

Puppy Training - A Matter of Life & Death



Training Begins At Home

Puppy training begins even before your puppy arrives home. The first step of any canine behaviour modification programme is: Management. This means that we manage the environment so that the puppy does not get a chance to practice, and make a habit of, any undesirable behaviours. And when considering what that might be, remember that what to us humans may be undesirable, or even considered a problem behaviour, is very often a normal behaviour for a puppy!



Priority #1: Safety

In the context of a new puppy, this means “puppy proofing” your home. It is similar to “baby proofing”, and includes the following:

Car

How will your puppy travel in your car? Safely in a crate? With a seat belt harness, few if any of which are safe and will actually hold up in a crash (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQHt1zkPRaM&>) and which are not suitable for young puppies? Loose in the back or held by a passenger and liable to fly through a window in case of accident? At best, that may result in the puppy running away in a panic and lost, or at worst killed. Held in your arms, your puppy will not be safe in case of accident – you wouldn’t travel in a car holding your baby in your arms, but you would put your baby in a safe baby seat. The closest thing we have to a baby seat for puppies is a crate, safely fastened into the frame of the car.

Antifreeze (ethylene glycol) is sweet and VERY tempting to dogs. A number of dogs die in Canada every year from ingesting antifreeze and the risks of this happening cannot be exaggerated. It is extremely toxic. All it takes is a leaking radiator, or a little spill on the garage floor, or a forgotten cap replacement. Please be VERY careful!

Cat Food & Cat Litter

Do you have a cat? Both cat food and dirty cat litter can be very tasty to puppies and dogs. Fortunately, cats usually have no trouble climbing up onto higher level surfaces where dogs can’t reach, so you can move the cat’s food bowl and litter box either to a room that is off-limits, or up onto a surface that is not accessible to your puppy.

Children’s Toys

If you have children, remember that many children’s toys are unsuitable for puppies. Consider any toy that is unsuitable for a child under the age of 3, to also be unsuitable for

a puppy. Also, anything that can possibly be chewed into pieces and swallowed, is likely to BE chewed into pieces and possibly also swallowed. - Tidy up accordingly, and keep the children's room off limits to the puppy by putting up a baby gate!

Closets

Keep closets and cupboards closed, to prevent your puppy from accessing anything from shoes (and shoe laces) to garbage and toxic cleaning materials under the kitchen sink.

Dog Toys

Not all dog toys are safe for all dogs. Soft toys with squeakers can be perfectly safe for a dog that wouldn't dream of chewing up his favourite teddy bear, but lethal for a determined chewer. Unlike baby toys, dog toys are not inspected and may include lead or other unhealthy substances.



Drugs and Other Poisons

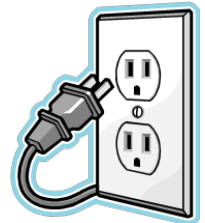
Keep medications, alcohol, household cleaning agents, chocolate, onions, avocados, raisins, grapes, mothballs and many, many other substances and items safe from your puppy. For more information, see:

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/poison-control/a-poison-safe-home.html>

Lay a good positive reinforcement basis for training "Mine/Take It" ("Leave It"), so that your puppy learns not to pick up anything that you drop by accident. (This skill is taught as part of Cowichan Canine's Foundation Programme.)

Electrical Cords

Fasten them to the wall so that little puppy teeth can not find them and make lethal chew toys out of them.



House Training Preparation

If you live in a house, it is a good idea to arrange for quick access to a fenced area outside. If you live in an apartment block, it would be a good idea to have a litter tray by the door, until the puppy is old enough to physically be able to hold it from the time he feels the need to go to the bathroom, is able to get your attention, wait while you get dressed, wait for harness and leash to be put on and still hold it while being carried or walked outside to the right spot.

Laundry

Dirty socks and underwear, which have been close to and carry the scent of the owner's body, are particularly popular with puppies, but any items of clothing can be attractive. Anything that contains elastics can be lethal if swallowed, as it may get entangled in the intestines. Don't leave dirty laundry on the floor, but put it away in the laundry basket that has safe a lid on it.

Miscellaneous "Stuff"

Elastic bands, paper clips, ties, string, coins, staples, etc., are small and easily dropped and lost on the floor, and even easier to pick up and be swallowed by inquisitive puppies. They are all capable of causing serious. Always have your veterinarian's emergency phone number handy, but do everything you can to prevent you from ever having to use it.

