

Makes Your New Pup Feel Safe, Secure, and Loved Right from Day 1

Start off on the right foot by doing this for your new pup from day one, and avoid the common mistakes that can impact their security. Number seven could even save their life. Also, learn tips on house training, avoiding separation anxiety, and more.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Puppies as young as 7 to 8 weeks can begin to learn basic commands like “sit” and “stay”
- From the time your puppy is born up until about 16 weeks of age, your puppy is very vulnerable to experiences, both positive and negative
- Properly socializing your puppy by exposing him to a variety of people, animals and places in the early weeks will help him develop into a happy, well-adjusted dog
- The first few days with your new puppy at home will set the tone for your new life together. To help things go smoothly, be sure you’re prepared ahead of time
- Keep your puppy on the same diet he’s used to while adjusting to your home (later you can transition to a species-appropriate, fresh food diet)

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A new puppy can bring endless joy, affection — and chaos — to your home. Fortunately, while the joy and affection are life-long, the chaos portion will typically end as your pup outgrows the puppy stage, provided you have taken the time to teach him how to grow into a well-mannered adult dog.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to bring a puppy home without a plan in place for training and socialization. The window of opportunity is short, as by 6 months of age your dog is already entering the juvenile stage and beginning to adopt the behavioral patterns he’ll depend on as an adult.

Puppies as young as 7 to 8 weeks can begin to learn basic commands like “sit” and “stay,” and socialization is also key, starting at just 3 to 4 weeks old. From the time your puppy is born up until about 16 weeks of age, your puppy is very vulnerable to experiences.

Negative experiences during this time can have a lasting impact on your dog’s psyche as can a lack of experiences. Exposing your dog to a variety of people, animals and places during these early weeks, and ensuring the experiences are positive ones, will set the stage for a happy, confident and well-socialized adult dog.

Top 10 Things to Teach Your Puppy

If you're thinking of adopting a new puppy, empower yourself with the information that follows. These 10 items are essential to your new pup's physical and emotional development, so be sure you take the time to educate him properly.¹

1. **Expose your puppy to a variety of situations** — Letting your puppy explore and experience different sights and sounds is known as "socialization." From about 3 or 4 weeks of age up until about 16 weeks, all of the experiences your puppy has can leave a lasting impact, so try to make them positive.

Puppies are typically at least 8 weeks old before they go to a new home, which means you may only have another eight weeks to socialize your pup.

Reputable and high-quality breeders will have already started this socialization process in their pups, but if you've adopted a pet from a shelter, he may have already had some negative experiences imprinted on him.

Still, it's not too late to begin a positive socialization process. Bring your puppy to places that are safe and have a controlled environment (such as a small social gathering at a trusted friend's house, not a loud outdoor festival).

You can also bring your puppy with you to pet-friendly shops or restaurants or sign him up for a puppy play class. A "play date" with a friend's trusted dog can work well too, as long as you **introduce the dogs carefully**.

If at any time your puppy seems fearful, remove him from the stressful situation, but let him continue to observe it from a distance while you give him some healthy treats for reassurance.

2. **Leave your puppy alone sometimes to prevent separation anxiety** — When bringing a new puppy home, take time off work, clear your schedule and plan to spend a few days or up to a week dedicated to making the transition to your home successful. Puppies need constant care and attention and shouldn't be left alone for long periods.

That being said, if you never leave your puppy's side, your eventual departure may come as a rude awakening and your puppy may struggle with **separation anxiety**.

One way to reduce this risk is to gradually get him used to being alone. Introduce your puppy to his crate during this time. Provide him with soft blankets, a puppy-safe toy and perhaps a few healthy treats, then put him in his crate while you sit quietly nearby.

After your puppy is comfortable with that, try moving to another room and then gradually increase the time you are away. Start with just a few minutes and work your way up.

3. **Start housetraining right away** — From the second you get home, begin to teach your puppy where the appropriate place to potty is. There are three keys to successful housebreaking, no matter what your dog's age:

- Consistency
- Positive reinforcement
- Patience

In addition, there are four primary principles that will work to teach virtually any dog the appropriate place to potty, provided you apply the three keys above.

- **Stay with your puppy at all times** — If you leave your dog unattended, it gives him an opportunity to have an accident. For times when you can't give your full attention to your dog, let him stay in his crate. If your dog is outside the crate, clip the leash on your belt buckle, so you can keep a keen eye on him when you're going about life.
 - **Feed your dog on a schedule** — This creates a more predictable schedule for when your dog will need to go out.
 - **Reward good behavior** — When your dog eliminates outdoors, immediately praise him with words (spoken in a soft, loving tone) and offer a treat within three seconds of him finishing his job.
 - **Avoid punishing accidents** — Yelling at your puppy for a mistake will not teach him appropriate behaviors; it will only confuse him, scare him and possibly make the problem worse.
4. **Provide your puppy with chew toys** — Puppies love to chew, and new owners often become frustrated when their puppy decides to chew on shoes, clothing, furniture and other items that should be off-limits. You can avoid such mishaps by controlling your puppy's environment (keep him in a gate area, on a leash clipped to your belt or under your direct supervision at all times in the beginning).

