

GUIDE FOR ALL PUPPY OWNERS

Puppy Behaviour Guide



Introduction

It is always a great event when a puppy arrives in its new home. However, integrating a puppy into the household is not always easy and if you are to get the most out of your relationship with your new pet there are some very important things to remember. The first weeks of life together will set the pattern for your pet's behaviour in future years and will lay the foundation for the relationship between you. Learning to communicate with your dog, understanding his body language and his basic behavioural needs are a fundamental basis to a successful relationship.

This booklet outlines the general principles of dealing with puppies and preparing them for life, but it is important to remember that every dog is an individual and that the rules may need to be adapted to suit your particular situation. If you have any doubts or concerns you should contact your veterinary practice for advice.



Communication is key

In order to avoid problems of miscommunication and misunderstanding it is important to appreciate that

- > Dogs are not human beings and they do not have the same range of intellectual and emotional capacities as us.
- > Dogs are excellent learners and are especially skilled at learning human body language but this can sometimes lead to owners over-interpreting their dog's ability to understand a situation.

In terms of human verbal language, dogs only know what we teach them. Your puppy has a range of behavioural needs and natural communication methods, which differ from our own.

Canine communication involves all of the senses (smell, taste, hearing, sight, and touch) and dogs use a blend of instinctive behaviours and more complex learned responses in order to get their message across.

Like all mammals, a dog can adapt to very different conditions, including new homes and new families, but it is important to remember that the adaptation is limited by the constraints of canine communication and understanding. Whatever the circumstances, your new family member can only react in canine terms. The details of that reaction will be unique to your pet. His behaviour will have been moulded by a combination of factors including genetic influences from the parents, early environmental influences and early social interaction with its own and other species.

Social behaviour

When your puppy arrives in your home it will probably be the first time that it has been separated from its mother and littermates. An ideal breeder will have already started getting each puppy used to being away from the mother and the litter for short periods of time. However, for most puppies, until now the mother will have been the most important figure in your puppy's life and when it enters your family it will need to form new attachments and social bonds.

Young puppies will transfer the attachment that they had with their mother onto a person who can provide its essential needs of food, warmth and comfort. In many cases the newcomer will appear to form a particularly close relationship with one family member. They value them as a source of comfort and security. With the security of this reliable relationship as a foundation, the puppy is better able to adapt to its new surroundings. Although a strong bond between puppy and owner is beneficial in the early stages, there comes a time when the newcomer needs to learn to stand on his own four paws.

In the wild, puppies replace their attachment to their mother and littermates with a wider attachment to the pack as a whole and domestic dogs need to do the same in terms of widening their attachment to all members of the household and to their environment. Loosening the bond may be difficult for both pup and owner at first, but you need to remember that this is a vital part of your puppy's development.



Decreasing the level of attachment requires teaching your puppy to become more independent, enabling him to cope without you if you are busy or need to go out. You can still have a great relationship with your puppy but he needs to learn that social interaction is not always available. A puppy crate or play pen can be a useful tool for teaching a puppy to cope with being isolated for short periods of time. It can be helpful for a puppy to learn to be mentally isolated before being physically isolated. This means that the puppy gets used to occupying himself whilst the owner is in the room and learns not to be dependent on the owner for entertainment and comfort. Make sure that your puppy has ample entertainment in his pen such as toys and activity feeders and a comfortable resting place. Once the puppy can cope with that, you can start to leave the room for short periods of time. If the puppy is particularly bonded to one member of the family then leaving the puppy with another family member can be a good starting point for helping the puppy to develop independence.

Once the puppy can cope with short periods of isolation you can gradually extend the time he is left. If this process is completed successfully your puppy will learn that social interaction is not always available on demand and this will enable him to cope with the inevitable periods of solitude that are associated with being a domestic pet. Puppies that fail to 'grow up' in this way, and remain dependent on their owner for all their social needs, will be prone to behavioural problems when they are left alone and may go on to develop so called 'separation anxiety'.

Destruction, howling and toileting are common symptoms of this condition and while it is well-recognised and can be treated or managed, it is far better to prevent it in the first place!