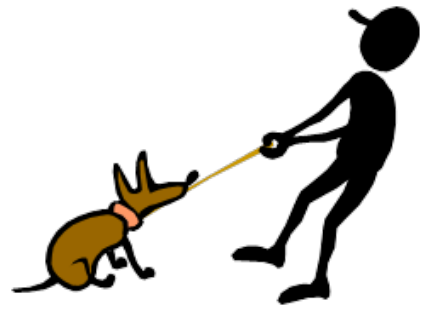
Neck & Spinal Injuries

A Swedish study conducted in 1994 by dog psychologist and behaviourist Anders Hallgren PhD of Sweden the "Animal Behaviour Consultants Newsletter" but now also published as

an [e-book](#) found that:

- 63% of dogs examined had neck and spinal injuries;
- 78% of the dogs with aggression or reactivity problems had neck and spinal injuries;
- Of the dogs with neck injuries, 91% had experienced hard jerks on the leash or had been pulling on the leashes.

Consider fitting your puppy with a plain walking harness instead of a collar. This will have less impact on a growing neck and spine. Sign up for a good quality class and learn how to teach your puppy to walk politely without pulling by using positive reinforcement.



Plants & Garden

Many house plants and garden plants are toxic to dogs. For detailed information, please see:

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/plants/>

Unless you are very familiar with mushrooms, it is also a good idea to keep your yard clear of these fungi. If you use mulch in your garden, do not use cocoa mulch, as theobromine (a constituent of cocoa) is toxic to dogs.

Stairs

If your house or apartment has stairs, you need to block them off until your puppy is old enough to negotiate them safely both up and down (discuss this with your veterinarian and with your breeder).

Toilet Bowl

There are many jokes about dogs drinking from the toilet. Consider instead what this water may contain both as regards bacteria and toxic cleaners. Think about the size of your puppy, and whether he might drown if he decides to try to climb in to discover where those interesting smells come from. Teach everybody in your family to close the lid of the toilet after use!

Waste Paper Baskets & Garbage Containers

Exchange uncovered waste baskets and bins for ones with lids, or even better, move them into cupboards, up on tables or otherwise out of reach of inquisitive puppies.

Priority #2: Socialization = Environmental Training (not just other dogs)

Why is Puppy Socialization so important?

It has been found that during the first three to four months of puppies' lives, their sociability outweigh their fears, which means that if we expose them to **positive** encounters with new people, animals, environments and other experiences, they will learn that these things are not to be feared. This, in turn, significantly reduces the risk of behavioural problems such as fear, avoidance and/or aggression later in life, which in turn reduces the risk of the dog ending up in a situation where she may be abandoned and/or euthanized for behavioural problems.

According to the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB), behavioural

issues, not infectious diseases, are the number one cause of death in dogs under three years of age.

The AVSAB has issued a document, "[AVSAB Position Statement On Puppy Socialization](#)", which is available on their website.

It says:

"For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated."

At a young age, the puppy still benefits from the immunity received from the mother via the colostrum. Combined with the initial, primary vaccination and appropriate standard of care, this is under normal circumstances considered to be a good enough protection that the risk of infection is likely to be less of a threat than the risks associated with the absence of proper early socialization, which may cause the dog to be abandoned or even euthanized because of the development of a serious behaviour problem.

This does **not** mean, however, that you should willy-nilly expose your young puppy to any and all unknown dogs!

What To Do:

First of all, **educate yourself** – YOU are your puppy's primary caregiver. She only has you to rely on for her safety and well being. YOU need to become your puppy's educated advocate on all issues relating to her health, safety and well being.

Don't take anything anybody says as gospel, be they a dog trainer (certified or not), the local dog park "expert", or even a veterinarian. Ask yourself:

- Does this make sense to me?
- Is this training humane?
- What is the dog learning?
- Where is the science to back up the statements made?



Secondly, **talk to your veterinarian** about your puppy's socialization, and the AVSAB's advice. Your veterinarian will have knowledge of local circumstances, such as current epidemics, that may have a bearing on how and where you should best socialize your puppy.

If you don't know any yourself, your veterinarian or your local dog trainer may be able to help you to find suitable, healthy and well cared for dogs that are safe (health- AND behaviour-wise) for your puppy to meet, to play with and to learn her doggy social skills from.

Thirdly, try to **find a safe, well run Puppy Socialization Class** in your area, where your puppy can meet safe dogs in a safe environment.

World famous dog trainer Terry Ryan says: *"Puppy class can be the best thing that happens to a puppy, or it can be the worst thing."*

- As your puppy's caregiver, it is YOUR responsibility to make sure that it is the BEST thing!

