

Puppy Kindergarten

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

There are good reasons why the English Springer Spaniel is the hunting sweetheart of the spaniel breeds. As puppies and adults, they brim with energy, always ready for action, games or training sessions. Bright and anxious to please, they are easily trained as long as the trainer does so with a gentle hand.

As with any breed of dog, the operative word here is "train." A Springer won't learn the house rules all by himself. A solid education in obedience, with you as the puppy's undisputed pack leader, is necessary to teach your Springer how to behave in his new human world. These lessons start on the day that you bring your puppy home.

All dogs are pack animals and, as such, they need a leader. Your Springer's first boss was his mother, and all of his early life lessons came from his mom and littermates. When he played too rough 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 you have to assume that role of leader and communicate appropriate behavior in terms that his young canine mind will understand. Remember that he has no concept of our human rules; even if he did, from a canine perspective, those rules would make no sense at all!

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. We've mentioned this already, but it's worth repeating! Positive experiences and proper socialization during this period are critical to your puppy's future development and stability. An indisputable canine rule dictates that the amount and quality of time you invest with your Springer youngster now will determine what kind of an adult he will become. A wild dog, or a polite gentleman or lady? A well-behaved canine citizen or a naughty mischief-maker? It's up to you.

Canine behavioral science 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, a puppy will naturally want to repeat the behavior. That same research also has proven that one of the best ways 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 full of small puppy treats at all times so that you are prepared to reinforce good behavior whenever it occurs.