

Training the German Shepherd Puppy

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

German Shepherds are highly intelligent animals. Their ability to master difficult tasks is testament to their comprehension, trainability and ability, indeed desire, to work as team players. However, that same brilliance can create a challenge for the German Shepherd owner. Your German Shepherd will need a solid education in obedience and leadership (yours) if he is to understand and obey the rules of his new human world. Although GSDs are quick learners with a strong desire to please, they also can be possessive and protective of their families and property. Obedience training is the only way to develop a trustworthy canine family member, and this begins on the day that your German Shepherd puppy comes home with you.

All dogs are natural pack animals and, as such, they need a leader. Your German Shepherd's first boss was his mother, and all of his life lessons came from his mom and littermates. Now you have to assume the role of leader and communicate appropriate behavior in terms that his little canine mind will understand. From a canine perspective, human rules make no sense!

Keep this in mind: the first 20 weeks of any dog'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. The amount and quality of time you invest with your German Shepherd youngster now will determine what kind of an adult he will become.

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. Keep your pockets loaded with puppy treats at all times so 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 naughty, like digging in the trash can, which the dog or puppy does not know is wrong. If the pup gets into the garbage, steals food or does anything else that he thinks is fun or makes him feel good, he will do it again. What better reason to keep a sharp eye on your puppy to prevent those normal canine behaviors? He needs to be taught right and wrong through your rewards and corrections.

Rule number one: the puppy must learn that you are now the alpha dog and his new pack leader. Rule number two: you have to teach him in a manner he will understand. Remember always that the puppy knows nothing about human standards of behavior.