Introducing your new puppy to the household

- > The most important point to remember with all introductions is to allow the puppy to avoid situations that scare him and to give him the time and patience to adapt. Most puppies will show mild apprehension when meeting unfamiliar people or dogs but should then relax provided that person or dog is friendly.
- > If you have another dog then ensure that the dog is under strict supervision and control during initial interactions. Even a dog who has previously got on very well with other dogs may be triggered into a chase response if the puppy runs away or may not appreciate an over-excited puppy jumping all over him. An accidental chase must be avoided at all costs because this could have long term effects on the puppy's confidence with meeting unfamiliar dogs. One suggestion is to take your dog out for a good long walk and then keep him on his lead when he comes back into the house. You then have physical control of him without him getting excited about going for a walk. If your new puppy is confident and happy to approach and play with your older dog then ensure that this does not result in the puppy becoming a pest! Both dogs may need to have some time alone to relax to avoid one becoming irritable. On the other hand if your adult dog has good social skills then he is potentially the best teacher your puppy can have. Do not intervene in every minor scuffle – if the older dog tells the puppy off and the puppy responds appropriately by backing off this is very important for the puppy's learning. If the puppy does not listen or respond appropriately then you may need to intervene.
- > Children also need to be introduced carefully depending on their age, experience of interacting with animals and the previous experience of the puppy. A puppy who has come from a family breeding environment and has met children from a young age will usually adapt well. If the puppy has come from a quieter, child-free environment you may need to take things more gradually. In this case using a play pen or crate can be an excellent way of providing your puppy with a quiet safe area where he can retreat to if he becomes overwhelmed.
- > If you have a cat in your household again a careful introduction is required. Even if your cat has lived happily with other dogs in the past, she may not appreciate a bouncy puppy arriving in the house. The puppy must never be given the opportunity to chase the cat so initial introductions should be either done via a puppy pen or with the puppy on a lead. This will allow the cat to approach and investigate on her own terms and leave her free to escape if she is frightened. Remember to consider your cat's access to food, water, resting places and the cat flap and check that the presence of the puppy does not accidentally interfere with any of these.
- > It is worth considering the use of a plug-in pheromone diffuser or a pheromone collar for your puppy when he first arrives. There is considerable evidence that dog appeasing pheromone helps puppies to settle more quickly into their new home, interact more confidently with unfamiliar people and dogs and to settle more quietly at night. For further information please visit your vet.



Toilet training

HOUSE TRAINING

Very few puppies are fully house-trained when they enter their new homes and most owners are prepared for a period of extra cleaning when they take on a young pup. However, in many cases the process of house training is unnecessarily long and drawn out and there is considerable tension between pet and owner as a result. By following some simple rules and avoiding some of the common mistakes you can maximise your chances of success, and make the whole process far less stressful for you and your puppy.

SPOT THE RIGHT MOMENT

It is important for your puppy to be in the right location when it feels the need to relieve itself. If you take your puppy outside when it is most likely to want to go to the toilet (after every meal, when it wakes up, after drinking and after play) you maximise the chances of it forming an appropriate association between being outside and relieving itself. Every time your puppy makes a mistake and goes to the toilet in the house it learns an inappropriate association and the process of house training is slowed down. Taking your puppy outside on a regular basis can be one of the quickest and simplest ways of house training. Up to the age of about 12 weeks your puppy may need to toilet every hour or so during waking hours. He should be able to last longer overnight but it can be worth setting an alarm clock for the early hours to avoid accidents.

Many people choose to use newspaper or commercial puppy pads as a house training tool. These can be useful if the puppy has to be left alone but are not ideal as a main method of house training. Puppies need to learn about substrate (different surface types, such as grass, gravel, cement etc) and location preferences for toileting so by taking your puppy out of the house and into the garden to toilet should result in faster and more successful training.

REWARD WORKS BETTER THAN PUNISHMENT!

