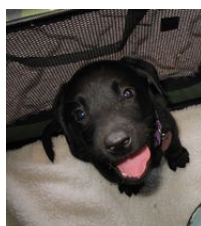


Why to train a new puppy and how to go about it

by Candi Moon



Got a new puppy?

Acquiring a new puppy is a wonderful and exciting experience, but can bring concerns along with it. Right from the outset you may wonder how best to cope with issues like potty training your puppy or how to control biting with needle sharp teeth, playing tug of war with your clothes, chewing, digging, barking, pulling on leash and jumping on guests.

You may also worry about a puppy who cries every time he or she is left alone or be concerned that your pup may grow up to be aggressive towards people or other dogs.

These issues may seem overwhelming but take heart. Puppies under the age of sixteen weeks learn extremely rapidly and its quick and easy to set them up with all the good habits you want them to have later in life.

Why is it important to train a puppy, why not wait until the dog is older?

Puppies are like sponges, soaking up every new experience eagerly and without fear until they reach four or five months of age. After this it is much harder to instill good habits and your dog may already have become fearful of other people, dogs etc. It is now a much longer and more difficult process to rehabilitate your dog. The time up until 16 weeks or so, it varies a bit from breed to breed and dog to dog, is the primary learning window of your dog's life. Just as early learning is important for a child, so it is for your puppy. Your pup's early experiences will have a fundamental effect on the dog he or she grows up to be.

So, how do I go about training my puppy?

There is a wealth of information available on the internet for training puppies. How do you tell if its any good? Websites and articles which advise you to hit, growl at, forcibly roll over, shake or choke you puppy with a choke collar are to be avoided. These are old fashioned and outdated training methods based on faulty research and will only serve to scare your puppy and teach your puppy to be afraid of you. Websites and articles showing how to use positive reinforcement training, lure and reward training with food and toys, clicker training and TTouch are beneficial and useful. These methods of training are easy to learn and fun to use and will set you up for a training experience which both you and your dog will enjoy. My most recommended web resource for online dog training information is Dog Star Daily at www.dogstardaily.com

However, no matter how good web resources may be, there can be no substitute for a good puppy training class. Having an experienced dog professional on hand to observe both you and your puppy and ensure you get all the information you need is the best and easiest way to set your puppy up for success. Also, puppy class will create a controlled environment for positive

interactions with people and other dogs, for a puppy who will interact confidently and appropriately when older.

Your puppy class instructor will be able to tell you how to avoid future problems you may not have thought of yet as well as help you to quickly and easily fix any problems you have now. He or she will be able to give you hands on direction with obedience training, helping you to position a lure correctly or get your timing right, or how to troubleshoot a problem when the usual methods aren't working. Your instructor will know how to interpret your dog's body language and teach you how to interpret it, and tailor-make the training process around the needs of you and your dog.

So how do I recognise a good trainer?

Firstly you should enquire about the methods and training equipment used. Avoid trainers who mention 'scruff shakes', alpha rolls' and 'choke chains'. Good trainers will use positive reinforcement and gentle training methods, usually lure and reward training using food treats. You can often find this kind of information on the trainer's website.

Talk to the trainer about any problems you may be experiencing or what you want to achieve during puppy class. Are they easily able to answer your questions in a manner that satisfies you?

Take a look at what previous clients had to say about the trainer or ask if you can come and view a lesson before enrolling. If the trainer refuses or you feel uncomfortable with the training methods used walk away. It is far better to travel a little further to go to a good trainer than to choose a substandard one who can potentially cause great damage to your puppy's personality.

If you do attend a trial class, to see if the trainer is for you, then look for the following: the training area should not be so large that off leash puppies during a play session cannot be reached easily by the trainer and should be securely enclosed. Periods of the class should be devoted to off leash play, training sessions should be kept short and fun and puppies should be exposed to different stimuli such as the sound of an umbrella opening, walking over different surfaces etc. to help them develop confidence and balance. Both owners and dogs should be treated with respect and have fun in the classes.

Ask what is covered in the course. A good course should cover socialisation to people and dogs, teaching bite control and having the puppy come reliably when you call him or her. Basic obedience training e.g. sit, lie down, stay and walk nicely on lead, should be covered but formal obedience is not appropriate for puppy classes. The instructor should address common puppy issues such as house training, biting, chewing etc. and provide a puppy obstacle course in the class for developing body awareness and resilience to new experiences.

I hope this helps! Congratulation on your new puppy, I wish you many happy and enjoyable years with him or her.

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Candi Moon

Furbabies Training

Tel: 079 490 3233

Fax: 086 545 7303

Email: furbabiestraining@gmail.com

Website: www.furbabiestraining.co.za