

Puppies: Teaching Good Manners

"A dog should be a pleasure to all and a nuisance to none," says well-known dog trainer Barbara Woodhouse. Teach your puppy the following commands in addition to basic obedience, and he will be much easier to live with. Practice these commands a few times a day in very short play-training sessions.

Give:

To avoid unwanted aggression and guarding behavior later in life, train your dog to give you his prized possessions and even his food. The best way is to offer an exchange. Say "Give" and offer your dog a treat for his toy. The food offering will inspire most dogs to release the toy without struggle. Praise him heartily. Then give the toy back to him. Make it a fun game that he wins most of the time.

Get it / Leave it (Don't Touch):

Dogs who know the command "Leave it" will let things alone when asked. To make learning fun, play a game with your pup. Start the exercise with the dog sitting in front of you on a leash. With a handful of treats, offer him one at a time, saying, "Get it!" After two or three "Get its", offer him a treat, as usual, but this time say, "Leave it!" Of course he is going to go for it anyway because he doesn't know any better. When the puppy tries to grab the treat, give him a tiny bop on the nose with the same hand that offered him the treat, and repeat, "Leave it". As soon as the dog leaves the treat alone, praise him, saying, "Good Leave it!", then say, "OK. Get it!" and give it to him. Repeat the sequence four or five times in a row, saying "Get it" much more often than you say "Leave it." The puppy will think this is great fun and will probably catch on very quickly, learning to leave the treat alone when you say "Leave it".

Don't Pull:

Your cute little puppy may grow up to be a hundred pound powerhouse dragging you down the street if you don't train him not to pull on the leash. To prevent physical damage to the dog, avoid excessive jerking on a puppy's neck until he is at least four months old. Meanwhile, use a retractable leash, such as a Flexi-Leash(TM), so the pup can have some freedom, but meets resistance when he pulls. If he lunges, simply turn around and walk the other way.

Many trainers are now using Halti(TM) Head Collars to train puppies not to pull. The Halti(TM) fits around the dog's head and attaches to the leash. With the Halti(TM), the owner diverts the dog's head gently to the side if the dog tries to pull forward. Dogs don't like to lunge in a direction they cannot see. The experience is unpleasant for the dog, but humane, involving no pain.

Off:

No matter what they say, most people do not like it when a dog jumps all over them. Jumping up can even be dangerous when a dog jumps on a small child. The simplest and safest way to teach a puppy not to jump up is to back up when you see the pup coming and say "Off!" Reward and praise the puppy once all its feet are on the ground. You can also tell the dog to "Sit" so he learns something positive to do when greeting strangers. When the puppy is older, more severe measures can be used if necessary.

One warning: If you allow your dog to jump all over you, he may have trouble understanding why you don't allow him to jump all over everyone else. Try to be consistent!

In Your Kennel:

A dog's kennel should be his safe place, his den, his refuge. Your dog can learn to go willingly into his kennel on command. Tantalize your puppy with a treat or toy, then put it into the kennel and say "Kennel" or "Go to bed", or "In your Kennel" (choose one and be consistent). The dog will probably go inside. At first, don't close the door. Just praise the dog for going in. When he's used to going in, start closing the door, at first just for a few seconds. Give the puppy a little treat through the bars when he's inside with the door closed. Extend the time he spends inside the kennel gradually. Never let him out when he's crying as that only rewards crying. When you let the puppy out, don't make a big deal out of it. You don't want coming out to seem better than going in!

Speak / Quiet:

When a person yells at his dog for barking, the dog thinks the human is barking too, joining the fun. "Quiet" is a difficult concept for dogs. The most successful strategy we've found is to train the dog to bark on command before training the dog what "Quiet" means.

Show the dog a treat, make a hand signal and say "Speak". You may have to bark a bit at your dog before he gets the idea, but eventually he will probably give you a bark or two. Praise and reward immediately and with great fervor. Try again until your puppy understands this entertaining game.

Once the dog knows how to bark on command, get him barking and then suddenly say "Quiet" and place your fingers to your lips. This strange action will probably stun your dog into silence. Reward and praise excitedly! Repeat several times a day for a few weeks until your dog knows it dependably. Later, when you yell "Quiet", the dog will know what you are talking about.

Summary:

A dog with good manners is a pleasure to live with and to be around. Training your dog to behave in a socially acceptable way is fun. Your family and guests will thank you, and you will be proud of your pet. Wouldn't it be nice to have a dog who stops barking when you ask him to, who doesn't jump up on people, who doesn't pull you down the street and who will give you even his most prized possessions without a grumble? It's all up to you...