

STARTING ON THE RIGHT PAW

Puppies, by nature, are very playful and inquisitive. Remembering that dogs are highly social pack animals, the relationship between an owner and a new puppy involves behaviour training, socialisation and play that is crucial for the dog's development into adulthood.



If acquiring a puppy from a reputable breeder, animal shelter or a pet shop, the usual age of most puppies obtained is around 7 to 8 weeks. It is preferable not to wean the pups off the female dog any earlier than 7 weeks; this will ensure that the puppy receives an optimal amount of 'colostrum' or first milk from the mum. Colostrum helps promote body growth and strengthens the puppies' immune systems.

It is also highly recommended that puppies be fully vaccinated to prevent diseases such as Canine Parvovirus, Canine Distemper, Canine Hepatitis and Canine Parainfluenza. Your vet will be able to instruct you on a suitable vaccination program according to the age of your puppy.

Socialisation

Puppy training should begin at around 7 weeks and continue until the dog is two years old when most dogs reach maturity. Once this period is over it becomes more difficult for the dog to accept new and unfamiliar experiences.

Early socialisation and training is very important. Without it, puppies can develop behavioural problems such as becoming overly noisy, not responding well to discipline or being more likely to fight with other dogs.

Until the puppy has received its first full course of vaccinations, limit exposure to any area where there may be a risk of the puppy contracting diseases.

During the critical socialisation period, it is important not to reassure the puppy if it shows fear when being socialised. This may be seen as praise to the puppy, making it more likely to continually behave in this manner. The best way to deal with this type of situation is to ignore any 'scared' behaviour and strongly praise confident behaviour.

Learning right from wrong

A new puppy does not yet know what is right or wrong. If the puppy displays undesirable behaviour, it is best not to scold them unless it is done immediately after the event. Otherwise the puppy will not associate the punishment with the undesirable behaviour.

In all areas of training, think of how you want the puppy to behave and what role you want it to play when it becomes an adult. Puppies won't stay small forever; therefore, dog owners must consider what is going to be desirable behaviour for a fully-grown dog.

Training

When acquiring a new puppy, it might be wise to look into some form of professional training such as 'Puppy Pre-School'. Professional dog trainers can assist you in basic skills to help train your puppy to become a well-disciplined and socialised dog later in life.

Talk to your local vet or dog behavioural clubs to find out what is available near you. Bear in mind that most clubs and training schools have strict guidelines that all dog owners must adhere to before they can bring their dogs to training sessions.

Some basic tips for training

- Choose a word that will indicate praise for good behaviour such as 'good' or 'yes'. Always keep it simple and use the word whenever your puppy is doing the right thing.
- Similarly, for undesirable behaviour, choose simple words like 'no' or 'bad'.
- With other basic commands like 'come' or 'sit', always reward the puppy when it does these to reinforce the behaviour with a positive experience.
- Teach your puppy his/her name, say their name and, if they respond by looking at you, reward by giving praise.
- Handle your puppy every day, so that it readily accepts being handled if he needs to be medicated, groomed or examined by a vet.
- Keep training sessions short and exciting, as puppies have a very short attention span; try to end the session on a good note.
- Always be consistent with your training; avoid changing the rules as this can cause confusion for the puppy.
- Avoid training your puppy if you are in a bad mood; puppies can sense any uncertainty in your manner. Remain confident.
- Continue to socialise your puppy throughout its lifetime – dogs are social creatures and as such need interactions with others of the same species.
- Continue training throughout your puppy's lifetime to assist in its mental wellbeing and obedience.

House rules for puppies

- When the puppy grows to be an adult dog, it will continue to behave in a manner according to how it was trained as a puppy. Behaviour that appears cute in a puppy may not be so desirable when the dog is fully grown.
- As exciting as it is to have a puppy in the house, remember to establish some house rules for your family and your new puppy.
- Doors and gates should be kept shut where possible.
- Do not encourage the puppy to jump up to greet human family members and friends.
- Discourage chewing or biting your fingers during play or attention seeking.

- Teach children to avoid playing rough or over-excitably games with the puppy.
- Young children should never be left unsupervised with the puppy.
- All human toys should be kept out of reach of the puppy until they learn not to chew them.
- Establish and maintain regular feeding times.
- Avoid feeding the puppy with human food from the dinner table during family meal times.
- Toilet train the puppy; be mindful that accidents will happen occasionally. Encourage the puppy to go to a designated toilet area, especially after meal times or naps.
- Avoid waking the puppy up when it's sleeping; puppies are inclined to sleep more when they are young, similar to human babies.
- The puppy should never be smacked, especially within the sight of children or they may imitate your behaviour later.

Dangerous items, valuables, clothing and waste bins should be kept out of the puppy's reach.

More information

The City of Palmerston produces a range of information sheets to assist responsible dog ownership. These include information about our off-leash area at Marlow Lagoon Pet Park, dogs in thunderstorms, animal management bylaws, and toys for your dog.

The information sheets can be found in the Library, at the Council office, and online at www.palmerston.nt.gov.au in our publications section. For information, you can also call Ranger Services on 8935 9977.

This information is provided for advice only.

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