If you ensure that you are with your young puppy when it is outside, you can give some form of reward to coincide with the process of toileting and thereby encourage him to see toileting in the garden as a good thing to do! Quiet praise whilst the puppy is actually urinating or defecating is the most appropriate form of reward. There is usually no need to use higher value rewards such as food treats because the relief of toileting is in itself a rewarding activity i.e. the puppy feels more comfortable afterwards.

NEVER PUNISH YOUR PUPPY IF YOU HAVE NOT CAUGHT IT 'ON THE JOB'

Going to the toilet is a necessary and natural behaviour and any form of punishment in house training will lead to confusion. If puppies are punished they are more likely to learn to avoid toileting in front of their owners than to learn that they toileted in the wrong location. This can make the training process far more difficult and many owners will spend hours in the garden waiting for their puppy to relieve itself only to find that it runs back into the house to toilet on the lounge carpet. The puppy has learned that toileting in private is safer! Retrospective punishment is also entirely inappropriate. If your puppy has an accident out of your sight you should calmly pop the puppy out of the way and clean up the mess. Owners often mistakenly believe a puppy to 'know he's done wrong' because he will hang his head low and look 'sorry' or 'guilty'. In fact this is simply a response to the tense or angry body language or voice of the owner or the puppy may have learned from previous experience that he will be told off if there is urine or faeces present. The puppy is showing appeasing gestures in an attempt to deflect your anger and its behaviour has no association with the act of toileting, which occurred some time before. Inappropriate aversive responses such as rolled up newspapers, pushing puppies' noses in excreta and screaming at them for being naughty should be avoided at all costs.

DON'T CLEAN UP ITS BUSINESS IN FRONT OF IT

If possible, it is best to avoid cleaning up your puppy's mistakes in front of it especially if you are feeling annoyed or frustrated. Your puppy is very aware of your body language and will be sensitive to your displeasure. Better to clean up out of the puppy's sight to avoid any misinterpretation. Punishment in the presence of faeces is a risk factor for the development of coprophagia (eating faeces).

Training with simple commands

Training your dog to obey commands will be fun but complicated training is not for everyone and most owners simply want a basic level of obedience which will make their dog a pleasure to own.

- > You should begin educating your new puppy as soon as he arrives in your home.
- > Use simple words as commands and make sure that all of the family are consistent.
- > One word can only have one meaning and it is important that you are all working from the same dictionary.

For young puppies it is important to ensure that training is fun. Training should simply be incorporated into daily life, for example teaching your puppy to sit before you feed him. If you wish to do more formal training sessions, keep these short but frequent. For a three-month-old puppy, training lessons of five minutes are long enough. Remember that reward is always more effective than punishment and work to teach the puppy what he should be doing rather than what is wrong. It is usually much more effective to simply ignore inappropriate behaviour (e.g. jumping up) and concentrate on rewarding the behaviour you would like to see more of (e.g. sitting politely). Dogs learn by the consequences of their actions – if an action leads to interaction with their owner they will do this action more; if it leads to being ignored they learn to do this less. Disobedience is very often due to misunderstanding. A puppy can only know what he has been taught and if he does not respond appropriately to a cue word, it means he has not yet understood the meaning of that word. Vocal signals can take a long time to learn and it is helpful to reinforce their meaning by using clear, accompanying hand gestures which the puppy can interpret more easily. When teaching a new command, it is vital to label a behaviour at the same time that it occurs. He will then learn to associate that behaviour with that word. After many repetitions you can start to use it as a cue word to ask your puppy to do that behaviour. Do not keep repeating the cue word when the puppy is not listening or reacting – all you are teaching him is that your voice can be ignored and he will fail to learn what response was expected. Probably the most important command in terms of control is the recall. It may save your dog from accidents in the future.

TEACHING A RECALL

- > Always reward your dog when he comes to you, however long it takes!
- > Never punish your dog for not coming back when he is called.
- > Make your recall command friendly, exciting and unpredictable.
- > Make yourself as welcoming as possible by adopting a crouched body posture.
- > Do not grab at your dog as he runs past you.

To have a dog with good recall you need to be the most important and wonderful thing in his life. He should come to you because he wants to be with you and because he finds you exciting, rewarding and fun to be with. At the end of the day isn't that what owning a dog is all about?

