if a tooth simply falls out during this period. The adult tooth will soon fill the empty space in your puppy’s mouth.

Housing and Housebreaking

A new puppy should sleep at bedside in a properly sized, individual airline crate. This practice can eliminate much grief from housebreaking because a sound animal will not consistently mess in his sleeping area, provided that he is allowed ample opportunity to seek relief at suitable locations. At bedtime, afford puppy a final evening walk, then take him straight to the crate. Plastic crates are preferable to wire-style crates. Plastic crates offer a “den” feeling for the puppy and are much easier to clean. In addition, avoid keeping a puppy in a crate that is too large. Begin with a crate large enough for the puppy to both stand and comfortably turn around. A smart puppy will learn that a crate with excess room provides room to both mess and lay comfortably.

While first placing the pup in the enclosure, repeat the command word (examples: crate, kennel, bed) several times. This word best expresses the idea to communicate to the little one. The weekend is often an opportune time to acquaint puppy with the crate, as some sleep may be lost that first night by both of you. To lessen undue worry and whining, place in the cage ahead of time such puppy treasures as a soft towel, maybe a ticking clock, possibly Nylabone, or perhaps an undershirt you wore that day (probably for the last time). Do not let a dog - young or old - shred a cloth article, however, as ingestion of such material can be fatal. If a dog or puppy begins to shred any type of cloth, the item must immediately be removed from his possession.

A pup finding himself alone in such a new situation may whine and fuss a bit, but after a time will usually settle. If the young one becomes unreasonably vocal, and if you are certain that the dog is not telling you that he *must* get outside (or is frightened), wiggling your fingers through the cage door and letting him lick them can do wonders. If the pup persists and begins to throw a fit, a squirt from a spray bottle filled with cold water can do wonders. Accompany such disciplinary measures with a curt (but not roared) “NO!” meaning, “Not now”, or more specifically in this case, “Hush” or “Quiet.” Whatever your word, choice, be consistent so as not to confuse the puppy. As the puppy calms, praise “Good.” Do not remove the puppy from the crate as a reward for being quiet. Do not remove the puppy due to simply appease the crying. Setting the stage of appropriate crate manners begins early. Consistency is key for good manners and a good night’s sleep for both of you.

Avoid moving the crate about the house. Part of its function is to create a sense of order and stability in and for a puppy. Periodic cage relocation can defeat this purpose. Similarly, other pets or children should not be permitted to enter or play with a pup's crate. The enclosure is something the young canine needs to think of as his, and his nose will tell him if there have been visitors.

The very first thing in the morning, take the puppy outdoors, repeating the cue “Outside” as you transport him there. If the crate is some distance from the door, prevent undesirable stops along the way by carrying the pup. Once the animal is back inside, keep your attention on the dog and be ready to take him outside hurriedly. Be

especially watchful for any signs for a repeat trip outside, such as repeated circling and sitting by or pawing the exit door. Should you be occupied with some activity for a time - even just talking on the phone - put the puppy on in his crate before proceeding.

Bear in mind that puppies initially possess very little internal control. An active pup involved in play and such would rather continue with what he is doing than stop to expel toxins. Thus, nature has constructed him in such a way that until he gains some maturity, he is simply unable to hold back the dam for more than a few seconds after his little brain issues the word. Once your pup gets "that look" in his eyes, you have very little time to get him outside.

The first time the puppy does goof in the house - and most pups do at least once - point his nose close to (but not into) the site of the transgression and repeat the word "No," in a firm, drawn-out manner. Do not speak harshly as that could frighten. More than one overly vocal owner has taught his pet through displays of righteous anger that the animal's natural urges were wrong. "Not here" is the message to communicate, not shame.

After drawing attention to the problem area, tote the puppy outside, encouragingly saying the word "Outside" as you proceed. Gathering up the accident and placing it at the location you want frequented can be helpful. The pup will find and sniff it, and will soon begin to get the idea.

As the young one performs his functions outside, praise (but softly, so as not to distract), saying, "Good boy, good puppy," or whatever phraseology you prefer. Be sure to show your excitement for his correct behavior, smiling as you delivery the verbal reward. Later, during lengthy drives, telling your pet at a rest stop to "Outside" will often trigger the desired response.

During puppy's waking hours, regardless of whether he sends signals, make sure to take him outside every couple of hours. Also, walk him after naps, meals and prolonged drinking; those are times when puppies often feel the need.

