

Puppy Cheat Sheet

Purpose Of This Page

This page is not intended to be an all-inclusive set of answers to every puppy problem. We merely list here the most common puppy questions we receive and simple suggestions to make your lives easier. Most tips will seem like common sense suggestions. (That's the idea.)

Training

- Begin early! Younger is better than older.
- Make everything a game, especially for young puppies (2-4 months).
- Don't expect obedience from puppies less than six months old. Anything they do when told is probably just coincidence, but praise them anyway. If they don't follow your command, ignore it and continue playing.
- Begin with "sit." It is the easiest thing to learn.
- Don't expect serious obedience until proper training begins around six months of age. If you start younger than this, puppies simply are not cognitively developed enough to understand what training is and what you expect them to do.
- When obedience training puppies (over 6 months), keep sessions short, twenty minutes or less. Repetition over time is the key, not marathon one-day sessions. (It's easier on you and your puppy.)
- Make training sessions fun for the puppy and for you!
- Find a good trainer to help you. Get recommendations from family, friends, Dr. Johnson and his veterinary team, and even neighbors with younger dogs. Ask who their specific trainer was because trainers tend to move around (every 6 months or so) until they join a dog training school, especially if the program is through a park district or a major pet store.

Diet

- Feed a puppy food until 10-12 months of age. Choose one of the major pet food suppliers, such as IAMS/Eukanuba, Science Diet, Purina, Royal Canin, ...ect.
- Feed a puppy 4 times a day until 3 months of age, then 3 times a day until 6 months of age, then 2 times a day until 1 year. Then you may feed your dog once a day if necessary, but we recommend twice a day feedings.
- Feed a large breed puppy food for puppies with an adult average size for their breed of 55 lbs or more.
- Feed only one type of food at a time.
- If you want to change puppy foods, remember that puppies have sensitive GI tracts. They can easily develop diarrhea or vomiting with sudden diet changes. Gradually mix in the new food with the original over 5-7 days. Begin with 80% original food and 20% new food on day one. On day two, feed 60% original food and 40% new food. Change ratios by 20% each day. If your puppy's stool is soft or loose, stay on the current ratio of foods for 1-2 days until stools are normal and then continue with the food transition.
- Keep treats to a minimum and use them primarily for training purposes.
- Do NOT give raw food to puppies.
- Make sure that you gradually increase the amount of food your puppy receives over time. Growing puppies require quite a bit of nourishment to keep up with their developing bodies. If your puppy devours his meal and still seems hungry, gradually increase the amount of food until he doesn't seem hungry afterwards.

Concerned puppy owners often worry about obesity, but in general, obesity is not a great problem in puppies unless they receive very large amounts of food. Ask us about amounts of food to feed, we're happy to help.

Chewing

- Puppies chew! Expect to have something destroyed during puppy hood. This is normal, so we recommend that you just prepare yourself for it now.
- Puppies do not know what they are allowed to chew. It is your responsibility to remove anything they should not chew beyond their reach.
- Give your puppy plenty of toys to chew and encourage their use. Play with your puppy with these toys. You are actually training your puppy what is fine to chew when they have that urge.
- Rawhide is okay, provided your puppy does not chew off large pieces and swallow them. It should take time for puppies to work over a piece of rawhide and if they swallow little pieces, that is fine. Rawhide is designed to be chewed and ingested.
- If your puppy chews on electrical cords, you need to address that problem IMMEDIATELY! Call a trainer or North Shore Veterinary Clinic for help.
- If your puppy bites your hands too roughly, you can do one of two things. First, ignore your puppy (don't even look at him, he will be watching for this) for a few minutes until he calms down and then resume playing. If he becomes rough again, stop playing and ignore him again. Leave the room. Try playing again later. Repeat this process over many days and have patience. Your puppy wants attention and he will do anything to get it. This type of training is known as "negative punishment" and takes time (several days to a couple of weeks). Beware, if this training begins to work, your puppy's behavior will actually get worse in the beginning before it gets better. Why? Because now your puppy does not have the attention he wants and he will try even harder to get it doing the same thing he has always been doing. Soon he will figure out that he needs to try something new and then you should reward him with attention when he behaves the way you wish. Second, simply remove your hand and stick a toy he can chew into his mouth and keep substituting the toy for your hand.

Housebreaking

- Your puppy is almost certain to have at least a few accidents inside at first, especially from stress or excitement. It's not the puppy's fault, just concentrate on housebreaking in the beginning.
- Do NOT rub your puppy's nose in any accident! This action does not teach your puppy anything because it does not understand what you are trying to tell him.
- Do not use "puppy pads" unless you always plan to use them lifelong for your dog. If you want your puppy to only eliminate outside as an adult, giving him the option to use the pads indoors will only confuse him later when you remove them. Plus, puppies often mistake newspapers and magazines for "puppy pads" when left on the floor. This is not their fault, these items all look the same to a young puppy.
- Your puppy will probably need to eliminate after meals, waking from sleep, heavy play sessions, and other times of stress and excitement.
- Some puppies will housebreak almost immediately and others will require up to two months. This has no bearing on your puppy's "IQ." On average, it takes two to four weeks to completely housebreak young new puppies. The actual amount of time depends mostly on your efforts and diligence.
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Discipline

- Never hit your puppy with anything.
- Do not rub puppy noses in any accidents. Puppies have no clue what you are doing to them or why.
- You must catch your puppy IN THE ACT for any discipline to be effective. If you are two seconds too late, all your puppy knows is that you are mad, but not why. Any discipline then is simply wasted on them and you.

- To discipline your puppy, a sharp firm "NO!" seems to suffice. Your puppy needs to be startled, not scared.

The KEY STEP is what to do next. Most people seem to forget or ignore this part. Introduce your puppy to what he should have been doing instead and make it a POSITIVE experience. (i.e. Give him a proper chew toy if he was chewing your shoe, take him outside if he had an accident indoors and encourage him to go and praise him if he does, make him comfortable on the floor or doggy bed and pet him if he was sleeping on the forbidden couch, etc....)

Finally, the next time he performs the proper behavior that you introduced when he was in trouble, praise him AGAIN! (This is the most important part.) You are on your way to having a well-behaved dog of which the entire neighborhood is jealous.

Baths

- Your puppy probably doesn't need a bath unless he is clearly covered in mud or a veterinarian recommends one for medical reasons.
- Puppies should not have a bath more frequently than once every three to four weeks because of their sensitive skin and coats.
- Use a dog shampoo to bathe your puppy. Do not use human shampoo, especially not baby shampoo, as this will rapidly dry out his skin and coat.

Behavior

- Puppies undergo several behavioral transitions during their development. Very young puppies (two to four months) tend to be fearless and often have too much curiosity for their own good. Older puppies (four to six months) often become scared of new things too easily. For this reason, it is very important to introduce your puppy to as many new people and things during his "socialization period" between two and four months. This will make later experiences much easier for both you and your puppy.
- Puppies exhibit "boom and bust" activity. They will play at 110% for an hour and then sleep, dead to the world, and upon waking they will be at 110% again. This is normal puppy behavior.
- Puppies can have a "variable intelligence." This simply means that although last week your puppy knew every command and obeyed promptly, this week he just looks at you as if you were speaking French, and next week he will sit perfectly to every command you will give. This too is normal.

The Most Important Thing!

- Be Patient! You will become an expert in patience. With it, every other problem you may encounter will not seem so bad.