Walking on a lead

Puppies do not inherently know how to walk on a lead and it is important to introduce your new arrival to a lead and collar as soon as possible. At first, you could put the collar and lead on your puppy and let it get used to this little constraint without you attempting to take it for a walk. When you apply gentle pressure to the lead, get your dog's attention by clicking your tongue. As soon as it follows the direction of the lead, reward it with a small food reward and verbal praise. Don't worry if it only takes a few steps on the first occasion. Once the puppy is happy to walk alongside you on its lead you should encourage it to make regular eye contact with you by making interesting little noises and attracting its attention. In this way, the dog is encouraged to be in communication with you during its walks and a vocal tether backs up the physical lead.

PREVENTING PULLING

Teaching your puppy to walk politely on the lead is relevant both for your enjoyment of walks as well as the important risk of neck injuries and restricted breathing if he learns to pull hard. The most important thing is to ensure the lead is slack. He does not need to walk at heel unless you wish to teach competitive obedience, he just needs to learn not to pull. Keep the lead slack: as soon as the puppy pulls, you should stand still. As the puppy reaches the extent of the lead it will look back to see why it cannot proceed. As soon as the lead is slack again, continue on your walk. This immediately rewards him for stopping pulling. In the early stages of training you may need to repeat this exercise several times, but before long your puppy will learn that walking with a loose lead results in a walk while pulling on the lead causes him to stop moving. The lead is a very important communication channel between dog and owner and tension and frustration are very easily transmitted down it. Many cases of behaviour problems, such as aggression toward other dogs, are made worse by this negative communication. Try to ensure that you are always calm and in a positive frame of mind when communicating with your dog down the lead.

Taking your dog out

Puppies need to be taken out and about as soon as possible in order to maximise the processes of socialisation and habituation and to teach them to accept diversity. While it is obviously important to take all necessary precautions not to expose your puppy to pointless risks, it is sensible to take him out on trips away from home as soon as possible.

Places that have been soiled by animals should be avoided, as should contact with unvaccinated animals, but the risks of isolating your puppy in the period between four and fourteen weeks of age are just as serious as those posed by taking him on small outings. To keep risks to a minimum you can carry your puppy in your arms but you should ensure that any interaction is done on clean ground so that the puppy is free to choose approach or avoidance behaviour rather than being forced into interaction. Ensure that the dogs it meets are of good health and vaccination status.

Once the vaccination process is complete there is no limit to the variety of experiences that you can offer your puppy, but remember that young animals have a high requirement for frequent sleep! It is very important not to overwhelm your puppy with too many new experiences at once. Low intensity experiences that ensure the puppy remains relaxed should occur frequently with rest periods in between. High intensity situations, e.g. car boot sales, should be avoided initially and only introduced once your puppy is confident to enjoy himself in this type of context.

Failing to take your puppy out will put it at risk of developing a number of behavioural problems later in life, including fear of places, people and animals. Many of these dogs will go on to develop aggressive behaviour, which is designed to protect them from the threats that they perceive in their environment. Preventing these sorts of problems is a real responsibility for new owners.

It is not uncommon for puppies to show some degree of fear when they encounter unfamiliar people and places for the first time. It is very important that you react in a positive manner by remaining calm and relaxed so your puppy can learn from your responses. Gentle, slow stroking can help calm a nervous puppy but you should resist the temptation to make a big fuss as this runs the risk of reinforcing the fear and making the situation far worse.

It is best to ignore the fear reaction and use play as a form of distraction. If the fearful behaviour continues then seek advice from your veterinary practice – the earlier problems of fear are dealt with the better the prognosis. Do not think that the problem will get better with time – it probably won't.

Hierarchy

Dogs are social animals and in order to make them feel secure within your family they need to learn house rules and be treated consistently and predictably by all family members. Everyone within the family needs to treat the dog in the same way and thereby reinforce the house rules. Dogs have evolved a superb range of communication signals which are used to avoid conflict at all costs.