Finally, **socialize your puppy every day**. Socialization is not just about meeting a few dogs. It means to **EXPOSE YOUR PUPPY TO NOVELTIES AND NEW EXPERIENCES OF AS MANY DIFFERENT KINDS AS POSSIBLE**. Once a day, give your puppy a new, POSITIVE experience, different sights and sounds, noises, surfaces to walk on, vehicles, machinery, different environments, people in wheelchairs, with beards, with different kinds of clothing, hats, kids on skateboards and roller blades, on bicycles and dirt bikes, running, jumping and shouting, perambulators, shopping trolleys. Invite the neighbourhood teenagers around for a hockey night & pizza party, and you will socialize your puppy to shouting teenagers! Let your puppy watch you baking, and you are likely to socialize your puppy to sudden noises, like dropped baking pans, strange smells, ringing egg timers, etc. Invite a few neighbourhood girls over to help, and you may have a big mess to clean up, but your puppy gets trained!



Do not forget to socialize your puppy to your veterinarian's office! Don't just go there for shots and poking and prodding! Every day, as you're out socializing your puppy, drop in for a minute or two and ask the receptionist to give your puppy a cookie! Going to the vets office should be fun!

Be sure that you DO NOT SCARE YOUR PUPPY during his environmental training. Expose him in a positive way to different stimuli; sights, sounds, smells, people, dogs, etc.

If your puppy or dog does have a fright, don't make a big deal out of it, don't react fearfully yourself. Comfort your puppy and remove him from the situation. Your puppy should then be re-exposed to the situation "below threshold", i.e. from so far away or with such a small stimulation that he doesn't react fearfully at all. Reward your puppy for "being brave", and over time and with many repetitions, slowly increase the level of stimulus until the puppy is no longer worried – learn to read your dog's body language to assess this, and remember that those low tail wags do not mean "happy". Such a "counter conditioning" programme should be implemented with the aid of a qualified behaviour consultant.

Priority #3: Bite Inhibition

Bite inhibition is one of the most important skills for your puppy to learn. According to Dr Ian Dunbar, bite inhibition must be acquired during puppyhood. It is a fail-safe mechanism to prevent full-force bites that can cause serious injury. Just like we humans react with defensive gestures, using our arms and hands when we are taken by surprise, so do dogs react defensively with their mouths (having to use their hands and arms to walk on!). Thus, bite inhibition is a necessary skill in order to avoid unintentional injury.



Puppies learn bite inhibition when they play-fight with each other. If one puppy bites too hard, the injured puppy will yelp and stop playing. After a little while, play resumes with better care – the offending puppy is learning to be careful and control his strength in order

for the game to continue.

Like with any other behaviour, the puppy needs to learn it in different circumstances, playing with different puppies, dogs and people, before he "generalizes" his learning. Be patient. When your puppy is mouthing you too hard during play, pull away for a second and then start playing again. Expect to be bitten again, pull away, and then start playing again. Repeat over and over until your puppy gets the message. Be patient. So long as you are patient and consistent, puppy should soon learn that the fun stops if he isn't careful.

Prevention is better than cure: If you need to handle him, but he wants to nibble on your hands, start by giving him a chewie or a licky-mat, and then you can handle him while his teeth are busy elsewhere!

Avoid physical or confrontational techniques such as scruff shakes, pinning the puppy, slapping its nose, squeezing his muzzle or putting fingers down the puppy's throat. These reactions are ill-advised and often cause much more serious problems. like hand-shyness or fear of handling. Puppy nipping has nothing to do with "dominance", which is often quoted as misguided justifications for these harsh techniques.

See: <https://avsab.org/resources/position-statements/>

Priority #4: Housetraining

Dogs are naturally clean animals. As tiny puppies, their mother would keep the puppies clean, and once they start learning to control their bodily functions, they will instinctively wobble away from their eating and sleeping area to a separate toilet area. This natural behaviour stands us in good stead when we want to housetrain our puppies; by observing our puppy's behaviour, we can learn to spot when he starts to walk away and sniff the floor and we can then quickly scoop him up and go outside to show him the correct spot.

At 8 weeks old and for a month or two thereafter, accidents will still happen as the puppy's mental and physical abilities are still immature. The puppy is often taken by surprise; while playing or otherwise being distracted, he may not realize that he has to go until it is already happening! Therefore, it is up to you to manage the puppy's bathroom routine in order to minimize accidents.

