



FEATURE

Top training tips for puppies

Words **Kelly Gill**



There's nothing quite like the fun and delight of a new puppy. Choosing a four-legged family member and bringing them into your home is an exciting time. Right from the start, thoughtful care and management is really important; your actions in the first few months will influence your puppy's behaviour for life.

Raising a puppy is fun and rewarding. Putting some serious effort into the early stages will provide enormous benefits in the longer term. Early socialisation combined with consistent supervision and training should result in a friendly, well behaved four-legged companion for life.

Training should be fun

Training provides mental stimulation for your dog and enhances your bond and trust. Make sure training is a lot of fun for both of you!

Socialising is simply a term for activities that introduce your puppy to a wide range of positive experiences in a safe environment so that they learn how to be a confident and relaxed dog. Puppies that have negative experiences or are isolated are more likely to be fearful as an adult.

Up until about 18 weeks of age is the most important developmental period in your dog's life. During this time it is crucial to socialise your puppy by exposing them to as many people, places and 'things' as possible – other animals, children, trucks, skateboards, veterinarians, slippery floors, loud noises etc.

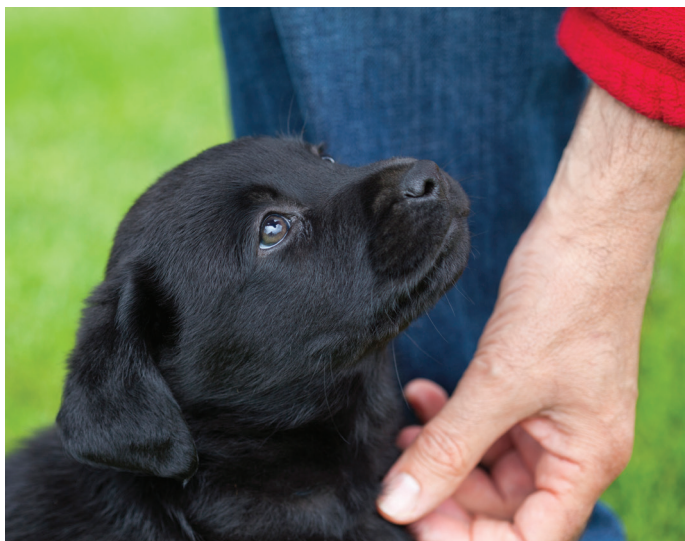




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Handle your Puppy

Teaching your puppy to enjoy being handled and touched everywhere on their body is very important. Begin by rewarding your puppy with their favourite treats every time you touch/handle them in different areas. This will also assist in building trust between each other. For example gently touch your puppy's tail and give them a treat, touch the puppy's foot and give them a treat. The aim is for the puppy to learn to enjoy this intrusion into their personal space.



Enjoyable alone time for your puppy

New puppies need lots of companionship and playtime with you, but it's also very important for them to enjoy spending time on their own. Preparing your puppy for inevitable periods of time being left by themselves is important; puppies need to learn how to occupy their time when home alone right from the start. Often there is a temptation to let your puppy follow you around all day, but this is not good for your puppy as they may eventually develop a dependency on your company and become anxious and destructive when left alone.

A puppy pen may be used for confinement when you cannot supervise your puppy. This will help keep them out of mischief and prevent them from destructive chewing, digging mistakes and toileting in the wrong place.

Safe chew toys for your puppy

Puppies like to chew and if you don't provide them with chew toys they are more likely to chew inappropriate items, like your furniture. Chew toys need to be made of materials that your puppy is unable to bite off or destroy easily, as these can pose a choking hazard.

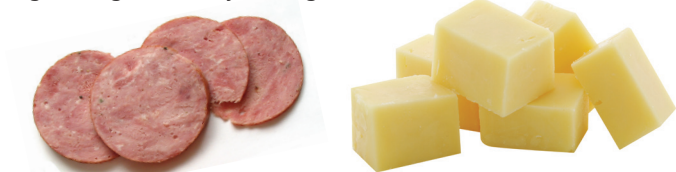
Ensure all toys are of suitable strength/size for your puppy and rotate the chew toys regularly to maintain your puppy's interest. There are plenty of interactive & food dispensing toys on the market now.



Teach a reliable Recall

This seems to be a behaviour that many people struggle to teach well. It will always be easier to teach a puppy that has no history of not coming back when called than an older dog who has learnt (been taught) the art of not coming back! It will take you time to build trust with your dog that it is well worth their while coming back to you.

Firstly we need to find what it is your dog loves!!! Then we can use this for our training.. For most puppies/dogs it will be a high value treat like chicken, cheese or cabanossi. Most dogs that aren't interested in training treats are either getting too much food for their everyday meals or the treats you are using are not high enough value to your dog.



There will also be some dogs that will value a toy or game of tug more than treats, so we can use this in our training too.

Now we need to start rewarding your dog when he offers the behaviour of coming to you as often as possible. Once he is offering this behaviour easily we can start programming this action with a recall word & then the reward. By only putting words to the right action we create very clear information for our dogs. We'll need to practice this as often as possible before gradually adding in distractions, remembering to reward generously.

Practice is the name of the game!

Remember when you are in an unfenced environment be sure to have a lead or long line on your dog to be sure of his safety.



Teaching Tricks

Puppies & dogs love to learn tricks. It doesn't matter what you teach as long as you are both having fun together. I believe trick training improves your bond & relationship.

Dogs can learn hundreds of different tricks. Some tricks may be easier for one dog than another. If you're having trouble teaching a particular trick just move on to teaching something different.

There is no end to how many tricks you can teach, it all comes down to how creative you are. The favourite ones seem to be 'shake hands', 'beg', 'roll over', 'speak', 'crawl' fetch' and 'play dead,' just to list a few. We all want to have a dog that we can show off to our friends and visitors so they know how clever they are.

Continue training

Problems often arise when puppies become adolescents from 6 to 18 months of age. I find that many people do not continue training after their puppy completes Puppy Classes and this often results in problems including jumping up, pulling on the lead, barking, food bowl aggression, chewing and digging.

I have developed an interactive, online course www.petlovers.com.au to help people and offer support during this important phase of their dog's development.

Just five to ten minutes of training and teaching tricks a day can make a huge difference to your dog's behaviour and help prevent problems.



Kelly Gill has over 21 years experience as a veterinary nurse, puppy trainer and dog class instructor. She is a highly sought after animal trainer for television and film and has been an instructor for her local Obedience club and running puppy classes for 20 years.

Kelly competes with her dogs nearly every weekend and has achieved over 250 Obedience and Agility Titles. She has twice

achieved the prestigious title of Obedience Champion and Agility Champion.

Together with Dr Katrina Warren, Kelly has set up the Pet Lovers Puppy Club for online puppy training . <http://petlovers.com.au/puppy-club/>

Above: Kelly in action with one of The Wonder Dogs

