

Basic Training Tips

Training can start immediately and should begin with establishing yourself as the pack leader. The first six months are vital for establishing rules and a routine with the puppy. Crate training and housebreaking should begin as soon as the puppy is home, followed by familiarity with a leash. Remember to continue to focus on socialization as well as basic training.

Training is based on correction and reward. Puppies are naturally focused on pleasing their owners, and they respond well to praise and food motivation. Your puppy is capable of learning and connecting actions with words. Training your dog is a long process, but pays dividends if done consistently.

A Labrador puppy doesn't learn everything on the first try, it takes several repetitions for him to start getting the idea. You may have to start over again tomorrow. Forgive them and keep training. He is eagerly learning how to learn.

The guidelines and five basic commands below can be started at approximately 8 weeks of age. A firm "no" is enough correction for most puppies. Correction should never be harsh or angry. Always train your puppy with verbal correction and lots of praise and rewards. Begin training in a place free of distractions if possible. Keep training sessions short and fun, five minutes or less to begin, and end on a positive note.

1. Come

The "Come" command is critical for the safety of your dog and is a key command for the puppy to learn.

-In a quiet place, begin by enthusiastically calling your puppy to you over a short distance. Squat down to the floor and praise the puppy as soon as they begin to come to you.

If the puppy does not come, attach a leash and gently guide him and praise as he comes to you.

Avoid scolding the puppy for coming slowly and do not call the puppy to punish them, it will teach them to avoid you.

2. Heel

-Heel means that the dog is walking on your side, head even with your legs. With a puppy, start with being sure you don't pull your dog along or let them pull you. Associate a word such as "Lets go" or "Forward" when walking. Be consistent with whatever command you choose. Start with the dog standing next to you, use a squeaky toy to get the puppy's attention and begin walking. The puppy should step forward with you to follow the toy. After 20-30 seconds of attention, give the puppy the toy to play and relax, then try again. Gradually increase the time of training.

3. Sit

-Get down next to the puppy and use a treat as a lure. Say sit as you lift the treat above the puppy's nose. He will probably sit as they try to eat the treat. If they back up, gently guide them into the sitting position. Praise as soon as they sit and give the treat.

-Alternately, place one hand on his chest and the other behind his rear legs. Say sit and you apply pressure and guide them into a sitting position. As soon as they sit, reward them.

4. Stay

-Begin with the puppy sitting next to you on leash. Keep the leash loose and move around to face the puppy. Say "Stay" while holding the palm of your hand in front of the puppy's face. Take a step away with a loose leash. After a few seconds, step back, give a release word like "ok" or "go" and reward and praise. If the puppy gets up before being released, walk back calmly without saying anything. Put the dog back into the sit position, give the open palm command silently and walk away. Gradually increase the distance as the puppy learns. Three minutes is a good goal to work through. If the puppy repeatedly breaks the stay, start slower.

5. Down

-Begin with them sitting next to you. Place a hand on their shoulders and another hand behind his front legs. Say "Down" while pressing gently on the shoulders and scoop the legs until the puppy is laying down. Stroke their backs to get them to relax and stay in that position, then praise and reward. Use the release word, let him get up, and praise him again. Put him back into sit, then repeat the down command. Eventually they will lay down as you give the command.

Basic skills to manage behavior-from Cesar Milan

To have a balanced dog, you have to provide exercise, discipline, and affection, in that order.

1. Have a clear picture of the behavior you desire.

2. Clearly and consistently communicate the desired behavior. Energy, intention, and body language are more important than verbal commands.

3. Ignore mild misbehaviors by using the no touch no talk no eye contact rule, they usually correct themselves when

they aren't reinforced.

4. Immediately and consistently give corrections to more obvious misbehaviors

5. Apply corrections with calm assertive behavior-don't take it personally.

6. Always give your puppy an alternative acceptable behavior.

7. Reward good behaviors, with affection, treat or praise.

Leash training:

-Exercise is extremely important. Dogs are hardwired to migrate with their pack, they need walks.

-The walk helps you establish yourself as the pack leader and bond with the dog. Even if you have a very large backyard, the dog needs a walk and needs to be taken out into the larger world.

-A structured, regular walking schedule is vital, especially with dogs with behavior issues

-Begin leash training from an early age. Puppies are programmed to follow the leader. If you direct with calm assertive energy, the puppy will want to follow you.

Utilize short stints of leash training-five minutes twice a day. When short sessions become easy, gradually lengthen them.

