

TRAINING the new puppy

By Joan Orr, M.Sc.

Good behaviour is truly a family affair

A new puppy — what fun! The whole family can (and should) be involved with the care and training of its newest member. Kids can help with the training under supervision by an adult. Here, we will give you some tips on what can be expected from kids of different ages. Remember, children develop at differing rates, and so age ranges given in this article are just general guidelines. Assess the abilities of your child and the tolerance of your dog to determine what activities are suitable for both the puppy and child in your family.

There are some essential skills that kids of all ages and puppies need to learn right off the bat. Puppies nip, and love to chase anything that moves. Teach kids to ‘be a tree’ — that is stand still, fold their branches (hands folded in front), watch their roots grow (look at their feet) and ignore the puppy if it gets too frisky by jumping on them or trying to nip at their hands or clothes. Running away, screaming, yelling “No!” at the puppy, or pushing him away, may make the puppy even more excited. It might also frighten him if he is very sensitive. The pup will no doubt find kids ‘being a tree’ boring, and will soon give up. Eventually, kids ‘being a tree’ will cue the puppy that the game is over, and that no-one is going to play his rough games.

Canine behaviour specialist Teresa Lewin of Milton K9 Obedience in Milton, ON, suggests that parents attach a leash to a dog toy and have the kids drag it around, so that the puppy learns to bite at the toy and not the kids’ heels or clothes. Another technique that often works to discourage nipping is to squeal ‘Ow!’ and then withdraw attention from the puppy for a few seconds. And be sure that there are lots of dog toys available so that kids can give the dog something to bite on if he is in a nippy mood. Teach kids to give appropriate chew items to the puppy,



Four-year-old Maddie practices walking her pug puppy Ruby in their fenced back yard.

Photos courtesy of Joan Orr.

but never to take anything away from the puppy. It’s an adult’s job to rescue stolen items by trading for a treat or a toy that the pet is allowed to have.

Start training your puppy as soon as you get him home. Your puppy can learn to say ‘please’ by sitting even if he is only seven or eight weeks old. At dinner time, before you feed the puppy, have a two-minute training session. Hold a piece of food over the puppy’s nose and move it slowly backwards towards his tail so his head comes up, and he eventually sits. Give him the food as soon as his rear end touches the ground. If you are clicker training (which makes training even faster and safer for kids), click as soon as his rear end hits the ground and then give the food. Don’t push his rear end down or pull up on his collar, just let him learn on his own and have a positive experience with the joy of learning. Repeat ten times and then have the puppy sit to receive the remainder of his food from the bowl. At the next meal repeat this, but wait

one second from the time he sits to give him the food. Say the word ‘sit’ as soon as you are sure he is going to sit. At the next meal, have him sit and wait between one and three seconds. Gradually increase the time adding one second at a time, until the puppy voluntarily sits and waits for his food and you not longer need to hold the food over his nose. Now that the puppy has learned basic self-control around food, the kids can start to help with feeding and training the puppy.

Infants and Toddlers

Puppies and babies both need a lot of love and attention. Most experts agree that it is best to wait to get a puppy until your youngest child is old enough to follow instructions and have empathy for the puppy. This is especially important if you are a first-time parent or a first-time dog owner. Puppies have sharp teeth, boundless energy and a desire to explore and experiment. This can present a danger to an infant or toddler, and so constant supervision and physical separation using gates and crates is essential to prevent either puppy or baby from being injured or frightened.

Puppies (and even older dogs) can become very excited by baby swings, rocking baby seats, baby toys, crawling babies and toddlers with food or toys, and so it is important to have a crate or pen for the puppy where he can be with the family and enjoy chewing his own toys without interaction with the baby or toddler. A general rule to follow with babies and toddlers — and all dogs — is that adults must at all times touch the dog along with the child. Babies and toddlers must never be left alone with a dog, even for a second. If you want a cute photo of your baby and puppy, there must also be an adult in the photo.

Preschoolers (Ages 3 to 5)

Children as young as three years of age can help with feeding and training the puppy with close adult supervision. Once the puppy has learned to sit and wait for his dinner, the child can put the bowl down. Young children can also help with clicker training by tossing the treat on the ground for the puppy after the adult has 'clicked' to mark a correct response from the dog. Some three- to five-year-olds will be able to operate the clicker to tell the puppy 'good job' when the puppy sits or lies down on command, while an adult delivers the treat. Preschoolers can play with a small puppy by dragging a toy on a rope for the puppy to chase. An adult should be there to take the toy back (trade for a treat) and to get the game going again. Young children can also throw a toy for the puppy to chase once it has learned to sit and wait for the toss. Preschoolers and puppies require constant, close supervision, and any activities that could result in rough play or a high level of excitement in the puppy should not be encouraged. Encourage calm behaviour in both child and puppy, reinforced in the dog with attention, praise (praise the child, too!), petting and treats.

Ages 6 to 11

Kids in the six- to nine-year-old age group can begin to take on responsibilities for puppy care. They can measure the puppy's food and put the bowl down, ensure that the water bowl is clean and refilled, and can be responsible for the puppy's toys being returned to his toy basket. An 11-year-old is not old enough to walk a puppy by themselves, in case they encounter a larger dog. Walking the puppy should be a daily family event.