Unless you have no choice, avoid using newspapers for relief areas. "Paper training" is just that - it can teach a dog to respond to the feel of paper underfoot. Not only can a pup not tell the difference between today's paper and the one you intend for him to use, but more importantly he is being taught to use your house as a bathroom. True, the animal is standing on a newspaper, but that does not change the fact that elimination is occurring in your living space.

Exercise and Socialization

Proper exercise is as important to the well-being of a puppy as is proper nutrition. Without either, healthy physiological or psychological development cannot occur. Your pet needs plenty of play area and lots of playtime with you.

Socialization entails taking a new puppy with you, wherever and whenever circumstances permit. During life's first months, the number and quality of different situations, people and events a pup experiences can affect him for the rest of his days. Always keeping him on-leash, take your young dog to public parks, school areas or just for a drive. If you intend for your pet to be a member of your pack (family), treat him like one.

When taking a dog (young or mature) for outings, never leave him unattended in a vehicle. The result can be chewed seats, a stolen pet or heatstroke. This last, which is often fatal, can quickly occur with outside temperatures no warmer than 70 degrees.

Veterinarians

Like your family physician, your vet should be someone in whom you have confidence. As a precautionary measure, any new puppy should be examined before or very soon after arriving at his new home. Should you not be familiar with a local veterinarian, perhaps being new to the area, meet and get to know one prior to need. An after-hours emergency is no time to discover that the doctor whose name you hurriedly gleaned from the yellow pages has an unreasonable fixation on keeping regular office hours.

In choosing a vet, take your own dog for a cursory examination and observe whether the doctor is at ease with pooch. Of equal importance is whether the animal seems at ease with him or her. Should either seem overly uncomfortable with the other, look elsewhere. While there, check out the general cleanliness of the office and the exam rooms. Also, note the attitude of the clinic staff. Should you detect tension, frayed nerves, short tempers or a decidedly lax, disinterested or distracted manner, be on your way.

Prudence dictates that two vets are better than one, in the sense that when your primary vet is unavailable you should have a reliable backup. Know your vet's general office hours and store the office phone number in your cellular phone and on a list of emergency numbers next to your home phone. As with your main veterinarian, you and your dog should meet and get to know this second person before a need arises.

Worms and Other Internal Parasites

Periodically take fecal samples to your vet for examination. If the tests are positive, treat the condition according to his or her instructions. Ask your vet about heartworm preventive and the testing that must precede its initial use.

Shots and Vaccinations

After concluding puppy shots, your pet should be vaccinated yearly against distemper, leptospirosis, hepatitis, parvovirus, rabies, coronavirus and tracheobronchitis (Kennel Cough). Your vet may have additional recommendations for necessary vaccinations, depending upon your geographic location and your dog's outdoor activities.

Medications

Giving pills and liquids are simple tasks that are made easier by conditioning during puppyhood. Give the pups placebos occasionally, always following such treatments with much praise and a biscuit. The treat not only lends a positive accent to the event, it makes sure the medication went down.

To give a pill, open the dog's mouth by reaching over the muzzle and inserting a fingertip directly behind a canine tooth. This causes nearly any dog to open its mouth. Holding the animal's nose upward, quickly but smoothly push the pill toward the back of the tongue. Withdraw your hand and gently hold the muzzle closed while softly stroking downward along the front of the throat. If this is not successful, take a piece of bland cheese or bread, roll the pill into the middle of the food, and give the disguised pill to the dog.

To administer a liquid, first draw the fluid into a syringe with the needle detached. Place the instrument's tip (repeat: without a needle attached) in the fold of your pet's cheek near the back teeth while using minimal pressure to hold the muzzle barely closed. Don't plunge the liquid in so quickly that your dog inhales the substance rather than swallow it.

Grooming

Canines usually shed two or three times a year. Boxers are not heavy shedders but still require basic grooming. Gently brush your dog to remove loose hair as needed. Bathe him as needed with pet or baby shampoo (more economical), lest you dry the skin and coat. Trim nails and clean ears at least weekly. Consistent handling of the feet and ears of your puppy will equate to easy handling as an adult. Since there are breed differences as to how these chores are best performed, ask your vet or breeder to show you procedures that are appropriate for your pet.

Training

While formal obedience is generally best deferred until the sixth month, much groundwork can be laid during puppyhood. This is especially true in terms of bonding and attitude building.

Precisely when to start formal training depends upon the animal's temperament and maturity, and upon the trainer's abilities and experience. Commencing at too young an age can do more harm than good. A puppy who experiences fright during a critical developmental period, whether it be of a collar, of a leash or - God forbid - of you, will never outgrow the feeling, regardless of ensuing positive learning experiences.

Until you discern some maturation in the young one - such as a lengthened attention span - allow the puppy to be a puppy. In other words, if in doubt, don't.

