

## Puppy Training:

Sometimes people feel overwhelmed with the thought of teaching a new puppy basic obedience commands and house manners. Thoughts of : Where do I start? How many hours is it going to take? What do I teach them first? may already be going through your mind. Puppy training is a matter of consistency and repetition. It does not take a lot of time but you need to make it a priority if you want a well-behaved family member. Puppies should start training the day they arrive at their new home. Don't wait until they are "older" since starting at 3 months or 6 months is already too late!! As to where to start, I have listed some suggestions you may find helpful.

### **Training tips:**

- *10-15 minute training sessions* twice a day are enough to get you and your puppy started. I have found a hungry puppy is much more attentive than a full one so I have always done the training before a meal.
- *Pick one command*, to start with, repeat it and reinforce it until the puppy will perform that action on command. Remember, your puppy is learning to speak human. It is a foreign language and takes practice before it will be understood. If it is not used on a daily basis, it will be forgotten so daily repetition is very important.
- Only *one person* should introduce the puppy to a new command. For our dogs, I did the training and when the puppy would do the desired action on command, the kids were encouraged to have the puppy repeat the behavior throughout the day and reward the puppy as the behavior was shown. They were told what words to use and how to offer the reward.
- During training sessions, some puppies respond well to praise, some to food, and some to toys. Find out what works best for your puppy and use it, together with lavish praise, to let your puppy know he has done something right.
- *Food rewards* – because puppy stomachs are sensitive to new foods, I suggest using the puppy's own food as a reward with the occasional new treat mixed in. Too many treats can lead to vomiting or diarrhea. Food rewards are good ones to start with and as your puppy learns new words, sometime replace the treat with verbal praise. Eventually you can replace most reward with praise.
- Take advantage of "*teachable moments*" in the day to introduce or reinforce concepts. For example, if you are teaching "leave it" and you happen to be taking the garbage out while your puppy is exploring and it comes to check out what you are doing, you can say "leave it" to let him/her know that the garbage is off limits. Make sure the puppy understands that the garbage is not to be touched. It is not a formal training session but it takes advantage of an everyday situation to teach or reinforce a concept.
- As new concepts are introduced, the puppy learns to apply the new "word" to a variety of situations. *Puppies are situational learners*. They will sit perfectly on command every time you ask in the house but the first time you take it outside and ask it to sit, it may not respond. Outside is a new situation so you need to teach your puppy that it needs to respond to the word sit in this situation as well as when it is in the house. For a dog to be reliable ( and even the best trained are not a 100% reliable in every situation) it must have an opportunity to learn basic obedience commands under a variety of situations.
- *Puppies are very sensitive to tone and body language*. To prove that point, just tell your puppy in a very happy, cheerful tone, with a smile on your face that he/she is a very bad dog. Your puppy will likely wag its tail and respond happily to your tone. Your puppy will sense frustration and anger in your voice during training session so if you find yourself getting frustrated, stop and try again later. It doesn't do either one of you any good to train under duress. Your puppy will just be confused because it won't understand what its done wrong. Puppies also learn hand signals faster than they learn words. If you are teaching a new command, put a hand signal with the verbal command to help your puppy learn. Just remember what signal you used and use the same one each time.

### **Basic commands and house manners:**

I have listed some basic commands to start with. There is no specific order although "**SIT**" is always a good place to start because it is the easiest to teach and can be applied to a variety of situations throughout the day. Bear in mind that these are only suggestions and do not replace a puppy kindergarten class and/or basic obedience classes.

