

PUPPY TRAINING

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When watching puppies in class having a good time playing off-leash and responding happily and willingly to verbal requests and handsignals to come, sit, heel, and down stay, one tends to forget the two most important reasons for attending puppy classes: learning bite inhibition and socializing with people. Off-leash classes provide an educational forum for pups to play-fight and play-bite with other dogs and to develop the confidence and social savvy for friendly interaction with people, especially with children and men.

Basic Manners

Some form of training is necessary for all owners to learn how to control their dogs' body position, location, and activity. Certainly, all aspects of obedience training may be accomplished at any time in the dog's life. But, it just so happens to be easier, quicker, and more

enjoyable to train the dog as a pup. In fact, by using modern psychological, dog-friendly, and owner-friendly training methods, off-leash control and hand-signals may be taught when your pup is just three months old.

Behavior Modification

Similarly, a dog's natural behavior may be modified at any time in the dog's life, although the older the dog, the harder the prospect. To reeducate a dog it is necessary to first break the existing bad habit before instilling a good habit. Since good habits are just as hard to break as bad habits, smart owners teach their puppies appropriate and acceptable behavior right from the outset—*what* to chew, *where* to eliminate, *where* to dig, *when* to bark, *how* to walk nicely on leash, and *how* to greet people

Socialization

Socialization and bite inhibition however, have pressing deadlines. Unlike obedience training and behavior modification, socialization and bite inhibition training MUST be accomplished during puppyhood. Preventive intervention is the key; to delay is utter folly. Prevention is easy, efficient, effective, effortless, and enjoyable, whereas trying to resolve temperament problems in adult dogs can be time-consuming, difficult, and often dangerous.

The temperament of every dog needs to be modified to some degree—that is, molded to suit the owners' lifestyle. All dogs are different. Some dogs lack confidence, whereas others are too pushy. Some are sluggish and others are too active. Some are shy, reserved, standoffish, asocial, or antisocial, whereas others are overly friendly and rambunctious. People tend to forget that a

domestic dog is not fully domesticated until he has been adequately trained, and socialized to enjoy the company of people, other dogs, and other animals.

Most potential dog-dog problems take care of themselves if your pup is given sufficient opportunity to play with other puppies and dogs. Puppies virtually train themselves to be friendly and outgoing, and a friendly dog would much rather play than run, hide, or fight.

Your puppy does, however, require significant help to develop confidence around people, especially around children, men, and strangers. Your mission, Puppy Owner, is to teach your puppy not just to tolerate, but rather to thoroughly enjoy the presence and actions of people. Specifically, you must desensitize your puppy to every conceivable potentially threatening situation, including petting, handling, hugging, and restraint, especially by children, men, and strangers, and especially around valued objects, such as a food bowl, toys, and bones. In addition to attending puppy classes, host a puppy party at home. Do not keep your pup a secret. Let other people enjoy the puppy, and give your pup the opportunity to enjoy other people. Socialization parties are a marvelous opportunity to teach a lot of people how to help you train your dog.

Bite Inhibition

Bite inhibition is by far the single most important quality in any companion animal, and bite inhibition must be acquired during puppyhood. Learning bite inhibition is the most important item on your puppy's educational agenda. Bite inhibition is a dog's fail-safe mechanism, preventing him from injuring other animals and people. Bite inhibition does not mean that your dog never reacts when scared or upset. Instead, bite inhibition clicks in when your dog does react to the unexpected: for example, when a child trips and falls on a dog when he is gnawing on a bone. Most dogs react when they are hurt, frightened, or startled. A dog with good bite inhibition would only yelp, growl, or snap, causing little if any injury. The prognosis is good since the problem may be resolved easily and safely with increased socialization and classical conditioning. However, a dog who did not acquire bite inhibition as a puppy might inflict deep puncture wounds and cause serious injury.

Dogs learn bite inhibition, i.e., learn that their jaws can hurt, when they play-fight and play-bite as youngsters. Puppies amp each other up until one puppy bites another too hard. Play stops immediately as the injured puppy yelps and takes the time to lick his wounds. When play resumes it is slower and gentler.

Puppy classes, and later, off-leash dog parks, offer the best venues for your puppy to learn solid bite inhibition and develop a soft mouth. Enroll in a puppy class right away.

To learn more about the importance of bite inhibition and socialization, read *AFTER You Get Your Puppy* and *How To Teach A New Dog Old Tricks*, and watch *SIRIUS Puppy Training*, all available from your local pet store or www.amazon.com. To locate puppy classes in your area, contact the Association of Pet Dog Trainers at 1-800 PET DOGS or www.apdt.com.

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