

Puppy behaviour and training



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House training

It is possible your puppy may already be house-trained before you collect it; if so, consider yourself lucky! However, the majority of pups will still require some training before they can be considered house-trained.

Teaching a puppy to eliminate in a certain spot is based on the concept of positive reinforcement; that is, rewarding the correct behaviour (in this case toileting at the right spot). Negative reinforcements, such as rubbing the pup's nose in soiled areas or telling it off, are not effective, and will only cause stress for your puppy.

Make sure to take your puppy out to the designated spot regularly (including overnight), especially after eating and drinking, and also just after waking. When your puppy goes to the toilet, give it some praise and a small treat. Also watch your pup carefully when inside for signs that it may need to go to the toilet, such as sniffing the ground or circling and squatting; take your puppy outside immediately when this happens.

Over time, with consistent rewarding, your puppy will associate the appropriate spot with toileting. If accidents happen, it is best to clean the area with enzyme cleaners that do not have a strong smell, and particularly avoid bleach/ammonia products, which for dogs can smell similar to urine and may confuse your puppy. If you have any problems, please speak to one of our staff.

Biting and mouthing

Biting and mouthing is normal behaviour for young pups: it is part of the process of exploring and learning about the world, as well as a way for them to develop control of their jaw muscles. Puppies will also begin to grow their adult teeth from about three months of age, and chewing helps relieve some of the discomfort associated with this. Usually the biting will settle by six months of age but in some puppies this behaviour can be excessive and beyond normality.

There are several steps you can take to help control it:

- Make sure that there are plenty of appropriate toys for your pup to chew on and direct any biting behaviour onto these chews.
- When the puppy bites inappropriately, simply say "No!" in a short, sharp tone. If the biting continues, put the puppy in a 'naughty area', such as a separate room or outside. After five to 10 minutes, let the puppy back in without any scolding or praise.
- Avoid rewarding biting behaviour by patting it or continuing to play while your pup is biting. Also avoid tug-of-war type games, which can encourage biting behaviour.

As with house training, it is important to avoid negative reinforcements such as smacking or shouting at the pup. Consistency is also vital to stopping the problem – if your puppy sometimes gets away with biting, it will take much longer to stop the behaviour

Socialisation

Puppies develop their own personalities very quickly and in order to ensure that your pup is happy and well-adjusted, it is important to begin educating it early.

All puppies go through a 'socialisation period', usually between six and 16 weeks of age, when they learn normal social behaviour and form their outlook on the world. Puppies that are not nurtured during this period often become fearful and wary of new people and places. For this reason, it is very important to introduce your puppy to a wide range of stimuli when young, always ensuring the experience is a positive one. Make sure your puppy is comfortable around different people, including children, and also traffic and noisy objects like vacuum cleaners.

Handling your puppy in sensitive areas, such as looking in the ears, opening the mouth and touching the paws, means that your puppy will be much more relaxed if these areas ever require any treatment.

It is also important that you introduce other dogs and animals while young but please be aware that until your puppy's final shots have been given it should only have contact with fully vaccinated dogs. A good way of helping to socialise your puppy is to take it to puppy preschool. These classes are held regularly at our clinic – please enquire with our staff for more information.