

When Should Training & Housebreaking Begin?

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Some people believe that young puppies, those less than 16 weeks of age, should not be exposed to any sort of a puppy training program. They feel that people should be using this time to simply expose the dog to her new home and family. They believe that this should be a totally unrestricted period, one with few rules so the puppy can widen her experiences at her own pace. Their thoughts often revolve around the conception that puppy training will have a harmful effect on the socialization process especially when discipline is used to define what is acceptable behavior and what is not. We disagree, and we do so possibly because of the training methods we believe in and utilize. Do not expect to read anything about training in this article that will cause your puppy mental or physical pain. We have no desire to frighten them, scold them into submission, or use our hands or any tool to hurt them. It is not our style.

Remember, we already are training the puppy – we are housebreaking her. This involves a lot of training and if done correctly, no one would say that it hinders socialization. We are altering the puppy's natural behavior patterns to ones that are appropriate for living inside of our homes. We take their instinctive behavior, and change it to one we approve of or want. The last sentence could be used as a definition of either general training or the process of housebreaking. In this context they are the same.

We think training, at least for house-dogs, should start as soon as you bring them home. We see no reason to wait. As a matter of fact, we see reasons not to wait. Puppy training is, as much as anything else, the formation of good habits. If we let our new puppy run wild for a long period of time, doing as she wants, bad habits will form. And when training your dog, you will find that it is much easier and takes less time to initially form good habits than to try to eliminate bad ones and then replace them with the preferred behavior. This is one of the reasons we stress bringing your new puppy home at 7 weeks of age. In addition to the effects on socialization, those that make their grand entrance at 12 weeks or later are a much greater challenge to initial training. This is because they have already formed so many habits or life styles in a kennel situation that are not acceptable to living inside your home. As an example, they urinate or defecate wherever and whenever they desire and sometimes then develop the behavior of tracking through these wastes, or even eating them.

We also like starting with puppies at 7 weeks of age because they are so eager to please. They are very formative at this age. You are their new family, their home base. They, in their canine way, reach out to you for security and love. Believe us, they want this relationship to work just as much as you do. Assuming that the pups had a normal socialization process at their previous home, watch them carefully and you will note that after just 2 or 3 days they will probably come or respond to you whenever they are afraid or unsure of something new. It could be anything from a loud noise to meeting a new person or dog. They are seeing you as their protector or at least something they understand and accept as part of their world. If it can be demonstrated in any way during this period what you want, they will attempt to please you. Be aware that licking your hand or face is not done to soften up a potential piece of food, it is a sign of affection. They like you and they want you to like them. When they understand what you want, they are eager to do it if only because of the way you act when they succeed.

We need to take advantage of this behavior and start training during this time frame. With some animals it may not do any harm to wait, but for most puppies it is better to start right away.