

Training Your Dalmatian Puppy

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

The Dalmatian puppy is love, all wrapped up in a spotted fur coat. He is also a bundle of energy that needs substantial physical exercise and mental stimulation. Highly intelligent and eager to please, he is also strong-willed. Puppy classes, basic obedience and daily training sessions are necessary to channel these qualities into proper canine behavior. Your Dal needs to learn that you are now the top dog, the alpha person in his life. The sooner he understands that, the fewer behavior problems you will encounter with your puppy and adult Dalmatian.

All dogs are pack animals and, as such, they need a leader. Your Dalmatian's first boss was his mother, now it's you. How best to teach him you are now the big Kahuna in his life? 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 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 his human family has to communicate appropriate behavior in terms 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 is critical to his future development and stability. We'll learn more about socialization later, but know this: The amount and quality of time you invest with your Dalmatian youngster now will determine what kind of an adult he will become. A wild dog, or a gentleman or lady? A well-behaved or naughty fellow? It's up to you.

Canine behavioral science tells us that any behavior that is rewarded will be repeated (this is called positive reinforcement). If something good happens, like a tasty treat or hugs and kisses your 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!