

# **PUPPY TRAINING**

## **THE FUN AND EASY WAY TO GET A LOT OF LEARNING DONE**

When watching puppy training classes, it is so easy to be seduced by the sight of individual pups happily and obediently responding to off-leash verbal requests and hand signals to come, sit, heel and down-stay, that one tends to forget the major reasons for holding puppy classes and using food in training. A comprehensive puppy program comprises both behavior training and temperament training in addition to the trainer's choice of obedience work.

### **TEMPERAMENT TRAINING**

The most vital ingredient is temperament training – providing an educational forum for pups to learn social skills and develop the confidence and social savvy for friendly interaction with older dogs and people. Pups must be allowed to play with other puppies and dogs and to enjoy numerous positive interactions with a wide variety of people, especially children and men. Socialization should always be the prime directive of any puppy program, whether the class entails a circle of owners with pups having a right old time playing in the center, or fancy obedience skills performed off-leash in the middle of an on-going play session.

Obedience training is necessary for owners to control their dogs' body position, location and activity. Certainly, all aspects of obedience training may be effectively accomplished at any time in the dog's life, but it just happens to be easier, quicker and more enjoyable to train the dog as a pup. By employing lure-reward training techniques, food treats (dry kibble from the dog's daily diet) become a virtual panacea for most potential puppy problems.

### **BEHAVIOR TRAINING**

It is better to nip behavior problems in the bud; to modify the dog's behavior before potential or incipient problems become full-blown. The dog must be taught appropriate and acceptable alternatives for its normal doggy behaviors: what to chew, where to eliminate, where to dig, when to bark or when to jump up. Otherwise, inappropriate expression of these activities will become an integral part of the dog's routine. And the behaviors become habits – bad habits.

For example, getting a dog to relinquish a ten-year barking habit is equivalent to convincing a person to quit smoking. It makes more sense to educate the dog as a pup, so that excessive barking does not become habitual. During the first week of class, teach the barking pup to "shush" for progressively longer periods of time using food as lures and rewards. Teach the dog to shush for its supper!

Food treats are essential during behavior modification because the majority of owners are incapable of convincingly praising their dog for exemplary behavior. Most mens' puppy praise is on par with a partisan Chicagoan's TV commentary on the Packers beating the Bears. Also, the positive approach of using food treats helps offset the negative side effects generated by our human foible of ignoring a dog's many good behaviors but repeatedly punishing it for making mistakes. Sadly, "training" is not much fun for many dogs and owners.

### **DO IT WHILE THEY'RE YOUNG**

Temperament training must be accomplished during puppyhood and must be viewed in a developmental context. To delay is utter folly. Preventative measures are easy, effective, virtually effortless and even enjoyable. If there were ever a time for food lures and rewards to be mandatory, the routing prevention of dog biting, fighting and fearfulness by dog owners (especially children and men), is it. Whereas punishment may modify a dog's biting behavior, for example, repeated punishments hardly engender trust and warmth towards people. Quite the contrary, punishment may inhibit some behaviors but only at the great expense of exacerbating the underlying temperament problem.

A puppy's temperament may be improved in the right hands just as easily as it may be ruined in the wrong hands: so much depends on the owner. Just as it is impossible to breed a dog that always scores 200 and never breaks sit-stays, it is impossible to breed a dog with a perfect temperament. Certainly good breeding is essential, but by itself it is not sufficient.

### **THE OBVIOUS REWARDS**

If owners allow their pups sufficient opportunities to play with other puppies and dogs, most potential dog-dog problems take care of themselves. The pups virtually train themselves to be friendly and outgoing. A socialized dog would much rather play with other dogs than hide or fight, though even well-socialized adult dogs will have occasional scraps. In this respect they are not much different from people, very few of whom can honestly say that they have never lost their temper, never had an argument and never physically grabbed another person (usually a child or spouse) in anger. On the other hand, few people have seriously harmed or killed another person.

Similarly, it is absolutely realistic to expect dogs to know how to resolve their differences without ripping adversaries limb from limb – in fact, without even drawing blood. Moreover, these social skills must be acquired early in puppyhood: The primary reason for puppy plays is to learn to inhibit the force of the bite before the jaws develop the power to inflict serious damage.

Puppies do, however, require considerable guidance to prevent the development of fearfulness and aggressiveness towards people. Puppy classes are essential to instruct owners how to desensitize their pups to potentially threatening situations, such as around food bowl and bones, with strangers and children, during friendly (but unwanted) petting and hugging or aversive (painful) handling and restraint.

Several confidence-building exercises have been described in previous GAZETTE articles: "Provocative Behavior," June 1989, and "Dogs and Children," September 1989; in my Preventing Aggression booklet and my video, Sirius Puppy Training. Here I will describe a single exercise: hand-feeding.

When hand-fed the initial portion of its supper, the dog learns to take the food gently and it learns the commands "Off!" ("Wait!") and "Take it!" "Off!" means don't touch the food unless told to "Take it!" Initially, the dog is trained that if it doesn't touch the food for increasing time intervals, it will always be allowed to take it. Once learned, the owner may use "Off!" to instruct the dog not to touch the object, period. There are numerous applications for these commands: "Take it!" encourages a fearful dog to take a food treat or toy from a stranger and, also, is a marvelous primer for retrieval work. "Gently!" instructs the dog how to take the food from an unfamiliar child, or how to play with a shy dog. "Off!" is useful to instruct a dog not to touch a baby" diapers, the baby, a dead crow, a fearful dog or an aggressive dog. It also warns a potential fighter not to touch the other dog.

### **A TRULY DOMESTICATED DOG**

People tend to forget that a domestic dog is not domesticated until it has been adequately trained and socialized. If the dog is not socialized and has not learned to inhibit biting, then the so-called domestic dog (of any breed) is much more dangerous than a wild animal. Puppy programs that promote early socialization, an enriched social environment and temperament training with the liberal use of food and other lures and rewards in training, are the only workable solution for temperament problems.

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