Lewin suggests that parents and child both have a leash attached to the puppy for safety if the puppy is large to teach the puppy to respect the child with the leash. Teach the kids how to groom the puppy, and allow them to help with gentle brushing on a regular basis. Involve the kids in training the puppy, and attend group obedience classes as a family so that the kids can learn from a professional instructor.

Many experts recommend clicker training as the best way to promote a safe and loving bond between kids and dogs. Veterinary behaviorist Dr. Gary Landsberg of The Doncaster Animal Clinic in Richmond Hill, Ontario (www.doncasteranimalclinic.com), discusses clicker training with all of his clients, making sure they understand the importance of using positive reinforcement as opposed to punishment in training. Norma Jeanne Laurette of Kitchener, ON, is the president of the International Positive Dog Training Association (www.ipdta.org). She says, "The positive reinforcement of the clicker method prevents the fear, anxiety, and aggression that are often the result of compulsive training. By choosing clicker training, your dog will learn quickly, both you and your dog will enjoy the process, but more importantly, you can create an intelligent dog with a trusting temperament."

Kids in this age range can begin to work independently with the puppy under adult supervision once the puppy understands basic commands and can exercise self-control in waiting for the treat. In fact, kids can be excellent dog trainers if given the chance. The basic steps in training are: 1) get the behaviour (e.g. hold a treat over the puppy's nose until he sits; 2) reward the puppy right away so he knows he did the right thing; 3) give the behaviour a name so



Teach kids to 'Be a Tree' if a strange dog comes near or their own puppy is getting too frisky

the puppy learns to associate a word (or hand signal) with the action.

Say "sit" as the puppy is sitting 20 times, and then try saying the word "sit" before he sits to see if he understands. Puppies need to hear the word while they are doing the action associated with that word. If your puppy is running away from you and you run after him shouting 'Here, Rover', he learns that 'Here Rover' means 'run away'. Lots of people have taught their dogs to run away using this method! Only call your puppy to you when you know he is already coming, and then give him a great treat or play a fun game when he gets to you. Kids can learn these simple training principles and be rewarded with a puppy that loves to follow their instructions.

Ages 12 to 16

Older kids can take greater responsibility for the care and feeding of the puppy. They can feed, groom, train and clean up after the puppy. They can let the puppy in and out of the crate. Most children in this age range can handle the puppy independently in a group obedience class (while a parent observes) and can continue as the puppy grows older and stronger. Lewin suggests that a child is old enough to handle a dog independently when

AGES AND STAGES

Child's Age	Activity with Puppy
0-2	• Parent must be touching the dog if child is touching the dog • Never leave infant/toddler alone with dog
3-5	• Constant and close supervision • Put down food dish for puppy that will sit and wait • Toss toy for puppy that will wait for toss • Help with clicker training • Drag toy for puppy to chase
6-11	• Adult supervision still required • Give puppy food and water • Handle puppy in obedience class with parent's help • Help with grooming • Put away puppy's toys • Teach tricks
12-16	• Handle puppy independently (as judged by parent) • Feed, groom and train with parental guidance • Handle puppy independently in obedience class • Play a major role in training • Walk puppy independently (possibly)

Guide to

Puppy and Kitten Care

Kids can help train the puppy in obedience class with adult supervision.



FIND A KID-FRIENDLY TRAINING CLASS

- Ask if kids are welcome
- Ask if positive methods are used
- Ask to bring kids to observe a class before registering

Look for the following:

- Class is well-structured — instructor is in control
- Class is not crowded
- Kids seem happy and are paying attention
- Dogs seem happy – lots of wagging tails
- Lots of praise and treats are used
- There is no intimidation or leash yanking to control dogs behaviour
- Misbehaving puppies are ignored, given more space to work, taken outside for a break, or redirected with treats or toys, but are not punished

the dog respects and obeys the child, when the child can read the dog, predict an impending problem and can intervene appropriately. This will occur at different ages and will depend on the maturity of the child, the relationship the child has developed with the dog and the temperament and level of training of the dog.

Changing Relationships

As the child and puppy grow, relationships can change. The puppy may ignore a baby altogether and become intensely interested in chasing an active toddler. A previously calm and placid puppy may suddenly at six or nine months begin to challenge authority, becoming pushy with children it views as playmates. As children become adolescents they begin to smell different to the dog, and the dog's behaviour toward the child may change. Parents need to be watching for

subtle changes in the dog's behaviour toward the children and continue with training using positive methods throughout the life of the dog. By avoiding punishment, rewarding good behaviour, setting limits (for both kids and dogs), providing kid and dog zones using gates and or crates and involving kids in the care and training of the puppy from the beginning, an extraordinary relationship can develop that will bring joy to the whole family.

Resources:

- **Doggone Safe** – Information about reading dog body language, bite prevention, clicker training and on-line lists of trainers (www.doggonesafe.com)
- **Living with Kids and Dogs Without Losing Your Mind** – By Colleen Pelar (www.livingwithkidsanddogs.com)
- **Clicker Puppy DVD** – Shows children training puppies using the clicker training method (www.doggonecrazy.ca) 🐕

Joan Orr is the president of non-profit Doggone Safe (www.doggonesafe.com), co-creator of the award winning Doggone Crazy! board game, co-producer of the award winning Clicker Puppy training DVD (www.doggonecrazy.ca), co-author of the book "Getting Started: Clicker Training your Rabbit" (www.clickerbunny.com) and vice president and co-founder of TAGteach International, promoting positive-reinforcement in teaching and coaching (www.tagteach.com).

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