

Understanding Your Puppy's Behavior and Development

WELL-SOCIALIZED DOGS ARE MORE LIKELY to have well-socialized puppies. Pups often mirror their mothers' calm or fearful attitude toward people; this is a normal part of their socialization. But you can play a vital role, too, by petting, talking, and playing with puppy to help him develop good "people skills."

Puppies are usually weaned at six to seven weeks, but are still learning important skills as their mother gradually leaves them for longer periods of time. Ideally, puppies should stay with their littermates (or other "role-model" dogs) for at least 12 weeks.

Puppies separated from their littermates too early often fail to develop appropriate social skills, such as learning how to send and receive signals, what an "inhibited bite" (acceptable mouthing pressure) means, how far to go in play-wrestling, and so forth. Play is important for puppies because it increases their physical coordination, social skills, and learning limits. By interacting with their mother and littermates, puppies explore the ranking process (who's in charge) and also learn how to be a dog.

Skills not acquired during the first eight weeks may be lost forever. While these stages are important and fairly consistent, a dog's mind remains receptive to new experiences and lessons well beyond puppyhood. Most dogs are still puppies, in mind and body, through the first two years of life.

STAGES OF PUPPY DEVELOPMENT:

0-2 Weeks: Neonatal Period

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother.
- Senses of touch and taste are present at birth.

2-4 Weeks: Transitional Period

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother and littermates.
- Eyes open, teeth begin to come in, and senses of hearing and smell develop.
- Puppy begins to stand, walk a little, wag tail, and bark.
- By the fourth or fifth week, eyesight is well-developed.

3-12 Weeks: Socialization Period

- During this period, puppy needs opportunities to meet other dogs and people.
- By three to five weeks, puppy becomes aware of his surroundings, companions (both canine and human), and relationships, including play.
- By four to six weeks, puppy is most influenced by littermates and is learning about being a dog.
- From four to 12 weeks, puppy remains influenced by littermates and is also influenced by people. Puppy learns to play, develops social skills, learns the inhibited bite, explores social structure/ranking, and

improves physical coordination.

- By five to seven weeks, puppy develops curiosity and explores new experiences. Puppy needs positive "people" experiences during this time.
- By seven to nine weeks, puppy is refining his physical skills and coordination, and can begin to be housetrained. Puppy has full use of senses.
- By eight to 10 weeks, puppy experiences real fear involving normal objects and experiences; puppy needs positive training during this time.
- By nine to 12 weeks, puppy is refining reactions, developing social skills with littermates (appropriate interactions), and exploring the environment and objects. Puppy begins to focus on people; this is a good time to begin formal training.

3-6 Months: Ranking Period

- Puppy is most influenced by "playmates," who may now include those of other species.
- Puppy begins to see and use ranking (dominance and submission) within the household (the puppy's "pack"), including humans.
- Puppy begins teething (and associated chewing).
- At four months of age, puppy experiences another fear stage.

6-18 Months: Adolescence

- Puppy is most influenced by human and dog "pack" members.
- At seven to nine months, puppy goes through a second chewing phase, part of exploring territory.
- Puppy increases exploration of dominance, including challenging humans.
- If not spayed or neutered, puppy experiences beginnings of sexual behavior. (Spaying or neutering your puppy at an early age will likely increase the health benefits of the surgery and increase his lifespan.)

Housetraining Puppies

Housetraining your puppy requires far more than a few stacks of old newspapers—it calls for vigilance, patience, plenty of commitment and above all, consistency.

By following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents. Virtually every dog, especially puppies, will have an accident in the house, and more likely, several. Expect this—it's part of living with a puppy.

The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy, and with some of the smaller breeds, it might take longer.

Establish a routine

Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. The schedule teaches him that there are times to eat, times to play, and times to potty.

Generally speaking, a puppy can control his bladder one hour for every month of age. So if you're puppy is two months old, he can hold it for about two hours. Don't go longer than this between bathroom breaks or he's guaranteed to have an accident. If you work outside the home, this means you'll have to hire a dog walker to give your puppy his breaks.

Take your puppy outside frequently—at least every two hours—and immediately after he wakes up, during and after playing, and after eating or drinking.

Pick a bathroom spot outside, and always take your puppy to that spot using a leash. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase, like "go potty," that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him what to do. Take him out for a longer walk or some playtime only after he has eliminated.

Reward your puppy every time he eliminates outdoors. Praise him or give him a treat—but remember to do so immediately after he's finished eliminating, not after he comes back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he'll know what's expected of him. Before rewarding him, be sure he's finished eliminating. Puppies are easily distracted. If you praise him too soon, he may forget to finish until he's back in the house.

Put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule. Do What goes into a puppy on a schedule comes out of a puppy on a schedule. Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same times each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well, and that makes housetraining easier for both of you.

