

Puppy Training from the Beginning

Be sure your puppy knows you are in charge.

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The first thing your puppy needs to learn is that you are the boss. This training should begin as soon as your new pup enters your home. All dogs need a leader, and it's important that you establish yourself as the boss early in your dog's life. If your dog recognizes your authority, he will be more obedient, more secure, and easier to control. You can communicate to your dog that you are the leader in a number of different ways.

Being the leader means being first. Teach your puppy to wait for you to go through doorways before he is allowed to enter or exit a room. You can do this by keeping him on a leash and going through a door first, with him following behind you. If he tries to rush ahead of you, use the leash to bring him back. Put him in a sit-stay, walk through the door yourself, and then invite him to follow. Reward him when he obeys.

In puppy kindergarten or any other canine activity, paying attention to you is one of the first lessons a puppy learns. To learn commands and tricks, your puppy must first learn to focus on you when he's asked to. Teach him that making eye contact is good by asking him to look at you and then giving him a treat when he looks at your face or makes eye contact. Repeat this exercise until he automatically looks at your eyes, instead of the people walking by or the treat behind your back, when you are interacting.

Your puppy will see you as the leader if you are the one who determines when he plays and eats. Schedule playtime for your puppy and be the one to initiate it. Feed your puppy his daily meals yourself, and use treats in training to help him see you as the source of his food. Don't chase your puppy or play tug of war to take his toys away. Instead, teach him to give you his ball or other toys on command, saying drop it, or using another verbal cue. When playing tug or fetch games, occasionally ask your puppy to give you the toy and then offer it back to him; he'll quickly learn that acquiescing continues the fun. Always end games with the toy in your hands, not your dog's mouth.

As the leader, you need to establish food control right from the start. In the wild, it's natural for a dog to protect his food from other dogs and animals, but it's unacceptable for a dog to do this in the home. Food possessiveness can be the most dangerous and problematic canine behavior. It can lead to serious bites and a general sense of the dog controlling the home, rather than the other way around.