

Getting Started with Your New Puppy

Congratulations on your new puppy! We are here to support you and your new pup as they transition into your home. **Note:** raising puppies is *hard!* A certain amount of frustration as you raise your new puppy is normal. Be ready with a good sense of humor and an understanding that puppies are just babies who are constantly learning about their world, and we have the unique privilege of helping them along the way. You're not alone! Contact us for support.

LEARNING: Animals are always learning, whether we are intentionally teaching or not. It's our responsibility to help them learn the right thing, and to teach them in a way that creates a strong, trusting relationship based on clear communication between us and our pets. See our **training philosophy** handout for more information.

MANAGEMENT:

Arrange the environment to prevent access to "wrong" choices, making it more likely for your dog to make the "right" choice, and allowing you to say "yes" more often.

REINFORCEMENT:

Take **EVERY** opportunity to tell your dog they've done something smart! Even a simple behavior like feet on the ground – the more you reinforce a behavior, the more your dog will do it.

MISTAKES HAPPEN:

They are still learning! Ignore, or **neutrally** end the interaction and move onto something else. Make a note about what went wrong to better set them up for success the next time.

MANAGEMENT: Look around your home through the lens of your puppy. We can't expect that any pup coming into our home knows yet what we expect of them. We have this wonderful opportunity teach them from the very beginning, and the most effective way to teach them while also facilitating a strong, lasting relationship is to find as many ways to say "yes" as possible. If we're constant saying "no", we're not helping them understand what we'd like them to do instead, and are creating a lot of frustration and confusion for both us and our new pup. Instead, take away as many choices that might prompt you to say "no", so they aren't even an option to start with.

- **Limit access to a small part of the house to start.** Use baby gates and closed doors to keep them in a smaller, more easily puppy-proofed space as they are settling in.
- **Puppy-proof!** Remove anything that you'd be upset if your new puppy chews up or pees on. Blankets and pillows should be stored in a closet, shoes and socks should not be left by the door, remote controls should be in the drawer, etc. Anything that doesn't need to be out should be put away.
- **Create structure to the day.** Your pup should have little to no time when they are left to entertain themselves. Instead, schedule the day in a way that provides ample opportunity for physical and mental stimulation, followed by structured settle time - in a secure **confinement space** with plenty of appropriate options to help them relax, like a frozen Kong, a puzzle feeder, or a bully stick - once their other needs have been met.

HOUSETRAINING: Your new puppy does not yet know where and when you would like for them to go potty. As babies, they can only physically hold their bladder for a very short time! It's important that everyone at home has accurate expectations for the housetraining process and is a willing and patient participant in helping the new puppy understand what is expected of them. **See our housetraining handout** for more information.

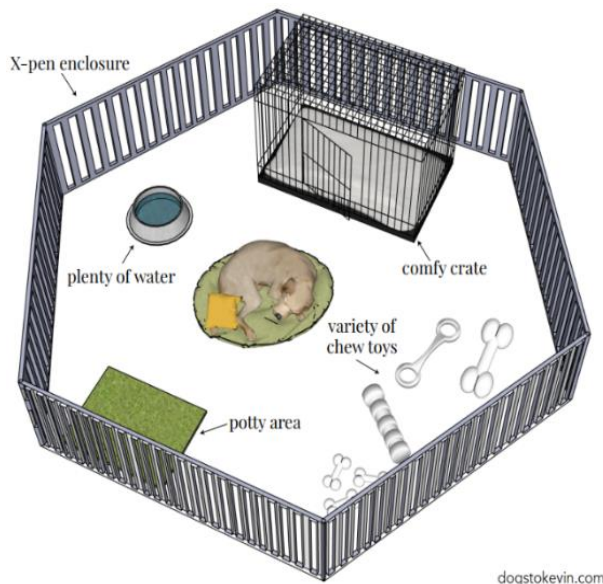
- **Schedule:** start your new puppy on a regular feeding and bathroom schedule right away. Start by taking them outside as frequently as possible – every 30 minutes to start, ideally.
- **Location:** go outside on leash or in a securely enclosed space to the same potty area (preferably grass or dirt).
- **Potty before fun:** potty breaks are separate from play time, walks, or exploring the yard. If your puppy doesn't go to the bathroom after 5-10 minutes, take them back inside and try again later.
- **Party time:** when they go to the bathroom outside, throw a party! Tell them how smart they are, give them a cookie, or pull out their favorite toy. Now play time or your walk can begin.
- **Never** punish or scold for accidents, whether you catch them in the act or find it later. Use of force/intimidation can make them afraid to go in front of you, and can make potty breaks less successful and more frustrating.
- **Clean up:** be sure to thoroughly clean any accidents in the house with an enzymatic cleaner.