Pick up your puppy's water dish about two and a half hours before bedtime to reduce the likelihood that he'll need to potty during the night. Most puppies can sleep for approximately seven hours without having to eliminate.

If your puppy does wake you up in the night, don't make a big deal of it; otherwise, he will think it is time to play and won't want to go back to sleep. Turn on as few lights as possible, don't talk to or play with your puppy, take him out to do his business, and return him to his bed.

Supervise

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house; keep an eye on him whenever he's indoors.

Tether your puppy to you or a nearby piece of furniture with a six-foot leash if you are not actively training or playing with him. Watch for signs your puppy needs to eliminate. Some signs are obvious, such as barking or scratching at the door, squatting, restlessness, sniffing around, or circling. When you see these signs, immediately grab the leash and take him outside to his bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

Keep your puppy on leash in the yard. During the housetraining process, your yard should be treated like any other room in your house. Give your puppy some freedom in the house and yard only after he is reliably housetrained.

Confinement

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, he should be confined to an area small enough that he won't want to eliminate there. The space should be just big enough for him to comfortably stand, lie down, and turn around in. You can use a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with baby gates.

Or you may want to crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine him. (Be sure to learn how to use a crate humanely as a method of confinement.) If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, you'll need to take him directly to his bathroom spot as soon as you let him out, and praise him when he eliminates.

Oops!

Expect your puppy to have a few accidents in the house—it's a normal part of housetraining. Here's what to do when that happens:

Interrupt your puppy when you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house.

Make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him) or say "OUTSIDE!" Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him, and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.

Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Just clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any other punishment will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. In fact, punishment will often do more harm than good.

Clean the soiled area thoroughly. Puppies are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces. Check with your veterinarian or pet store for products designed specifically to clean areas soiled by pets.

It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to minimize the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, he'll get confused about where he's supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.

When you're away

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time (approximately one hour for each month of age). If you have to be away from home more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy; instead, you may want to consider an older dog, who can wait for your return.

If you already have a puppy and must be away for long periods of time, you'll need to:

Arrange for someone, such as a responsible neighbor or a professional pet sitter, to take him outside to eliminate.

Train him to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of housetraining. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a life-long surface preference, meaning that even as an adult he may eliminate on any newspaper lying around the living room.

Paper training

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space, and a separate place to eliminate.

In the designated elimination area, use either newspapers (cover the area with several layers of newspaper) or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a container such as a child's small, plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at a pet supply store.

If you clean up an accident in the house, put the soiled rags or paper towels in the designated elimination area. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate.

Chewing: The Why's and How's to Stop a Gnawing Problem

Sooner or later every dog lover returns home to find some unexpected damage inflicted by his or her dog; or, more specifically, that dog's teeth. Although dogs make great use of their vision and sense of smell to explore the world, one of their favorite ways to take in new information is to put their mouths to work.

Fortunately, chewing can be directed onto appropriate items so your dog isn't destroying things you value or jeopardizing his own safety. Until he's learned what he can and can't chew, however, it's your responsibility to manage the situation as much as possible, so he doesn't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

Why dogs chew

Puppies, like infants and toddlers, explore their world by putting objects in their mouths. And, like babies, they teethe for about 6 months, which usually creates some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething, but also makes sore gums feel better.

Adult dogs may engage in destructive chewing for any number of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is chewing—and remember, he's not doing it to spite you. Possible reasons for destructive chewing include:

- ♥ As a puppy, he wasn't taught what to chew and what not to chew.
- ♥ He's bored.
- ♥ He suffers from separation anxiety.
- ♥ His behavior is fear-related.
- ♥ He wants attention.

Important! You may need to consult a behavior professional for help with both separation anxiety and fear-related behaviors.

Manage the situation

Take responsibility for your own belongings. If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, and remote control devices out of your dog's reach.

Give your dog toys that are clearly distinguishable from household goods. Don't confuse him by offering shoes and socks as toys and then expecting him to distinguish between his shoe and yours.

Supervise your dog until he learns the house rules. Keep him with you on his leash in the house so he can't make a mistake out of your sight. Confine him when you're unable to keep an eye on him. Choose a "safe place" that's dog-proof, and provide fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also place him in his crate for short periods of time.

Give your dog plenty of people-time. Your dog won't know how to behave if you don't teach him alternatives to inappropriate behavior, and he can't learn these when he's in the yard by himself.

Give your dog plenty of physical and mental exercise. If your dog is bored, he'll find something to do to amuse himself and you probably won't like the choices he makes. On the other hand, a tired dog is a good dog, so make sure he gets lots of physical and mental activity. The amount of exercise should be based on his age, health, and breed characteristics. If you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise. Offer him an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.

