

## Labrador Retriever Puppy Training

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

There's a good reason that Labrador Retrievers are among America's favorite canines. This is one smart fellow, an amiable guy who loves to learn and is easy to train. But the key word here is train. He won't learn the house rules all by himself. A solid education in obedience and leadership is essential to teach your Lab how to behave in his new human world, and those lessons start the day you bring your puppy home.

All dogs are pack animals, and as such they need a leader. Your Lab'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 unbearable, his dam cuffed him gently with a maternal paw or shook him by the scruff of the neck. Now, you have to assume the role of leader and communicate appropriate behavior in terms his little canine mind will understand. Remember, too, that from a canine perspective, human rules make no sense at all.

When you start the teaching process, keep this thought uppermost: 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. We've discussed the importance of socialization, so know this: the amount and quality of time you invest with your Labrador 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 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. Liver smells very pungent to your Labrador Retriever, so never underestimate the power of a liver snap! 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. Rewarding good behavior and correcting bad, at the time each occurs, teaches puppy right and wrong. Catch him in the act is the rule, so what better reason to keep a sharp eye on your puppy?

You are about to begin Puppy Training 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.