



Puppy Training

When it comes to training your new puppy, you will of course need many tools like a crate, an arsenal of chew/puzzle toys, a simple buckle collar (NEVER use a correction collar on a puppy), a 4-6 ft. leash, high value treats, etc.

However, when it comes to the most urgent and important priorities, the tools you will need are of a different variety entirely.

While potty training and household etiquette are your first priorities, your most *urgent* priority is socialization with people and your most *important* priority is learning bite inhibition. These issues are urgent and important because they can mean life or death for your dog later on.

Here are the tools you will need to socialize and teach bite inhibition:

1. People of all shapes, sizes, colors, and ages. Especially strangers, men, and children
2. Other puppies (all shapes, sizes, colors and ages)
3. Yourself! Be a responsible dog owner and educate yourself how to communicate, teach, and create a relationship built on respect and trust with your new pup. Puppyhood does not last forever, time invested now will pay off BIG dividends in the future -- that is, years of great **companionship**.
4. A puppy class with lots of off leash play.

Socialization, your most urgent priority, is the process of exposing dogs to new environments and situations. It helps them feel more comfortable when encountering new things, animals, people and experiences. The critical period of socialization ends at sixteen weeks! This is the crucial developmental stage during which puppies learn to accept and enjoy the company of people and to enjoy being handled by people, especially children and strangers.

The clock is ticking, so don't wait! There is simply nothing better for your social life than having a new puppy! Throw a Puppy Party, go for car rides, take puppy to work, go to Super Bowl parties where people are screaming and acting silly, hang out on the coffee shop patio, etc.

Bite inhibition, or developing a soft mouth is the single most important lesson a dog must learn. Hopefully, your dog will never fight or bite. But accidents do happen and if an adult dog is badly hurt, frightened, or upset, their natural response is to growl and bite. However, if your dog has learned adequate bite inhibition during puppyhood, she is a lot less likely to cause any damage or break skin if she ever does happen to bite a human or fight with another dog.

One of the most colossal mistakes a new puppy owner can make is to punish their puppy for mouthing altogether. Puppies are born little biting machines and those needle teeth hurt! Still, in order to learn to inhibit the pressure of her bite, your puppy must be allowed to play-bite and play-fight. Puppies must be given constant appropriate feedback that any pressured bite is unacceptable.

Since puppy play is almost entirely made up of chasing, biting and wrestling, other puppies are the best teachers of bite inhibition. Puppies give each other excellent feedback when bitten too hard. Usually they will give a big yelp and then run away, as if to say, “Ouch, that was too hard! I don’t want to play with you anymore!” Thus, the biting puppy learns if she wants the play to continue, she must be softer with her mouth. The best way to give your puppy the most substantial opportunity to fine tune her bite inhibition is to find a puppy class.

The best Puppy Classes integrate short training interludes within off leash play sessions. An off-leash class allows the puppies to teach each other bite inhibition and gain vital socialization skills while owners practice and learn to control their puppy.

The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) encourages owners to take their pets to puppy classes as early as possible, preferably before the puppy reaches 12-16 weeks old, even before puppies have completed their full vaccination series. The Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association recently released a paper describing a study that concluded puppies vaccinated at least once prior to starting puppy classes at less than 16 weeks of age were at no more risk of being diagnosed with Canine Parvovirus infection than vaccinated puppies that did not attend classes.

In fact, the risk of a dog dying because of infection with distemper or parvo disease is far less than the much higher risk of a dog being euthanized because of a behavior problem. **Millions** of dogs are euthanized every year because of behavior and temperament problems. Therefore, the number one killer of pets in the US is totally preventable.

With the help of some other people, other puppies, and a good puppy class, you can socialize your puppy, teach her bite inhibition, and nip the most common behavior issues in the bud. You will be your new puppy’s life saver. Literally.