



## SHAPING YOUR DOG'S TEMPERAMENT

Puppies are so much fun and we all love them! It is so easy for people to get caught up in “puppy love” and forget that there is much work to be done to have a happy and well balanced canine good citizen. Often, puppy parents find the road to adulthood difficult and challenging and different breeds come with their own specific set of challenges.

Puppies are born with a base line temperament that falls somewhere in a continuum based on the breeding history of the dam and sire as well as past generations. While it is true that a pup's temperament is most deeply impacted by the behavior of the dam and early experiences, there is much that you as a new puppy parent can do to provide a positive impact on your pup's temperament.

As a professional trainer - I think of it this way – I have an abundance of time to fine-tune a dog's position or bearing in a sit, down or stay but only one chance and a limited window of opportunity to shape temperament.

Here are the things that I do when raising a puppy of my own and we also recommend these exercises to our clients. These same techniques can also be used with a newly acquired older dog – just be patient and keep the sessions short and positive with loads of praise and treats.

### 1. SENSITIVITY & TOUCH

Your pup should allow you to handle every part of their body. Dogs don't come with an ability to do this – you must work at having your dog accept handling to his paws, pads, nails, ears, mouth, etc. Be sure that your pup will accept people who may reach over their head, lean over their back or approach from behind.

### 2. LEADERSHIP EXERCISES

Act as a fair, yet firm benevolent leader. You are responsible for earning your pups trust and part of that is keeping your pup safe from harm. Learn to read canine body language and to recognize the signals of stress in your dog. Keep your pup close and be aware of situations that may be stressful or are beyond your pup's level of social adaptability and social tolerance. Avoid overloading and over stimulating your puppy with situations they may not yet be equipped to handle.

Most children are bitten by making direct eye contact with a dog that may be dominant or will not accept direct eye contact. Teach your pup that eye contact is a good thing by teaching him to focus to you while making direct eye contact.

The 1<sup>st</sup> \*trick\* your puppy should learn is to roll over and show you her belly. You should also practice standing over, stepping over and kneeling over your puppy in a non-threatening way.

Use LIFE REWARDS in addition to food treats and praise. Before you clip the leash on to go for that walk, get a sit exercise. Before your pup is allowed to cross a door threshold, ask for and get a sit. Before you throw the ball for a game of fetch, ask for and get a sit. Think of all the interactions you have with your puppy during the day and institute the concept of LIFE REWARDS into your basic training. This practice allows for the creation of more training opportunities and creates a solid foundation of cooperation compliance.

### **3. PRACTICE BASIC OBEDIENCE SKILLS AS A FORM OF IMPULSE CONTROL**

The purpose of puppy training is not to have THE perfect sit or down or any other competition obedience skill. The most important aspect of puppy training is to create a solid temperament while building a foundation of trust and social adaptability and tolerance. This type of early foundation training also creates a strong bond and builds workability in the dog.

Keep your training sessions short and stress free. Make sure your puppy is proficient in one skill before adding another. Don't expect a 5 month old puppy to sit for 3 minutes and ALWAYS use a release command consistently. Keep your skills training at age appropriate exercises and remember – it's about teaching impulse control for the puppy. .

### **4. SOCIALIZATION & THE PUPPY RULES OF 12**

Socialization is extremely complex and entails more than walking your dog, going to the dog park or attending puppy play groups a couple of times a month.

When a professional trainers speaks about socialization, we are talking about socialization to the environment along with all things that are dog centric. Remember, your dog has to live in a human world so build your program based on this.

### **5. GREETING BEHAVIORS**

Teach your dog proper greeting behaviors with both dogs and people. Your pup should never charge full forward to greet another dog or person. Help your dog to learn neutral canine greeting behaviors such as approaching from an arc and sitting to greet people.

Teach your dog a \*look away\* skill – it's much more neutral, as opposed to the use of a LEAVE IT command (save this command for emergencies). Direct your dog to offer the behavior when greeting and reward promptly.

## **6. PREVENT FOOD AGGRESSION & RESOURCE GUARDING**

Take the time to hand feed your dog one complete meal a couple of times each week. Also, sit with your dog's food bowl in your lap and have her take her entire meal in this manner. Move your pup's feeding area to different places and be sure to walk by – call your pup over, pet, praise and release.

Take charge of resource guarding by teaching your dog to trade and drop on command. Don't give high value items until your pup has proven an ability to cooperate and release. Practice often with toys and food items throughout your dog's life.

## **7. AVOID WRESTLING, ROUGH PLAY AND TUG-OF-WAR GAMES THAT FORCE YOUR DOG INTO A DOMINANT POSITION OR DOMINANT POSTURES**

Practice positive play and establish appropriate behaviors with people early in your dog's life. If you allow your pup to wrestle and mouth the 6' burly guy in your family, chances are she may try to do the same with your 80 year old grandmother or your 6 year old child. Think about how you want your dog to behave as an adult not-so-cute puppy and promote and encourage those positive behaviors.

## **8. PROMOTE BITE INHIBITION AT AN EARLY AGE**

Bite inhibition is a learned response where the dog consciously inhibits the force of a bite.

Pups need to know that when biting starts, all play stops. Your best line of defense is to yelp loudly and immediately withdraw your attention by getting up and leaving the puppy. Once the pup calms down and attempts interaction with you, redirect into an alternate behavior that can be reinforced.

**Use of physical force may actually cause the play biting to escalate.** Aggressive biting should be evaluated by a professional trainer and a Board Certified Veterinary Behaviorist. To find one in your area visit [www.veterinarybehaviorists.org](http://www.veterinarybehaviorists.org)

## **9. MAINTAIN YOUR PUPPY'S PHYSICAL HEALTH**

Proper nutrition and exercise play a key role in the overall well being of a dog. Cultivate a partnership with a great vet that understands both your needs and those of your dog. Don't wait until a problem arises or your dog is ill. Your vet is in a perfect position to help you raise a healthy, well balanced animal.

## **10. PROVIDE ABUNDANT MENTAL STIMULATION FOR YOUR PUPPY**

A bored puppy will find lots of things to do – and you won't like any of them. A room full of toys may be great and might make you feel better but they won't take the place of quality time and training with you. If you work long days or are already overwhelmed with life's complications, be sure there is someone who can come in to help break the monotony of being alone for long periods of time. Or better yet, wait to get that dog until you have more time to devote to their care.

With just a little effort from you and your pet will reward you with a lifetime of love and loyalty!

**For more information about our training programs, classes and times contact  
The SW Florida Professional Dog Trainers Alliance at 775.1660 or 404.3085.**

SW Florida Professional Dog Trainers

Written by Jeannie Bates

239.404.3085

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