

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.

Australian Shepherds are highly intelligent animals, blessed with a strong desire to please their owners. They are quick learners and loyal companions who can be possessive and protective of their families and property. A solid education in obedience and leadership is essential in Australian Shepherd training.

Puppy kindergarten starts the day you bring your puppy home. Before your puppy left his breeder, all of his life lessons came from his mom and littermates. When he played too roughly or nipped too hard, his siblings cried and stopped the game. When he got pushy or obnoxious, his mother cuffed him gently with a maternal paw. Now his human family has to communicate appropriate behavior in terms that his little canine mind will understand.

When you start the teaching process, keep this thought uppermost: The first 20 weeks of any canine's life are his most valuable learning time, a period when his mind is best able to soak up every lesson, both positive and negative. Positive experiences and proper socialization during this period are critical to his future development and stability.

Canine research tells us that any behavior that is rewarded will be repeated. That's called positive reinforcement. If something good happens, like a tasty treat or hugs and kisses, the puppy will naturally want to repeat the behavior. Canine behavioral science also has proven that the best way to a puppy's mind is through his stomach. Never underestimate the power of a treat! This leads to a very important puppy rule: Keep your pockets loaded with puppy treats at all times so that you are prepared to reinforce good behavior whenever it occurs.

That same reinforcement principle also applies to negative behavior, or what we humans might consider negative, like digging in the trash can, which the dog or puppy does not know is wrong. If pup gets into the garbage, steals food or does anything else that makes him feel good, he will do it again. What better reason to keep a sharp eye on your puppy so that you can catch him in the act and prevent undesirable behaviors?

You are about to begin Puppy Class 101. Rule No. 1: Puppy must learn that you are now the alpha dog and his new pack leader. Rule No. 2: You have to teach him in a manner he will understand (sorry, barking just won't do it). Remember, always that he knows nothing about human standards of behavior.