-Hold a treat close to their nose to encourage them to move forward.

-Let a puppy drag around a short leash while they are playing to get used to the feeling.

-Make sure the puppy is calm submissive waiting beside you, then step forward. Hold the leash in an easy, relaxed manner. Head high, shoulders back.

-If the puppy begins to pull, pull up slightly on the leash, then immediately release the tension once the puppy gets back into line. Keep tension loose and the puppy beside or behind.

-If the puppy gets distracted, use a treat to engage the nose, then continue to move forward.

-If the puppy gets excited, do not get excited. Keep your focus and continue walking. A slight side pull correction on the leash will communicate to not get distracted.

-When returning home, walk through the threshold, have the puppy sit, and invite the puppy after you.

Other concerns:

-Remember to keep training sessions fun and brief, so that they end in success instead of failure.

We use clicker training once our dogs are 3 months old. They seem to respond well to the click and we have found it to be a viable method of training.

-Do not allow possessiveness over toys or food.

-Make sure the dog stops barking and is calm and sitting when a new person enters. No touch, no talk, no eye contact at first. Do not let the visitors greet them improperly.

-Jumping on people: Prevention is the best medicine. Ignore or actively discourage the jumping behavior by moving through it calmly and assertively.

-Hyperactive energy is not natural for a dog. A happy dog is alert and wagging, but an overexcited dog is jumping panting and cant stop moving. If your dog greets you at the door, do not greet with affection. If your dog is jumping on you, that is a sign of dominance. Do not allow it. Dogs don't greet other dogs by jumping. Keep the dog leashed when you are teaching her to greet visitors politely. Ask guests not to acknowledge your jumping, over excited dog. No talk, no touch, no eye contact, until they calm down.

-Do not give affection when the dog is fearful, anxious, possessive, dominant, aggressive, whining, barking, or breaking any rule in your household.

-Use energy and attention to communicate energy. Use touch to communicate displeasure or snap a dog out of an escalating behavior. A light tap, tssst sound, a touch on the side of the neck, or a claw shaped hand to mimic a mother's bite can divert the behavior. Always sharing a calm energy and being neutral but reliable is true leadership, and the puppy will respond.

Guide Dog Foundation article: How a Dog Learns

HOW A DOG LEARNS

Dogs are instinctual and are influenced by patterned behavior.

Trial and error is the most common way that they learn.

Example: A dog that is investigating a porcupine might not get hurt the first couple of times. However, the time they get hurt by a quill they will learn not to bother the porcupine again.

Dogs will continue behaviors that offer reward or favorable outcome.

Example: A puppy that investigates the counter-top because it can smell something good jumps up and steals the food. They are more likely to counter surf again in search of a reward for their behavior.

Any behavior that is met with praise and reward teaches the dog to repeat the behavior.

Example: Your puppy is barking in their crate out of boredom and you continue to ignore them. Then, they choose to be quiet and you let them out of the crate. You just showed them they have to be quiet to be let out.

Example: When you call your puppy's name from across the room they come over and will receive a food reward. Your puppy gets out of the house later that day, but you are able to safely recall them by calling their name and they respond expecting a reward that you give them the moment they return to you.

Dogs learn to avoid behaviors that have negative outcomes or correction.

Example: Our trial-and-error friend sees a porcupine again and chooses to move out of its way.

Example: Your puppy lunges at another pup while walking to class and causes uncomfortable tension on the leash. He continues pulling several times and continues to cause tension each time he lunges. After several times he chooses to stand relaxed on your left side.

Dogs learn by rewards and corrections. They adjust their behavior accordingly.

Example: A dog rewards itself by sniffing and scavenging the ground when walking if they are not redirected by their handler. They will continue to do so because they might find food or objects when scavenging.

Example: Your puppy eagerly lets you slide the puppy coat over their head at an early age because you praise and reward them every time you place it over their head.

Always correct or reward behavior as soon as they occur. Remember that correction and reward affect the outcome of later behaviors.

You cannot correct a dog that got into the trash 10 minutes ago when you just discovered the trash on the floor. They will not understand why they are being corrected.

Your puppy bites another puppy too hard when they are playing and the other pup snaps their teeth quickly in your pup's face as a warning. The correction was timed well so your pup understand that the other pup doesn't want to play roughly.

Never correct behaviors like housebreaking accidents, counter surfing, getting into the trash, or destructive chewing if you did not see them do it.

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