

Pet Training/Behavior

Puppy Training

Puppy training classes are mostly geared toward socialization of the puppy. In other words, they help the puppy feel comfortable around strange dogs and strange people.

Puppies learn their social behavior early on and by a few months of age, their behavior patterns are set. If a young dog is not used to strangers of all species before he is three to four months old, he may never warm up to them.

Some puppy classes also help with obedience training. The sooner your puppy learns to listen to you, the better off you will both be. A few hours a week working with your puppy will pay off as a lifetime of good behavior.

The simplest way to start with your puppy is to teach him to sit. Make him sit for everything (before he gets to go outside, before he gets his food, before he gets petted). Once he has the sit command down you can teach him to sit and stay, and then to come.

As to the question of how well puppy training works, it all depends on the technique used. All training should be based on reward, not punishment. Punishment for behavior training is overused, and often causes more harm than good. If the training is not fun for both you and your puppy, neither of you will get much out of it.

Dominance Training for Puppies

Biting and nipping is a normal puppy behavior but it should not be tolerated. It stems from the puppies in the litter jostling for dominance. You have to realize that dogs are pack animals. In a pack, it is important to establish a hierarchy. The top dog rules.

Many people become subordinate to their dogs and do not even know it. These unruly pets soon do not obey and cannot be handled. And it all started when they were cute little puppies.

A puppy that nips is trying to tell you that he is in charge. When you let him get away with it, you are telling him he is right. When the puppy bites, you should tell him "no" in a low, deep, drawn out voice that sounds like a growl. You may have to tap him on the chin from below to get his attention. Then offer your hand again. If he continues to bite, repeat the reprimand.

This can be repeated three times and if the puppy does not catch on, isolate him for five minutes. If you have a crate, do not use this for isolation. We do not want it associated with punishment. Use a small room with nothing he can get into. Soon your puppy will learn that biting is unacceptable.

Often a puppy will listen to the man of the house and not the women and children. You must think like a dog to understand this. When a mother dog corrects her pups, she does it with a growl. A man's voice is naturally deep and mimics the mother's corrective growl. Women and children's voices are high pitched and sound more like the whining of littermates. Littermates can be dominated. This is why many puppies do not listen to the women and children in the family.

Be sure not to yell at your puppy. A mother dog does not yell at her pups. Yelling only confuses puppies. When you reprimand the puppy, talk in a low, deep, drawn out tone so it sounds like a growl.

Your puppy needs to understand his place in his new pack. He must see the family members as being dominant. We do not want to create a puppy that cowers in fear when he sees you, but he must obey you. Remember the top dog rules.

One way that one dog establishes dominance over another is by holding the muzzle of the subordinate in his mouth. Try this easy dominance exercise with your pup when he is unruly. Use your thumb and forefinger to gently encircle his muzzle. (Be sure he can breathe.) Put your face right up to his and look him right in the eyes. Tell him “settle down” in a low, deep, drawn out voice.

It is likely that the pup will cry and carry on for a few seconds. If you let go at this point then you have just taught him that if he throws a tantrum he will get his way. You must gently hold on until he settles down. As soon as he is still, let go immediately and praise him. It is important to do this exercise with love and not out of anger. Dogs can sense your emotions and you will have a loving companion only if you treat him lovingly.

Crate Training

When used properly, a crate is an excellent training and safety aid for puppies. This approach to training is often misunderstood, so I'll start at the beginning.

Crate training capitalizes on a dog's natural denning instinct. A den is a safe environment that becomes home for the dog. A crate recreates this security space plus keeps the pup safe from hazards of the home, and the home safe from destructive behaviors.

Dogs appreciate the controlled, structured environment the crate provides. Often, as the puppy grows and freedom is earned, the dog will return on his own to the crate for a nap or to escape from the kids.

Crate training can greatly ease house breaking. . . Left on his own, a puppy will poop and pee whenever and where ever it is convenient...for him. However, puppies learn from their mothers not to eliminate where they sleep. Crating teaches the puppy to hold rather than eliminate.

Crating also allows a puppy some quiet time. When the puppy gets too rambunctious, crating him will help him settle down. Nevertheless, the crate should never be used for punishment.

The first key to crate training is to get the right crate. Find one that is airline approved. The crate should be just large enough for the puppy to stand, turn around and lay flat on his side.

If you decide to get a crate that your dog can use when he grows up, you'll need to block off the back half to make it smaller while he's a pup. Otherwise, the large size will allow him to lie at one end and eliminate at the other.

Next, place the crate in a room of the house where the dog can see most of what's going on. Do not put paper in the crate, just a few favorite toys. Also, do not put water in a puppy's crate to help avoid accidents.

Puppies can begin training at eight weeks of age. Introduce the pup and put him in while telling him, “Kennel up.” He will probably whine a little, but will soon settle down.

Do not talk to or acknowledge the puppy while crated, as this will just make him anxious. After a few minutes, let him out. Be sure not to let him out while he is whining or you will be reinforcing the wrong behavior.

At first, keep the crate times short. This lets the puppy know that the confinement is not permanent. Gradually increase the amount of time he is crated, keeping in mind that young puppies need to eliminate frequently. By 4 to 6 months of age your puppy can be left in the crate for up to 5 or 6 hours.

Soon, as the comfortable time grows, your pup will be happy to kennel up, especially if you give him a small treat each time he complies.

The puppy should be crated whenever you are unable to watch him, when you go to bed and when you leave the house. He should only be crated for a few hours at a time during the day, and his collar should be removed for safety. Don’t forget to exercise your pup before and after crating.

The security of a crate does not replace the puppy’s need for being part of the family. Let him participate, enjoy and share.

Keep Cats Indoors

I think that in a perfectly natural world it would be best for cats to be kept outside in their natural environment. A perfectly natural world is one without cars, poisons, and neighbors. Unfortunately, this type of setting does not exist for most of us. Even if you live in the country, there are likely to be roads and neighbors within cat walking distance.

The outdoor world we have created is a very dangerous place for our feline friends. Automobile versus cat encounters are one of the most frequent emergencies veterinarians see.

It is unfortunate that there are also many neighbors out there who simply do not like cats. A few of these misguided souls are armed with guns, poisons or traps. Sometimes cats even fall victim to sadistic tortures, especially around Halloween.

Outdoor cats also run into non-human dangers such as fights with dogs, wild animals and other cats. Even if the violence of the battle does not cause harm, sometimes the resulting spread of disease will.

It is true that the sheltered life of an indoor cat is not natural and can lead to health concerns. However, the worst of the indoor concerns that I see is feline obesity caused by excessive cat napping. For me, the indoor benefits far “outweigh” the risks.

Cat Aggression

Cat aggression is a fairly common problem for owners in single cat households. Often cats attack family members, biting and scratching to the point of drawing blood. The simple reason for this behavior is that they are cats.

In order to understand cat behavior, we need to look at the natural tendencies of cats. In the wild, cats are predators. It is their instinct to hunt and attack. You can take the cat out of the wild, but you can't take the wild out of the cat.

Just because we bring these creatures into our homes and our lives does not mean that they are automatically going to conform to our standards. They simply cannot shake off thousands of years of evolution. Every cat has this predator tendency although they all express it to different degrees.

So, we are left with a predator among us, and no prey. The cat will sometimes take out its frustration on anything that moves.

The solution is to give the cat plenty of prey play. Toys that move or can be dangled in front of the cat for him to attack are great kitty stress relievers.

Another recommendation is to get a second cat, so they can take out their aggression on each other. This second strategy can backfire if the two do not get along. It is often best to raise two cats together from kitten hood.