Build a toy obsession in your dog. Use his toys to feed him or fill a Kong-type toy with his kibble.

If your puppy is teething, try freezing a wet washcloth for him to chew on. The cold cloth will soothe his gums. Supervise your puppy so he doesn't chew up and swallow any pieces of the washcloth.

Make items unpleasant to your dog. Furniture and other items can be coated with a taste deterrent (such as Bitter Apple®) to make them unappealing.

Caution! Supervise your dog when you first try one of these deterrents. Some dogs will chew an object even if it's coated with a taste deterrent. Also be aware that you must reapply some of these deterrents to maintain their effectiveness.

Offer your dog a treat in exchange for the item in his mouth. As your dog catches on to this idea, you can add the command "Give" as his cue to release the object in exchange for the yummy treat.

Don't chase your dog if he grabs an object and runs. If you chase him, you are only giving your dog what he wants. Being chased by his human is fun! Instead call him to you or offer him a treat.

Have realistic expectations. At some point your dog will inevitably chew up something you value; this is often part of the transition to a new home. Your dog needs time to learn the house rules and you need to remember to take precautions and keep things out of his reach.

What not to do

Never discipline or punish your dog after the fact. If you discover a chewed item even minutes after he's chewed it, you're too late. Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're being corrected. Your dog can't reason that, "I tore up those shoes an hour ago and that's why I'm being scolded now." Some people believe this is what a dog is thinking because he runs and hides or because he "looks guilty."

In reality, "guilty looks" are actually canine submissive postures that dogs show when they're threatened. When you're angry and upset, your dog feels threatened by your tone of voice, body postures, and/or facial expressions, so he may hide or show submissive postures. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but could provoke other undesirable behaviors as well.

Puppy Nipping and Rough Play

It's not always easy to convince a new puppy not to bite the hand that feeds him, pets him, or plays with him, for that matter.

When puppies play with each other, they use their mouths, so they may also be inclined to bite or "mouth" your hand during play or when being petted. This is rarely aggressive behavior meant to do harm, but it is a difficult habit to break unless you encourage your puppy to try an acceptable alternative behavior. The goal is to redirect your puppy's energy onto acceptable chew toys, and to teach her to be gentle when a hand is in or near her mouth.

Encourage acceptable behavior

Redirect your puppy's penchant for nipping and biting by offering her more acceptable objects (such as chew toys) whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her.

As you or the child reaches out to scratch her behind the ears with one hand, offer the chew toy with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she's being petted. Alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the chew toy. You may need to start off by petting or scratching your puppy for short periods of time, since the longer she's petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

Discourage unacceptable behavior

You must also teach your puppy to be gentle with hands, and show her that nipping results in unpleasant consequences. Teach your puppy that nipping "turns off" any attention and social interaction with you. As soon as a nip occurs, look your puppy right in the eye and yell "OUCH" as though you've been mortally wounded. Then ignore her. Leave the room if you must, but ignore her until she's calm, and then try the chew toy and petting method again.

Jumping up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. Even if you push her away, she is still getting attention (even if it is a response that you might consider negative).

When your puppy jumps up:

Fold your arms in front of you, turn away from her, and say "off."

Continue to turn away from her until all four paws are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat. If she knows the "sit" command, give the command when all four paws are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat while she's in the sitting position.

If she begins to jump while you're praising her, simply turn away and repeat the second step, above. Remember to keep your praise low-key.

When your puppy realizes that she gets no attention from you while she's jumping up, but does get attention when she sits, she'll stop jumping up. Remember, once you've taught her to come and sit

quietly for attention, you must reward her behavior. Be careful not to ignore her when she comes and sits politely, waiting for your attention.

What not to do

Attempts to tap, slap, or hit your puppy in the face for nipping or jumping up are almost guaranteed to backfire. Several things may happen, depending on your puppy's temperament and the severity of the correction:

She could become "hand-shy" and cringe or cower whenever a hand comes toward her face.

She could become afraid of you, and refuse to come to you or approach you at all.

She could respond in a defensive manner and attempt to bite you to defend herself.

She could interpret a mild slap as an invitation to play, causing her to become more excited and even more likely to nip.

Set boundaries when playing "tug-of-war" or wrestling games with your puppy. When trained properly, these types of games can teach your puppy bite restraint and the limitations of rough play.

Be consistent

It's important that all behaviors, acceptable and unacceptable, be managed consistently by all family members. And remember that any method you try will probably not be effective unless you work hard to teach your puppy an acceptable alternative behavior.

A note about children and puppies

It's very difficult for children under 8 or 9 years old to practice the kind of behavior modification outlined here. Children's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed by a puppy is to push the puppy away with their hands and arms. This will be interpreted by the puppy as play and will probably cause the puppy to nip and mouth even more. Adults should closely monitor all interactions between their children and dogs.