

What to Expect From the New Puppy

The first days together - Many adjustments will be expected, both of the new puppy and the new owner. It is up to you to set the tone of your new relationship. The key words to remember are love, patience, and a gentle consistent attitude towards the beginning of discipline. Decide now what your ground rules for the puppy will be. Decide where he is to sleep and prepare for it. Decide what area of the property you will take him to go to the bathroom and then take him there every time. Carry him there when he is little. Never feed from the table and he will not become an annoying beggar. Be firm with your children about this. Prepare for frequent walks to accommodate his immature bladder. He should be walked immediately after rising, after every meal, after every nap and the last thing at night. He is by nature clean and will try to help. You will soon learn his signals of sniffing and circling, so regard these and walk him if you observe these signals. Praise, praise, praise every time he performs correctly. Be positive in your attitude in training, never negative. He is a baby until he is at least six months of age and more. Scolding for mistakes is not done in the early weeks after you bring the puppy home. He is a little baby (just like a real person) and is too little to understand what is going on and takes a lot of learning and patience to learn what it is you want him to do or not to do.

The first nights - Yes, he will cry. Remember he is desolate without his littermates with whom he has cuddled since birth. Prepare a cozy folded blanket in a corner or his crate for him. A ticking clock well out of reach or a radio will help keep him company. Pat him, reassure him, and leave him. The first two nights, if he cries go in to love and reassure him. Keep the crate you're your bed where he can hear you or smell your fingers. Eventually he will get the idea. Be firm but gentle and loving. Do not give in and take him out of the crate nor let the children do so. With children, I would suggest having the puppy sleeping area off limits at all times. A housedog should have a cool but draft free location, a cozy nest that is his alone. Fresh water should always be provided and you can take it up at night while he is sleeping.

Puppy-Proofing Your Home

You should consider that a puppy has an absolute right to chew whatever they can get at in your absence. You must put the puppy where it cannot do any damage. Puppies can eat kitchen cabinets, destroy furniture, chew on carpet, and damage a wide variety of other things. Besides the destruction, the puppy may well injure itself, even seriously. A good solution to this is a crate. A crate is any container, made of wire mesh or plastic that will hold the puppy comfortably with enough room to stand and curl up and sleep, and a little extra room to stretch out. You can also fence off part of the house, or the kitchen or garage or build an outside run. (You can construct a simple 4 X 4 with turkey wire in the garage very easily.) Put your pup in an environment it can't destroy. Puppies are too immature to handle temptations, many not being able to handle mild temptations until they're 6 months or older. Consider the analogy with a baby--where you keep it in a crib, stroller, or pen if you are not holding it.

It is essential to puppy-proof your home. You should think of it in the same way as childproofing your house but be more thorough about it. Puppies are smaller and more active than babies and have sharp teeth and claws. Things of special concern are electric wires. Get down on your hands and knees and consider things from this angle. What looks enticing, what is breakable, what is sharp, etc? The most important things are watching the puppy and, of course, crating it or otherwise restraining it when you can't watch it.

Teach him what is and isn't chewable. The single most effective way to do this is by having a ready supply of chewable items on hand. When the puppy starts to chew on an unacceptable item (be it a chair, rug, or human hand), remove the item from the puppy's mouth with a stern, "NO" and a tap up under the chin, and replace it with a chew toy and praise the puppy for playing with the toy. If you are consistent about this, the puppy will get the idea that only the things you give it are to be chewed on! Don't stint on the praise, and keep the "No!" to a single calm, sharp noise -- don't yell or scream the word. There are some products that can help make items unpalatable and thus aid in your training. Bitter Apple and Bitter Orange impart a bitter taste to many things without staining, etc. You should not depend on these products to keep your puppy safe, but use them as a training aid.

Puppies and Small Children

Keep puppies and very small children apart or under close supervision. Small children do not understand the need for keeping fingers out of puppies' eyes or refraining from pulling painfully on their tails, etc. And it is very hard for a toddler to keep an excited puppy from jumping and scratching on them. Teach your children how to approach a puppy or dog, to prevent being jumped on. They should understand that they should put out their hands below the pup's chin, to keep it from jumping at a hand above its head. They should not scream or run away, as the puppy will then chase the child. Remember kids in diapers when they run away, are one of a puppies most fun things to chase and bite right in the diaper.

Don't Be Surprised When...

1. Your puppy doesn't seem to pick up the idea of whining at or going to the door to tell you it needs to go to the bathroom. Many puppies do not begin this behavior until they are four or five months old. Attach a small bell on a string to the door knob and he can learn to ring it when he wants to go out.
2. Your puppy does not seem to pick its name up quickly. Sometimes it takes several weeks before you consistently get a reaction when you say its name. (Be careful not to use its name in a negative sense! Clap or shout instead.)
3. Your puppy does not seem to be particularly happy with verbal praise. You need to pair verbal praise with physical praise for a few months before your puppy understands and appreciates verbal praise.
4. Your puppy falls asleep in the middle of some other activity. Puppies need lots of sleep but since they are easily distracted, they sometimes forget to go to sleep and so will fall asleep at bizarre times: while eating, or even running.
5. Your puppy twitches while sleeping. This indicates healthy neural development. Twitching will be most pronounced for the first few months of the puppy's life, and slowly diminish thereafter. There are many adult dogs that continue some twitching. Expect muffled woofs and snuffling noises, too.
6. Your puppy hiccups. Many puppies hiccup. The only thing to do is wait for them to pass. Don't worry about it. They will out grow it.

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