Your puppy will develop preferences for chew toys early on, so provide him with a variety of acceptable chew toys and only give him free run of the house when he's learned which items he can chew on and which he cannot (this typically won't be until he is 1 year old or after).

5. **Try positive-reinforcement training** — It's important to teach your dog good manners, but be sure to do so using positive reinforcement, not punishment. The use of choke collars and other forms of punitive behavior training can harm your dog, physically and emotionally, and damage the bond between you.

In addition, negative training methods primarily teach your dog what not to do to avoid getting punished. What they miss is the important step of teaching your dog desirable behaviors in their place. Working with a positive dog trainer is recommended, especially at the puppy stage, but following are five steps to positive-reinforcement training to give you an idea of how it works:

- Come up with short, preferably one-word commands for the behaviors you want to teach your pet. Examples are come, sit, stay, down, heel, off, etc. Make sure all members of your family consistently use exactly the same command for each behavior.
- As soon as your dog performs the desired behavior, reward him immediately with a treat and verbal praise. Do this every time he responds appropriately to a command. You want him to connect the behavior he performed with the treat. This of course means you'll need to have treats on you whenever you give your dog commands in the beginning.
- Keep training sessions short and fun. You want your dog to associate good things with obeying your commands. You also want to use training time as an opportunity to deepen your bond with your pet.
- Gradually back off the treats and use them only intermittently once your dog has learned a new behavior. Eventually they'll no longer be necessary, but you should always reward your dog with verbal praise whenever he obeys a command.
- Continue to use positive reinforcement to maintain the behaviors you desire. Reward-based training helps create a range of desirable behaviors in your pet, which builds mutual feelings of trust and confidence.

6. **Make learning fun** — What goes hand-in-hand with positive reinforcement training? Making training time fun. Your dog should be excited when it's time for learning, and this will happen naturally when you incorporate a happy voice, toys, play and treats into your training sessions.
7. **Teach your puppy to come when called** — Teaching your dog to come when called (recall) is one of the most important behaviors your puppy can learn. Not only does it allow your dog more freedoms, but it could also save his life and prevent him from becoming lost.

Teaching this command should be a positive experience. Avoid calling your dog and then doing something he perceives as negative, like cutting his nails or giving him a pill. Instead, command him to come and then praise him, reward him and play a fun game (like chasing you around your yard, fetch or tug-of-war).

8. **Teach your puppy that human touch feels good** — There will be times in your dog's life when human touch may not be pleasant (such as during a veterinary procedure). However, there is a growing movement that **gentle handling with the least amount of restraint is beneficial for pets** and this is being increasingly used by caretakers of zoo animals and veterinarians.

If your pet is used to human touch, he may not need to be physically restrained at the veterinarian for blood draws or routine exams, for instance. You can start this process at home by petting your puppy and then rewarding him with a healthy treat. As his comfort levels with being touched grows, move on to other areas of his body, like his paws, ears and stomach. Provide treats and positive reinforcement and stop if your pet pulls away.

9. **Take your puppy on car rides** — Part of properly socializing your puppy should include trips in the car. He may associate your vehicle with leaving his mom and littermates, or he may be afraid of the noises involved or even have motion sickness, so taking your puppy on short trips and making the car ride fun (with chew toys, for instance) will help him to associate car rides with something positive instead of negative.

You can also make the destination of your trip fun (such as taking a trip to a nature preserve for a walk) so your puppy learns to adore car rides. When travelling by car, be sure to secure your pet in a crate or carrier that is securely fastened to your vehicle.

10. **Earn your puppy's trust** — It's your job to protect and advocate for your puppy. In time, he will learn that he can trust you and this is part of the powerful human-dog bond. As The Whole Dog Journal explained:²

"You have an obligation to be your dog's advocate, and not allow anyone, no matter who they are, to do things to her that go against your gut instincts about how she should be treated."

If you are committed to force-free, fear-free, and pain-free handling and training, don't ever let anyone talk you into treating her badly. No leash jerks, no collar shocks, no alpha rolls. Ever. Stick to your guns; there is always another way. If your animal care and/or training professional insists that the use of pain or force is necessary, find another one."

There are plenty of professionals out there who will support and respect your wishes when it comes to handling your dog. She cannot speak for herself; she is counting on you to speak for her."

Puppy's First Days at Home Are Incredibly Important

The first few days with your new puppy at home will set the tone for your new life together. To help things go smoothly, be sure you’re prepared ahead of time. This includes **puppy-proofing your home** and having these necessary supplies on hand:

- An appropriately sized crate
- A collar, harness and leash
- Bedding
- Dog brush
- Food and water bowls
- Nail clippers
- **Nontoxic chew toys**
- All-natural dog shampoo

Keep your puppy on the same diet he’s used to while adjusting to your home (later you can transition to a species-appropriate, fresh food diet). Once home, spend quality time with your puppy, petting him, cuddling him, and talking softly to him to let him know that he’s safe and secure in his new home. And remember to enjoy these early days — they go by incredibly fast!

Sources and References

^{1,2} [The Whole Dog Journal June 14, 2016](#)
