

## **First Steps with a New Pup**

Just got a new puppy? Then you want to be sure you start training by doing all the right things. Unfortunately, many dog owners fail to realize that a puppy is always learning whether they are in training mode or not. The purpose of this article is to offer practical ideas on how to proactively reduce or eliminate the common problems experienced by puppy owners.

The separation of a pup from its dam and littermates can be an unsettling experience. Therefore, we want to do everything possible to ingratiate our new family member to his new environment. It is a good idea to take your pup home on a Friday afternoon if you work a typical work week. This will allow two full days for you to be with it and begin the bonding process. During the first 24 to 48 hours the pup can do no wrong. Do not scold or reprimand. Remember, everything is new to him. However, be sure to keep an eye on your pup at all times when he is not safely in his crate.

Once the grace period is over it is time for the pup to go to school. The first thing that needs to be understood is that while you may set aside time specifically for training, your pup is constantly learning what he can or cannot do. It is imperative that you be aware of this. A lack of understanding in this regard is what causes many well intentioned puppy owners to end up with dogs that jump, chew furniture and run away when called.

From the moment the grace period ends all rules must remain consistent. Therefore, if Fido will not be allowed on the couch, don't pick him up and sit with him on your lap. When you catch the pup chewing on something that is off limits, use a guttural sound to halt the activity but also be sure to offer something for him to chew in place of the off limits item. Never let the pup roam the house without one hundred percent of your undivided attention. If you do I can guarantee you he will get into something he should not have or eliminate in the house. Each time your pup does something he is not supposed to do it will become harder and harder to break him of the habit.

Make sure everyone in the family is on the same page with respect to training including children. Consistency is a necessity for a puppy to learn. Children should be supervised when playing with a puppy so that the pup does not get away with things that are off limits. Adults should support children so that the pup understands that it must respect the child too. I worked with a client recently who had four young girls ranging in age from two years old to ten years old. They have a beautiful and exuberant Golden retriever. They also have a similarly aged Bichon Frise. If one of the girls picks up the Bichon and fusses over it the Golden playfully bites at the child. To the Golden this became acceptable behavior because he never received a consistent message in respect to the behavior. I instructed the adults to make sure they were present when the children were playing with both dogs. I also told them to support the children if the Golden tried to nip at the dog in the child's arms. The support would come in the form of a Guttural "Eh-

Eh” just prior to the Golden reaching for the Bichon. Within no time the Golden understood that he was not to bite at the Bichon when it was in the child’s arms.

Another very common problem that people have with their puppies is pulling on the leash. This dangerous habit can be avoided by proactive measures that begin immediately after the “grace period” has ended. To start, bring your pup outside several times at day while it is on leash. Pick a place in the yard and stand stationary. The pup should try to move away as it picks up interesting smells or sees things it wants to check out. As soon as you feel tension on the leash gently flick your wrist bringing the pup back to a position where there is no tension in the leash. Remain in the same area for about a minute and then move on to another area and repeat. Use this exercise three to four times a day for about five minutes. Once the pup understands his “range” on the leash you can start walking with him. While walking, if the pup pulls out in front, one you feel tension on the leash stop, immediately pivot on your left foot and walk in the opposite direction. AS soon as the pup changes direction and follows to catch up with you offer him praise and a treat if necessary.

Other helpful hints in starting your pup off on the right foot include the use of a crate for housebreaking and times when you cannot give the pup undivided attention, observing body language, learning patience and not repeating commands, understanding that the pup will only associate a reward or punishment with the behavior you are trying to mold if delivered between one to three seconds after the act and using a training system that allows the pup to graduate from learning commands in a “sterile” environment to situations in which distractions are layered in to increase his focus and attention on you.

A puppy can begin to learn at seven to eight weeks of age. This is the best time to start and it is also the time most breeders will allow their pups to go to their new homes. Do yourself and the pup a favor and begin basic training immediately. Locate a credentialed professional that utilizes methods based in positive reinforcement. The Association of Pet Dog Trainer’s website at [www.apdt.org](http://www.apdt.org) is a good place to start. Good luck and good training.

*About the Author: Charlie Petrizzo, certified dog trainer, has worked with dogs and horses for more than twenty years. He trains dogs for private clients and breeds and trains Labrador retrievers for children with disabilities. He earned a bachelor’s degree from St. John’s University in New York, a diploma from The Animal Behavior College and is a candidate for an advanced diploma in canine fitness and nutrition from Cynology College. His personal story, including recovery from two life altering accidents that left him temporarily paralyzed and permanently scarred from burns over two thirds of his body, is truly inspirational. Charlie is a dynamic and motivational speaker. His website is [www.circleoflifecanine.com](http://www.circleoflifecanine.com). He can be reached at [ak9nose@earthlink.net](mailto:ak9nose@earthlink.net).*