

## Training the Golden Retriever Puppy

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

Golden Retrievers are smart dogs; after all, isn't that one reason why you chose this breed? They love to learn and are easy to teach, but the key word here is teach. They are not born pre-programmed to be obedient. Teaching house rules and good manners is your job with your new dog, and this job starts the day you bring your puppy home.

All dogs are pack animals and, as such, they need a leader. Your Golden's first boss was his mother, and 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 you have to assume the role of leader and communicate appropriate behavior in terms that his young canine mind will understand. Human rules make no sense at all to a dog!

The first 20 weeks of any canine's life are his most valuable learning time. 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. Know this: the amount and quality of time you invest with your Golden youngster now will determine what kind of an adult dog he will become. Wild dog or gentleman or lady? A well-behaved or naughty dog? 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 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 negative, 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 so you can catch him in the act and teach him which behaviors are not acceptable to you.

You are about to begin Puppy Class 101. 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 (sorry, barking just won't do it.). Remember always that he knows nothing about human standards of behavior.

### Word Association

Use the same word (command) for each behavior every time you teach it, adding food rewards, petting and verbal praise for positive reinforcement. The pup will make the connection and will be motivated to repeat the behavior when he hears those commands. For example, when teaching the 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 relieving himself. Your pup will soon learn what those trips outside are for.