

Training the Australian Shepherd Puppy

A solid education in obedience and leadership is essential to teach your Aussie the rules of his new human world.

Word association is important in teaching a dog. Use the same word (command) for each behavior every time you teach it, adding food rewards and verbal praise to reinforce the positive. Pup will make the connection and will be motivated to repeat the behavior when he hears those key words. For example, when teaching pup to potty outside, use the same potty term (Go potty, Get busy and Hurry up are commonly used) each time he eliminates, adding a Good boy! while he's urinating. Pup will soon learn what those trips outside are for.

Timing is another crucial element in training. All dogs learn their lessons in the present tense. You have to catch them in the act (good or bad) in order to dispense rewards or discipline. You have three to five seconds to connect with your pup or he will not understand that what he did was right or wrong. Thus, timing and consistency are your keys to success in teaching any new behavior or correcting any bad behavior.

Successful puppy training depends on several important principles:

1. Use simple one-word commands and say them only once. Otherwise, puppy learns that Come (or Sit or Down) is a three- or four-word command.
2. Never correct your dog for something he did minutes earlier. Three to five seconds, remember?
3. Always praise (and treat) as soon as he does something good (or stops doing something naughty). How else will puppy know he's a good dog?
4. Be consistent. You can't snuggle together on the couch to watch TV today, then scold your puppy for climbing on the couch tomorrow.
5. Never tell your dog to come to you and then correct him for something he did wrong. He will think that the correction is for coming to you. (Think like a dog, remember?) Always go to the dog to stop unwanted behavior, but be sure you catch him in the act.
6. Never hit or kick your dog or strike him with a newspaper or other object. Such physical measures will only create fear and confusion in your dog and could provoke aggressive behavior down the road.
7. When praising or correcting, use your best doggie voice. Use a light and happy voice for praise and a firm, sharp voice for warnings or corrections. A whiny No, No or Drop that will not sound too convincing, nor will a deep, gruff voice make your puppy feel like having fun. Your dog also will respond accordingly to family arguments. If there's a shouting match, he will think that he did something wrong and head for cover. So never argue in front of the kids or the dog!

Next step: Games for Aussie Puppies

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