



## Back to School for Puppies

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Summer has drawn to a close, the lunches are packed and that bell ringing tells you that school is back in session. Classes are not just for the two legged members of the family. We all know the importance of a good education so remember that it is time to get the canine college courses started as well. Basic training for Spot is essential for a well mannered pet. So don't just prepare the kids for school, get ready for class yourself because you are now going to be the teacher, parent and perhaps even the pupil with your pet.

Socialization and good puppy training are of the utmost importance. Studies show that this development occurs up to about 3 months of age. After that time, refinement in social skills occurs. Proper socialization now will pay huge dividends and make a much better companion that can be easily trained. After that time, it is extremely difficult and will be time consuming, costly and trying to your patience. Few pet owners have the time to correct poor social skills and problem behavior is the number one reason for releasing a pet to a shelter. An unsocialized dog can be untrustworthy, fear biter and difficult to manage. A simple trip to your veterinarian can turn into a nightmare for your dog and everyone involved as he cannot adapt to new situations.

Like good parenting it is important to develop a good trusting relationship with your puppy. Make sure that things are done in a positive way. If the first exposure to something is frightening or painful it will defeat the purpose and may in fact create a phobia. Be careful not to rush or force Bowser into a situation or meeting new pets or people. Invite friends over with their healthy and vaccinated animals for a visit. Go for fieldtrips (car rides) with frequent stops so your pup can see the wonders of the world thru the window. Introduce your pet to new and novel things like an upside down chair, a trash can on its side or unusual noises. Start with loud noises from a distance. Accustomize Fido to physical handling, brushing, and bathing. Check the ears and between the toes with a finger. Lift the lips and message gums and teeth. Gently do gradual nail trims.

It is important not to reward fearful behavior. It is natural to sooth and calm a fearful puppy but be careful not to unintentionally reward the fear. Go slowly with introductions and have lots of patience. It is better to do brief amounts more frequently than occasional prolonged sessions. Like young children, puppies need time to sleep and rest. Be careful to not put on

the ground where unhealthy animals have been. Like socialization, the immune system is also developing and vaccinations are important for a healthy pet.

Train for respect, trust and confidence. It is easy to win a new puppies love by letting her get her way. But as with children, giving in to every whim does not foster self discipline and self control. Developing respect early will establish a clear social hierarchy and your dog will do anything for you. Just as a child needs a caring parent, a team needs a coach; your dog needs a good leader. Remember that respect is something that must be won. Bullying or terrorizing a pup into submission will create a situation that may result in aggression and a bite to the owner. Respect is something that is won not forced. You can win your pups trust and respect by asking for her compliance in a consistent and predictable manner. Affectionate praise goes a long way in training and a resounding “NO” establishes boundaries for unwanted behavior. Treats can be used to reward the correct action and soon your puppy will learn the routine and be happy to comply. But only give the treat if she does the work. Placing your dog in a sit followed by praise is good and a treat is deserved after she sits when asked.

Establishing a good relationship of respect now with your pet and providing an opportunity for socialization creates the positive framework on which to build a lifelong companionship. It is no wonder dog is man’s best friend with earned respect and nurture.