

Puppy-Proofing Your Home

You should consider *in a puppy's mind* he/she has an absolute right to chew whatever it can get at in your absence. You must put the puppy where either it cannot do any damage, or you do not care about the possible damage. Puppies can eat kitchen cabinets, destroy furniture, chew on carpet, and damage a wide variety of other things. Besides the destruction, the puppy may well injure itself, even seriously.

A good solution to this is a crate. A crate is any container, made of wire mesh or plastic, that will hold the puppy comfortably, with enough room to stand and curl up and sleep, but not too much that it can eliminate in one corner. See the section on housetraining below. Other solutions include fencing off part of the house; say the kitchen or garage or building an outside run. Be sure the area is puppy-proofed.

Please put your pup in an environment it can't destroy. Puppies are too immature to handle temptations. Black Russian Terriers begin to gain the maturity to handle short stints with mild temptations when they're about 12 to 18 months old. Consider the analogy with a baby, where you keep it in a crib, stroller, or pen if you are not holding it.

It is essential to puppy-proof your home. You should think of it in the same way as child-proofing your house but be more thorough about it. Puppies are smaller and more active than babies and have sharp teeth and claws. Things of especial concern are electric wires. If you can get through the puppy stages without having your pup get a shock from chewing a wire you are doing a great job! When puppy proofing your home, get down on your hands and knees (or lower if possible) and consider things from this angle. What looks enticing, what is breakable, what is sharp, etc? The most important things are watching the puppy and, of course, crating it or otherwise restraining it when you can't watch it.

Another step in puppy proofing is house proofing the puppy. Teach it what is and isn't chewable. The single most effective way to do this is by having a ready supply of chewable items on hand. When the puppy starts to chew on an unacceptable item (be it a chair, rug, or human hand), remove the item from the puppy's mouth with a stern, "NO!" and replace it with a chew toy and praise the puppy for playing with the toy. If you are consistent about this, the puppy will get the idea that only the things you give it are to be chewed on! Don't stint on the praise, and keep the "No!" to a single calm, sharp noise -- don't yell or scream the word.

There are some products that can help make items unpalatable and thus aid in your training. Bitter Apple and Bitter Orange (available at most pet stores) impart a bitter taste to many things without staining, etc. You should not depend on these products to keep your puppy safe, but use them as a training aid.

Teething

Around 4 to 5 months of age, puppies will start to get their permanent teeth. There are several things you can do, both to ease the pain and control the chewing.

- Make some chicken soup (low sodium variety or make it yourself) ice cubes and give them to the puppy.
- Soak a clean rag in water, wring it out and then freeze it (rolling it up helps) and give it to your puppy to chew on.
- Soften the kibble a bit with water.
- Discourage biting on your arm or hand for comfort.

Puppies lose their teeth in a distinct pattern: first the small front teeth come out; then the premolars just behind the canines; then the molars in the back come out (and you'll see adult molars behind those erupting as well). Finally the canine teeth come out. Sometimes the adult canines erupt before the baby canines have come all the way out. Give your puppy plenty of chew toys during this time. (Please see your vet if it looks as though your puppy is retaining puppy teeth.)

During this time, some discomfort, including bleeding gums is to be expected. Your puppy will want to chew more during this period of time, but it may also be too painful to do so (hence the suggestions above). You will probably find few if any of the teeth your puppy loses, as puppies typically swallow them.

Housetraining

If the dog makes a mess in the house - slap YOURSELF. You didn't do your job, and that's in no way the dog's fault. You let him down. If you can't keep supervise him without help, tether him to you. That way he can't "wander off".

--Mary Healy

The idea is to take advantage of a rule of dog behavior: a dog will not generally eliminate where it sleeps. *Exceptions* to this rule are:

- Dogs that are in a crate that is too large (so the dog can eliminate at one end and sleep at the other end).
- Dogs that have lived in small cages in pet stores during critical phases of development and have had to learn to eliminate in the cage.
- Dogs that have blankets or other soft, absorbent items in the crate with them.
- Dogs that are left for too long in the crate and cannot hold it any longer.

If the crate is too big (because you got an adult size one), you can partition the crate off with pegboard wired to the sides to make the crate the correct size, and move it back as your puppy grows. RC Steele also sells crate dividers.