Note: if your new puppy is very fearful, you'll have to start by helping them feel more comfortable and secure in their new environment before working on housetraining. See your adoption counselor with questions.

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CONFINEMENT: Create a quiet “home base”. Don’t rely on physical confinement alone, pair it with the necessary behavioral management too. They should only spend time in the confinement space following plenty of physical and mental stimulation, with an empty bladder, and plenty of appropriate activities (ex: long-lasting chews, durable toys, puzzle toys – ask us for recommendations) to keep them busy as they wind down for a nap. The space should be:

- **Accessible but not overwhelming:** in a low-traffic area, but where you can easily monitor. It should be easy to relax without too many distractions.
- **Puppy-proofed:** your puppy is still learning what you expect from them. Remove anything that you’d prefer they don’t put in their mouth, and then gradually allow more access to items as they are successful.
- **Secure:** start with some sort of gate, exercise pen, or closed door.
- Do **not** close your dog in a crate before teaching them to settle comfortably. Closing a dog in a crate before they are ready can cause your dog to bark, pace, go to the bathroom, or try to escape, which can cause injury to your dog and make crate training much more difficult going forward. **See our crate training handout** for more information.
- **Play some white noise** (search white noise on youtube, classical music, sound machine, fan) to block out noises as your dog is getting used to the new space.



CRATE TRAINING: Crate training is a functional way to keep your puppy safe while unsupervised, give him a comfortable place to rest, allows you to travel with your companion more easily, along with many other benefits. As with any new skill your puppy will need to be taught how to settle comfortably in their crate, should you decide to use one. It is important that you introduce your puppy to their crate gradually, and never shut them inside when they aren’t already trained to relax in that space. **See our Crate Training handout** for more information.

- **Location:** set the crate up in an area of your home that is quiet and comfortable but also allows visual access for both you and your puppy to see one another.
- **Door open:** leave the crate door open at all times - see confinement section of this handout for information about keeping your puppy safely confined without the use of a crate.
- **Surprise snacks:** periodically leave treats in the crate when the puppy is not paying attention so that they find them later when they wander near or into the crate.
- **When they get it right:** anytime you see your puppy in their crate take a few minutes to calmly pet them from the outside of the crate. If you see them laying down in the crate, pet them for even longer.
- **Meal time:** Feed your puppy their meals in the crate (with the door open).

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SOCIALIZATION: an important part of helping your new puppy grow into a well-adjusted, emotionally resilient animal.

It is:

- **Careful, intentional** intros to people, places, and things
- **At a low level** so your dog has a neutral or positive experience
- **Paired with something good** like a cookie
- **Aborted** if your dog exhibits fearful or overly excited behavior.

It isn't:

- Exposure to something new at close proximity or for a long time, regardless of the dog's response
- Passive or unstructured exposure without an option to abort if things aren't going well
- An assumption that with enough exposure your dog will figure it out on their own, outgrow, or eventually get used to something they are afraid of.



new people
Let your dog approach **at his own pace**, if and when he wants to.

Associate new people with **wonderful things**.

BACON!

Make sure puppies are **gently & positively exposed** to different people.

children, beards, seniors, people carrying & wearing stuff, different ethnicities, people on wheelchairs...

other animals
Always check that the other animal is friendly & tolerant of dogs before you let your dog approach.

Can my dog say Hi? Um... Better not.

Teach your dog how to act **politely around other animals** by rewarding him for good behavior. Redirect him if he's pushy or overly excited.

Over here! Good Boy! WHEW! SHAKE SHAKE

If your adult dog doesn't want to play with unfamiliar dogs, that's okay. Adult people don't want to play with every other person we meet either!

Let's go. Thank you, Mom! RUFF! RUFF! RUFF!

new things & environments
To prevent **noise phobia** (eg, fear of thunder), feed your dog a tiny treat every time the noise happens.

BOOM! **CHICKEN!**

CHEESE!