- **Sit** – once learned, puppies should sit before getting attention, before getting food, before walking out the door, etc. This is the most used command and usually the easiest to teach because there are so many opportunities to use it in day to day life.
- **Leave it or No!** – puppies are curious and want to explore everything including things that may be harmful to them. Teaching a puppy to not touch something can save its life so this is important to start introducing as soon as you can. I

- use **leave it** for things they are not supposed to sniff, eat or investigate and **NO** for things that are absolute no no's like peeing on the floor or chewing my shoes. They are very similar and can be combined into the same command.
- **Outside** – when it's time to take your puppy to the bathroom, this is the word that they will learn to associate with the action of going outside to the bathroom. Repeat it over and over again as you take your puppy to its bathroom spot.
  - **Hurry up / go pee/ some sort of “it's time to go to the bathroom command”** – every time you take your puppy to its bathroom spot, use the same command so that the puppy learns that the word means “this is your chance to go to the bathroom”. Praise like crazy when your puppy does what you want but make sure you don't praise until puppy is completely finished its job. Sometimes the praise will interrupt a job that will end up being finished in the house!
  - **Out/Drop It/Spit-** If your puppy has managed to get something in its mouth before you noticed, you will need to find out what it is and make sure it is not harmful or you may need to take something away from it that it is playing with. Pick a word and every time you want your puppy to give you something, use that word. This is best taught during play time when you want to get the ball or toy back from your puppy.
  - **Wait** – before you open the crate door, open the door to go outside or open the car door to get out, tell your puppy **wait**. This is similar to stay although I use it to mean a short term pause rather than a definite stay in one spot until I release you. Use this word to teach your dog not to bolt out the crate or an open door. It must get permission first.
  - **OK** – release word. This word give a puppy permission to do something: either to get up from a sit, stay, walk through the door after being told wait or to eat something after being told leave it. ( My dogs hang around the kitchen when I am cooking. If I happen to drop something, I automatically say leave it. This gives me a chance to get to it before my dogs do. I may want to retrieve it because it wouldn't be good for them or, if I decide it is ok for them to eat, I'll tell them ok and they will enjoy the unexpected treat.
  - **Down** – Learn the difference between down and off. **Down** generally means lay down while off means get off me, get off the couch, get off the chair etc. Introduce down once the puppy is in a sit as they are half way there already.
  - **Off** – when your dog ends up on something you don't want it on, tell it **Off**. Dogs shouldn't be permitted on furniture unless invited and given permission. If you prefer not to have them on furniture at all, that is fine but you will need to teach them that. Puppies that jump up might be cute but dogs that jump up are annoying! Before giving your puppy any attention, tell it to **sit**. As long as it **sits**, pet it and give it praise, as soon as it gets up, stop giving attention and walk away. If it jumps up on you, tell it “**off**” and gently push it off of you.
  - **House/Crate/Kennel** – every time you put your puppy in its crate, tell it to go “**house/crate/kennel**”. Eventually it will learn that “**house**” means go into the crate and lay down. This comes in handy when company is over, during meal times or when puppy needs quiet time and you are leaving for a short while.

Many dog tricks simply take advantage of a dogs natural behavior. For example, our boy stretches every morning when he gets out of his crate and it looks like he is bowing. We started saying “bow” every time he did this action. Eventually he learned what “bow” meant and would do it on command. Watch your puppy for its natural antics and if an action/behavior is repeated frequently, add a word to it and you may be able to teach it to repeat the action on command.

There are many different schools of thought when it comes to training and many factors to consider. I have listed the commands but not the “how do I get him to do that” information. For the “hows” of dog training, use common sense combined with puppy classes to help turn your new puppy into a well-behaved member of your family.

There are lots of good books on dog training available at your local library. I have listed a few that I have found to be good resources.

**Dog training in 10 minutes / written and illustrated by Carol Lea Benjamin**

**The complete idiot's guide to fun and tricks with your dog by Sarah Hodgson.**

**Mother knows best : the natural way to train your dog / Carol Lea Benjamin**

**The dog listener : a noted expert tells you how to communicate with your dog for willing cooperation by Jan Fennell.**

**The dog whisperer : a compassionate, nonviolent approach to dog training / Paul Owens**

**Catch your dog doing something right : how to train any dog in five minutes a day by Krista Cantrell.**

**Clicker training for obedience : shaping top performance--positively by Morgan Spector.**

**The well-mannered dog : from dealing with cats to staying in hotels, a total guide to good manners / edited by Matthew Hoffman.**

**Before & after getting your puppy : the positive approach to raising a happy, healthy, & well-behaved dog –by Ian Dunbar.**

**Everyday dog : training your dog to be the companion you want by/ Nancy E. Johnson.**