If you observe groups of dogs you will see that maintaining a stable social structure does not involve bully boy tactics and there is no need for confrontation to be used in order to teach the rules. Instead individuals respond to subtle signals from their pack mates. It is vital for owners to recognise and respect appeasing gestures to prevent escalation into defensive aggression (see diagram of ladder of aggression).

It is important to remember the significance of reward in terms of a dog's behaviour. A dog will work for valuable rewards and by maintaining control of important resources (your attention, food, access to toys) you can use these rewards effectively for enforcing house rules.

FEEDING TIME

Dogs are social eaters and historic advice that they should be fed after the human family is out of date. Dogs should learn to wait for food and take food gently when told but they can be fed at any time of day as long as they have a predictable routine. It is advisable not to give human food from the table or from your plate as this may encourage stealing, begging or scavenging behaviour.

SLEEPING

Historic advice about sleeping locations is also out of date. Your puppy may sleep where you choose but he must be willing to move if you ask him to and allow you to approach him and stroke him. Dogs may learn to guard very valuable resting places such as an extra comfortable armchair so it is best to start off with teaching your puppy to rest in his own bed. As he learns some general obedience cue words, it may be that such rules can be relaxed in time, but it is sensible to adhere to a strict plan in the early weeks in order to avoid any potential confusion.

The Canine Ladder of Aggression

HOW A DOG REACTS TO STRESS OR THREAT



THE LADDER OF AGGRESSION

The Ladder of Aggression is a depiction of the gestures that any dog will give in response to an escalation of perceived stress and threat, from very mild social interaction and pressure, to which blinking and nose licking are appropriate responses, to severe, when overt aggression may well be selected. The purpose of such behaviour is to deflect threat and restore harmony and the presence of appeasing and threat-averting behaviour in the domestic dog's repertoire is essential to avoid the need for potentially damaging aggression. The dog is a social animal for whom successful appeasement behaviour is highly adaptive and it is used continually and routinely in everyday life.

It is most important to realise that these gestures are simply a context and response-dependant sequence which will culminate in threatened or overt aggression, only if all else fails. Contrary to persistent misinformation, the gestures identified are nothing to do with a purported dominant or submissive state relative to companions. In all dogs, inappropriate social responses to appeasement behaviour will result in its devaluing and the necessity, from a dog's perspective, to move up the ladder. Aggression is therefore

created in any situation where appeasement behaviour is chronically misunderstood and not effective in obtaining the socially expected outcome. Dogs may progress to overt aggression within seconds during a single episode if the perceived threat occurs quickly and at close quarters, or learn to dispense with lower rungs on the ladder over time, if repeated efforts to appease are misunderstood and responded to inappropriately. As a consequence, a so-called 'unpredictable' aggressive response, without any obvious preamble, may occur in any context which predicts inescapable threat to the dog, when in reality it was entirely predictable. (Shepherd, K 2009. *BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behaviour*, 2nd edition, pages 13-16. Editors Debra F. Horwitz and Daniel S. Mills).

SUMMARY

Bringing up a puppy can be a challenge as well as an adventure; but if you respect your pet's behavioural heritage as well as its individual personality you can learn to understand the world from a canine perspective and enjoy years of rewarding companionship.

Behavioural problems are a common reason for breakdowns in the pet owner relationship and the most common reason why adolescent dogs are relinquished. You can help to prevent these problems by remembering that your puppy is not a person! You are in the best position to prevent problem behaviours and now is the best time to start. Take the time to learn your puppy's language and you will find that you are able to communicate far more effectively.

There are many good resources to help you learn about dog communication. Some good places to start are the following websites:

<http://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/free-downloads-posters-handouts-and-more>
www.canis.no/rugaas/articles.php

However, if you experience any problems with your pet's behaviour or consider his reactions to be inappropriate, annoying or even dangerous do not hesitate to seek advice from your veterinary practice.

They are there to help you and can refer you to an appropriately qualified behaviourist if needed such as a member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (www.apbc.org.uk) or a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist (www.asab.nottingham.ac.uk/accred/reg.php)

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