Introduce young dogs to lots of **different surfaces**.

gravel, tile floors, concrete, carpet, bridges, plastic, rubber, snow, sand, etc.

Take rides in a boat, train car, or elevator.

WOOHOO!

Visit the **vet & groomer's** just for treats and petting.

YAY!

YUM!

Teach your dog to **enjoy wearing a muzzle** by making it into a "treat basket"

Avoid truly scary situations, such as fireworks.

Visit parking lots and other busy places just to watch the people, animals, vehicles, etc. and feed your dog treats.

This is FUN.

Remember: EXPOSURE alone isn't socialization!

If your dog isn't having a great time, you could do more harm than good. Dogs don't just "get over" issues by themselves, so if your dog is shy, worried, or overly excited, leave the situation and work with a professional who can help both of you. If your dog is having a blast and is happy and comfortable, you're doing a great job of socializing him!

Words by Sara Reusche www.paws4u.com Drawings by Lili Chin www.doggiedrawings.net



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MOUTHING: Puppies naturally explore their world with their mouths. They are still learning about where they should use their teeth and with how much pressure. You can help them learn in the following ways:

- **Encourage other behaviors that involve their mouths:** smear soft food like peanut butter or baby food on your hand to encourage licking instead of biting.
- **They need to chew!:** provide options like Nylabones, different textured toys, frozen and regular Kongs, etc.
- **Nose target:** teach your pup to touch their nose to your hand. Put your open hand right next to their face. When they turn their head toward your hand, praise and give a small treat. Repeat until your pup is consistently moving their nose toward your hand. They will quickly learn that moving toward or touching your hand with their nose is a good way to get a cookie. Then, when they approach during play or excitement, hold out a hand for them to touch their nose to rather than biting. This is a great way to introduce them to new people, too!
- **Mistakes happen!:** when they do, calmly/ neutrally walk away, putting a physical barrier between the two of you for about a minute. Don't yell or frighten them, as this can teach them that you are a scary person to be avoided. Pulling or running away can become a fun part of the game. Instead, remain neutral.
- **Management:** avoid teaching behaviors that are too exciting and might over-stimulate your puppy, making using their mouth more likely, like running, chasing, or tug games. Instead, practice calm, functional behaviors like sit, nose touch, and settling. Have ample toys for their mouth instead of your hands during play time.
- **Nap time!:** learning is exhausting, and your puppy (who is a baby!) can't do their best when tired. If you notice more mouthing and fewer of the alternative behaviors you've been working on, it might be time for a nap.

TOUCH AS A REINFORCER: For puppies who are asking for them, pets from you can be a powerful reinforcer. Touching them softly or giving a good scratch behind the ear is a great way to tell them “yes, you got it!”. Identifying when your puppy does or doesn't want to be pet is the first step in using petting to shape behaviors like keeping their feet on the floor or even sitting when they meet a new person. The rules are simple – when they are doing something you like, pet them! Try not to pet them when they are jumping or putting their mouth on you.



... with “Undesirable” Behaviors:





By Sean Will & Maasa Nishimuta
Constructional Approach to Animal Welfare and Training
caawt.com



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ADVOCATE FOR YOUR PUPPY: It can be hard when what is in your dog's best interest conflicts with what is socially acceptable. Rather than having to have an uncomfortable exchange asking your mom or a stranger to stop interacting with your puppy in a certain way, set those expectations ahead of time. Prior to anyone interacting with your puppy, give clear instructions for how to interact with your dog, what you'd like to people to do or not do, etc.

- **Learn about your puppy's preferences through observing their behavior.** Dogs are individuals, just like us! They have likes and dislikes, or things they are more or less comfortable with – and they communicate those to us with their body. It's our responsibility to notice when they tell us that they are happy, afraid, or overwhelmed – and then use that information to inform how we will help them interact with the world around them.
- **Keep them safe (physically and emotionally) as they navigate the world.** Puppies are impressionable! Even one well-intentioned negative experience can have lasting effects on their behavior. Outings that involve your puppy should be structured to prevent them from becoming overwhelmed. For example, a busy parade could be really scary, but hanging back a few streets where they can still hear the noise and see people walking by, but aren't right in the thick of many new and potentially scary things, could be a great opportunity for learning. Use what you've learned about reading their body language to know when it's time to leave, and aim to end an interaction or outing *before* your puppy begins to struggle.
- **Give clear instructions for interacting with your puppy, and end interactions that are making them uncomfortable.** Just because they are cute doesn't mean that anyone is entitled to pick them up or give them a squeeze. Be polite but direct about what you'd like someone to do, or not to do, when greeting your pup. This applies to strangers, family, friends, *and* members of your animal care team like your veterinarian or dog trainer.
- **Plan ahead.** Avoid situations that you know will be hard for your puppy. If you can't avoid them, think about ways to make it easier like providing a Kong or long lasting chew, going somewhere public during off-hours when there will be fewer people, or being prepared to ask for space if your puppy is having a hard time.