To house train a dog using a crate, establish a schedule where the dog is either outside or in its crate when it feels the need to eliminate.

Using a mild correction (saying "No" in a firm, even tone) when the dog eliminates inside and exuberant, wild praise when the dog eliminates outside will eventually teach the dog that it is better to go outside than in. Some owners correct more severely inside, but this is extremely detrimental to the character of puppies. To make the dog notice the difference between eliminating inside and outside, you must praise more outside rather than correcting more inside.

The crate is crucial because the dog will "hold it" while in the crate, so it is likely to have to eliminate when it is taken out. Since you know when your dog has to eliminate, you take it out and it eliminates immediately, and is praised immediately. Doing this consistently is ideal reinforcement for the behavior of going out to eliminate. In addition, the dog is always supervised in the house, so the dog is always corrected for eliminating indoors. This strengthens the inhibition against eliminating inside.

In general, consistency is MUCH more important than severe corrections when training a dog. Before a dog understands what you want, severe corrections are not useful and can be quite DETRIMENTAL. Crating allows the owner to have total control over the dog in order to achieve consistency. Hopefully, this will prevent the need (and the desire) to use more severe corrections.

Housetraining is relatively simple with puppies. The most important thing to understand is that it takes time. Young puppies cannot wait to go to the bathroom. When they have to go, they have to go NOW. Therefore, until they are about four or five months old, you can only encourage good behavior and try to prevent bad behavior. This is accomplished by the following regime.

- First rule of housetraining: puppies have to go to the bathroom immediately upon waking up.
- Second rule of housetraining: puppies have to go to the bathroom immediately after eating.

With these two rules goes the indisputable fact that until a puppy is housetrained, you MUST confine them or watch them to prevent accidents.

This means that the puppy should have a place to sleep where it cannot get out. Understand that a puppy cannot go all night without eliminating, so when it cries in the night, you must get up and take it out and wait until it goes. Then enthusiastically praise it and put it back to bed. In the morning, take it out again and let it do its stuff and praise it. After it is fed and after it wakes up at any point, take it out to eliminate.

Make it aware that this is not play time, but understand that puppies get pretty excited about things like grass and snails and leaves and forget what they came outside to do! Use the same spot each time if you can, the smell will help the puppy remember what it is to do, especially after 12 weeks of age.

To make life easier for you later on, use a key phrase just when the puppy starts to eliminate. Try "hurry up," "potty," or some similar phrase (pick one and use it). The puppy will begin to eliminate on command, and this can be especially useful later, such as making sure the dog eliminates before a car ride or a walk in the park.

Don't let the puppy loose in the house unless it has just gone outside, and/or you are watching it extremely closely for signs that it has to go. The key to housetraining is preventing accidents. If no accidents occur (ha!), then the dog never learns it has an option other than going outside. When you are at home, rather than leave the pup in the crate, you can "tether" the puppy to you -- use a six foot long leash and tie it to your belt. That way he can't get out of your site in the house and go in the wrong place.

Crying at Night

Your puppy wants to be with the rest of the "pack" at bedtime. This behavior is highly adaptive from the standpoint of dog behavior. When a puppy becomes separated from its pack it will whine, thereby allowing it to be found and returned to the rest of the group. This is why so many books on puppies and dog behavior strongly recommend that you allow your puppy/dog to sleep with you in your room to reduce the likelihood of crying at night.

Try moving the crate into your bedroom. If your puppy whines, first make sure it doesn't have to go outside to eliminate. This means getting up and taking it outside. If it whines again, or doesn't need to go outside, bang your hand on the crate door and say something like "NO, QUIET" or just "QUIET!" If the puppy continues to whine, try giving it a toy or chew toy and then simply ignore any continued whining. If you don't reinforce the whining by comforting it (other than to take it outside -- which is OK), it will eventually learn to settle down. Also, be sure to have a vigorous play session JUST BEFORE you are going to go to bed. This should poop it out and it will sleep much more soundly.

You may have to sleep in another room for a couple of nights so you can not hear the puppy. Eventually he/she will go to sleep. You need to ignore it once you know everything is o.k.

I sometimes put a favorite stuffed toy in the crate so he or she can cuddle with it the way he did with his litter mates.