Puppy Obedience Classes

I have mixed feelings about the concept of puppy obedience classes. They are fine as a socialization vehicle, but that potential is offset by their inherent risk for spreading disease.

From a training standpoint, they can easily be detrimental. For instance, in many classes a puppy is taught he may ignore or respond to his owner's command to "Sit" (for example), as no meaningful compulsion is used to backup the command. The problem is that "Sit" does not mean, "Smack your butt onto the ground, then hop up and do whatever you please," though without enforcement that is how a pup typically responds when made to sit, especially when among peers.

A professed puppy-class goal is to demonstrate obedience is a fun and pleasant activity. This sounds good on paper, but two problems exist. First, this positive attitude should be a constant: It should be operative in any training program, without regard for the animal's age. Second, while it is true that no puppy should be pressured - inappropriate force can scare him at a time when he is highly vulnerable - it is equally true that no dog should ever be taught that a command allows a choice on his part, especially during the impressionable phase of puppyhood.

Puppy-class supporters promote the view that corrections - force - are added to the program when the pooch is old enough to handle them. That's mixed signals and that's my objection. From a training standpoint, to initially demonstrate that commands are open to a vote, and then later change the rules, can instill confusion and distrust in any animal.

Unintended Lessons

Consider the following example of subtle training that can take place inadvertently. While reassurance can be helpful with some children, it is a sure way to cause apprehension and anxiety in a dog. For instance, should a sudden sound cause puppy to startle, ignore both the noise and his anxiety. Rushing to him with, "It's all right,

don't worry," and so forth, may only reinforce his nervous reaction to sudden noises. Yes, pet the animal as you normally would if he comes to you, but no, don't fly to him with the express purpose of reassurance. Stable canines have no built-in-fear of thunder - it is a natural phenomenon and dogs are beings of nature - but many owners have educated their pets to fear loud noises. A dog's reaction to pointless reassurance is, "If everything's so fine and dandy, then just what are you so concerned about?" If a given sound does not worry you, do not teach your pet to fear it.

You're Always on Stage

Along that line of thinking, remember that whenever you are near your companion, even if you are not actively engaged with pup at the moment, you are in fact teaching him, whether you mean to be or not. Be aware, and be careful.

Collars

Regardless of the type of collar you prefer, be sure to remove it from your pet's neck when you are not going to be nearby for a while - even for a few minutes! A curious and adventurous puppy or dog can discover myriad ways of catching a collar on something. Such happenings are usually traumatic and can easily be fatal.

The Play Toy

When playing with a puppy, use tennis balls, laundered burlap sacks, Frisbees - whatever seems to turn the puppy on. Regardless of your toy selection, do not leave the special play toy lying around where the pup can see it, lest the article lose its attraction. If the toy is always present, it can lose its specialness - a puppy can easily learn to take the object for granted. It is only to appear when you do, and then only sometimes. The idea is for the pup to learn to associate the pleasurable object with you.

The few rules governing the proper use of play article come under the heading of "A Puppy Cannot Do Anything Wrong with a Play Toy." That is, if he is interested in the thrown ball, fine. Should he give chase and pounce upon it, fine. If he picks it up and runs away from you with it, fine. If he goes to the bathroom on it, fine. He cannot do anything improper with a play toy - that is simply not possible. Sending any negative messages that a puppy could infer as relating to the play item can easily lessen his attraction to the object.

To install and heighten puppy's interest in a play toy, begin by kneeling next to him. (The dominating pressure imparted by body language when standing over a young animal can distract from the moment - in general, things above a dog seize his attention.) Roll the ball back and forth, staring pointedly at the object while observing the pup's reactions peripherally. As he develops interest, move the article to the side of your leg so he will look for the toy. As puppy fascination increases, allow him to pounce upon and carry off the object to the accompaniment of your expressed approval.

The objective is to tempt the puppy with a play toy until he displays strong attraction to it. Making capture of the article easy can cause lost interest for want of challenge and stimulation. At the same time, do not prolong the teasing to an extent that desire wanes. That could teach a pup to lose.

When playing with very young or inexperienced animals, roll a ball for them rather than throwing it. Until a young dog has had some practice in pursuing an object, he is unable to follow visually the flight of a thrown ball, and can easily become confused or frustrated to the extent of losing interest. Field and depth of vision expand with maturity.