SELECTING A TRAINER AND VETERINARIAN: The team you select to support you in raising your puppy will play a formative role in what you and they learn as you grow together. The importance of making the right choice cannot be overstated. We recommend working with animal care professionals who subscribe to a science based, positive reinforcement approach to teaching new behavior, and a force-free, Fear Free approach to medical care. Some questions to consider as you select your puppy's animal care team include:

DOG TRAINER (see [How to Choose a Dog Trainer handout](#) for more information):

- What exactly will happen to my dog when they get it right?
- What exactly will happen to my dog if they get it wrong?
- Are there less invasive/aversive alternatives to what you propose?

Visit [mspca.org/programs-resources-for-behavior-and-training-services-in-Boston, Methuen, and Waltham](https://www.mspca.org/programs-resources-for-behavior-and-training-services-in-boston-methuen-and-waltham)

VETERINARIAN:

- Are you and your staff Fear Free certified?
- What exactly will happen if my dog is experiencing fear or anxiety before, during, or after a visit?
- Will I be able to stay with my dog for the duration of their appointment?
- Do you offer "Happy Visits" to help my dog get more comfortable in the space and with the staff?



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RESOURCE GUARDING: Refers to behavior a dog exhibits when trying to communicate they are uncomfortable with a person or animal near their resource. This might look like running away with an item, becoming very still, looking at you out of the corner of their eye, growling, snapping, or biting. While this behavior may never pose a challenge for you and your new pup, it is important to know what to look for and contact us if you are concerned with your puppy's behavior.

Prevention is key! Teach your new puppy that it is **safe** and normal for a person to be in their vicinity while they are eating or otherwise interacting with something they really find valuable.

The most effective way to do this is to avoid putting unnecessary pressure on your puppy when they are eating.

DO NOT pet your puppy while they are eating, attempt to repeatedly remove their bowl, or insist on handfeeding your puppy to "get them used to" people interacting with their food.

DO give your puppy plenty of space from other people or animals while they are eating or chewing a bone.

DO toss snacks to your puppy if you have to pass by them while they are eating or chewing on a bone.

DO puppy-proof your space to reduce the chance of your puppy finding something you need to remove from their mouth.



MEETING OTHER DOGS: Appropriately interacting with other dogs is an important skill for puppies to learn. Because they are so impressionable, it's important to be careful and thoughtful in facilitating those initial interactions to avoid experiences that might negatively impact your dog's overall behavioral well-being.

Consider your puppy's preferences when it comes to other dogs. Some dogs love to wrestle, some like to chase, others are happy to share space but would rather not interact, while others might prefer not to be around other dogs at all. Forcing a puppy to interact with another dog when they are afraid or saying "no" can lead to behavior challenges.

- **Picking the right dog:** Some puppies do well with other puppies, while others might do better meeting calm, confident adult dogs to get them started with their learning.
- **Be an active participant:** Parents of all dogs should be present and actively participating in any introductions.
- **Saying "no thanks":** Ensure your puppy has the option to say "no thanks", and end the interaction accordingly.
- **Quit while you're ahead:** Try to end interactions on a high note, before your puppy gets too tired and their play becomes less appropriate, and before either dog has to give many corrections.
- **When to ask for help:** If your puppy is growling or barking at, biting, or otherwise struggling to interact with other dogs, do not ask them to interact with any other dogs and contact the MSPCA for support.

a small number of dogs are "dog aggressive"



they dislike all other dogs in general, but might have a dog friend at home.

most dogs are "dog selective" to some degree



some don't like excited puppies, some prefer gentle play, and others just have a few close dog friends. Many dogs transition from social to more selective as they become adults and develop stronger preferences.

some dogs are "dog social"



we see these dogs EVERYWHERE because they CAN go everywhere!



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