As the puppy is not yet capable of controlling his bathroom needs at all times, we need to help. The basic advice for this is:

- 1) Take the puppy out whenever there is a change in activity, such as immediately after
 - eating or drinking
 - sleeping
 - playing
- 2) Keep an eye on the puppy at all times, and when you see him sniffing the floor as if looking for the "right spot", take him outside.
- 3) When you are busy and cannot keep an eye on the puppy, first take him outside to potty and then confine him to a small, safe area, such as a crate or an ex-pen.

Every time your puppy successfully goes to the bathroom outside, reward him immediately after finishing by telling him in a happy voice how happy you are that he went in the right spot, that you have the cleverest puppy in the world, and give him a treat or, even better, enjoy a short play session outside. Be careful not to associate going to the bathroom with immediately going back inside again and be bored!

With positive reinforcement associated with going to the bathroom outside, as soon as your puppy is physically and mentally mature enough (and this can vary greatly between individuals), he will want to do everything in his power to go to the bathroom in the right spot to earn your praise and rewards. That's all it takes.

When the puppy has an accident in the house, you may sigh or even swear at yourself (or even take the fabled rolled-up newspaper and beat yourself over the head with it!) for not keeping a better lookout on your puppy, but DO NOT punish your puppy. Punishment serves no purpose and will not teach your puppy anything but that you can be very unpleasant and dangerous. The puppy is unlikely to be able to associate the punishment with his act of going to the bathroom. If punished, he may well associate the punishment with you and decide that you are best avoided. Then, he may well go to the bathroom behind the sofa instead...

Priority #5: Crate Training

We all need to have our own private little place, such as a bedroom, a hobby room, or a study, where we can be "off duty" and just relax or do our favourite things. This is true for the puppy, too. Dogs love dens, and therefore a crate is ideal. Place it in a corner, in a quiet room that is always accessible to the dog and out of the general hustle and bustle of the family.

Hard crates come in plastic or metal (wire). The plastic airline crates give the dog more privacy and keeps out draft, but you can achieve the same with a wire crate by putting a towel over it, to make it darker and more den-like.

Soft crates come in fabric, like nylon (mesh). These are best used as temporary solutions when you are away from home. They are often used by dog sport enthusiasts at shows and trials, as they are lightweight and collapsible. They are not suitable for permanent use, and certainly not for puppies or untrained dogs, as they are not escape proof. The same goes for ex-pens.

The crate should be large enough that the adult dog can comfortably stand up, lie down and turn around without restriction.

The purpose of the crate is to keep the puppy safe from his own adventurous spirit when you are unable to supervise him, and this can include house-training. For example, whenever the phone rings, and before you settle down for a half-hour chat, wouldn't it be so much safer for the puppy to be in the crate with a safe chew toy or a stuffed Kong, and much more relaxing for you and your friend on the phone, too? So, ask your friend if you can call back in a few minutes, after you have put puppy in the crate with his entertainment. The same goes for when you are having your morning shower, cooking dinner, eating, etc. So long as you don't use it as such, being in the crate is not a punishment, but a way to manage your supervision and to keep your puppy safe. When the puppy is NOT in the crate, you need to supervise and give your puppy quality time.

At first, keep the crate door open (or take it off completely). Let puppy go in and out at will. You may toss treats in front of or into the crate, and even give puppy his meals in the crate. Don't close the door. If you haven't already, you will soon find that your dog intentionally retreats to the crate for resting and sleeping.

In a good beginner level class, crate training, or at least "Go To Place", should be part of the curriculum, and you can also ask about it in your Puppy Socialization Class.

Priority #6: Home Alone Training

Wolves and wild dogs live in family packs and hunt together. For a puppy to be alone and without his family can be life threatening, as he cannot hunt for his own food and he may fall victim to other predators. Instinctively, young puppies know this and will do their utmost to stay with their family and not get left behind. It is a matter of survival!

To function well in our human society, however, puppies and dogs need to learn that being left alone is not dangerous, they have not been abandoned, and they are not left in a life-threatening situation.

Different dogs will have different tolerance to being left alone. The best basis for home along training is to give your puppy good socialization and good crate training. With your puppy in the crate, start by leaving for just two or three seconds, and build it up from there to several minutes, then a quarter of an hour, then half an hour, and so on. Before training begins, make sure that your puppy is well exercised and ready for a nap, and has recently been to the bathroom. Don't make a fuss, neither when leaving nor when returning. Be matter of fact in your attitude and don't create a great, tearful farewell when you leave or a large celebration when you return. All that just increases your puppy's arousal and makes it more difficult for him to learn his home-alone skills. Remember to leave him with a stuffed Kong so he has something to do.