Praise

When your puppy does something that pleases you, tell him. For example, when he trots back to you with his ball, pet and praise the young one repetitively, saying, "Fetch" or "Good Boy." Do not be in a hurry to take the object from him, lest he learn to come with his head lowered - or not to come at all. When removing the toy from the puppy's mouth say "Drop." With age and practice the puppy will learn to drop the toy on command. When you do take the article, immediately throw it again. Do not tease excessively. Instead, take the toy, wave it in front of his nose a time or two and throw it while saying "Fetch." Dogs enjoy pursuit as much as they do possession. The purposes are to show your pet that it is in his interests to release the toy to you and to keep his eyes on you afterward.

When petting a puppy, especially one with erect ears, confine the fondling to under the chin and along the underside of the neck and muzzle. The idea is to teach your pet to look up at you. This manner of touching is especially important with regard to outsiders whom you allow to pet your animal. Petting a canine atop the head can cause him to lower it while pulling down his ears submissively, and it is unwise to suggest a mind-set of automatic submissions toward strangers. Friendliness and curiosity, yes; submission, no.

Identifiers

Assign names to things for your puppy. In addition to their command vocabularies, my dogs have an understanding of objects and concepts numbering another forty-odd terms. Some handy words are: outside, yard, car, truck, ride, house, chair, couch, bed, crate, (food) dish, dinner (feeding time), drink, ball, lead, collar, sack (burlap), rabbit, horse, kitty, bird, critter (bovine), deer, warm and cold.

Protection

Prudence dictates taking precautions for your pup's well-being and safety. One of these is an area securely fenced to a minimum height of five feet. That may seem excessive if yours is a small dog, but keep in mind that while a fence is intended to contain your pal, it is also to keep intruders out. There are those who are disposed to taking things that do not belong to them, your pooch included. Another precaution to consider is that of having a microchip identifier injected under your puppy's skin. The cost for a microchip identifier is normally \$40 or less and is a wonderful tool to help recover a lost or stolen pet. The microchip is the size of a grain of rice and can be injected during a normal veterinary visit. Speak with your vet to discuss the valuable identification tool and his or her preference of the age at which they prefer to put this tool to use.

Two other safeguards are a watchful eye and no patience with anyone who attempts to tease, aggravate, or endanger your pet. Dogs possessing even minimum intelligence and spirit seldom tolerate such abuse for long, and they should not have to. Do not tie or chain a dog. The practice can easily induce paranoia (as well as an aggressive attitude) since the animal's primary defense - the ability to run away - has been taken from him. Also, tying can create distrust toward yourself, as it is you who have done the taking. Finally, dogs that are tied face a high risk of injury, including accidental hangings.

Discourage the behavior of cretinous types who seem compelled to act in an agitating or teasing manner when finding themselves near a Doberman Pinscher, German Shepherd Dog, Rottweiler or any other large dog. Similarly, waste no patience on the clown who habitually ridicules smaller members of the canine world. Such a person's frail ego may need the stimulation, but the pooch's spirit and well-being should be your first concern.

On a related them, I never take my dogs off-leash to a public area, regardless of the animal's age or depth of training. I don't ever want to find myself in a courtroom, trying to phrase a disarming reply to the learned judge's query. "Has the dog been trained to bite?" The fact that the child was nipped while trying to stick the animal in the eye may prove a shallow defense. Irrespective of whether your dog has been bite-trained, keep him on-leash whenever the two of you are out in public, lest some yahoo winds up owning your house.

The Ten Commandments for Puppy Owners

1. My life is likely to last ten to fifteen years. Any separation from you will be painful for me. Remember that before you buy me.
2. Give me time to understand what you want of me.
3. Place your trust in me – it's crucial to my well-being.
4. Don't be angry at me for long, and don't lock me up as punishment. You have your work, your entertainment and your friends. I have only you.
5. Talk to me sometimes. Even if I don't understand your words, I understand your voice when it's speaking to me.
6. Be aware that however you treat me I'll never forget it.
7. Remember before you hit me that I have teeth that could easily crush the bones of your hand but that I choose not to bite you.
8. Before you scold me for being uncooperative, obstinate or lazy, ask yourself if something might be bothering me. Perhaps I'm not getting the right food, or I've been out in the sun too long, or my heart is getting old and weak.
9. Take care of me when I get old; you too will grow old.
10. Go with me on difficult journeys. Never say, "I can't bear to watch it," or, "Let it happen in my absence." Everything is easier for me if you are there. Remember, I love you.

Additional Resources

- *Dog Logic: Companion Obedience*, by Joel M. McMains
- *Manstopper: Training a Canine Guardian*, by Joel M. McMains
- *Be The Pack Leader: Use Cesar's Way to Transform Your Dog . . .and Your Life*, by Cesar Millan