

## **New Puppy 101**

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If you are acquiring a new canine family member, it's important to be prepared. Puppy-proof your home. Puppies explore the world with their mouths and the world is very exciting to them. They love to explore. All unsafe, tempting items should be put out of the pup's reach. This includes chemicals such as cleaning products and antifreeze. Antifreeze has a sweet taste to dogs, and they are attracted to it, but it's very deadly. Electric outlets and cords should also be out of the pup's reach.

Puppies will try to chew on other items of interest, such as furniture or your personal possessions. As much as possible, try to keep your shoes, socks, and other personal items out of the pup's reach. He can't differentiate between his soft toy and your sock. In fact, items with your scent will be very attractive to him. If the puppy chews on an item that he shouldn't chew on, verbally correct him (say "eh-eh"). Then, redirect the pup to another desirable activity, such as chewing on a safe Kong toy or Nylabone. It's really important to redirect him, as correction shows only what behavior you don't want, not the behavior that you do desire.

Keep the puppy in an area where you can observe him. You can use gates in each room to keep him with you. He must earn his freedom as he is able. If you give the pup too much freedom before he's ready, he will have housebreaking accidents and be destructive outside of your view. You must correct any unwanted behavior during or immediately after the behavior. Then, redirect the pup's behavior to an acceptable activity. If you wait too long to correct, the pup will associate the correction with what he is doing at the exact time of the correction, which may be a desirable behavior. Safely confine the pup to a crate or exercise pen when you can't observe him. Just make sure that he is not over-confined and that he receives a sufficient amount of positive interaction with your family.

Schedule a visit with your veterinarian to check the pup's health and administer any vaccinations that are necessary. If you don't have a veterinarian, ask friends who they use and recommend. Have an appropriately-sized crate ready for when the pup arrives home. The crate will be an important tool in his housebreaking. The crate should just be large enough for the pup to stand up in, lie down in comfortably, and turn around in. You can even purchase a crate with a divider which can expand to be large enough for the pup when he is an adult dog.

Have the pup's food, dishes, and safe toys ready. Part of preparing for the pup also involves teaching everyone how to care for the pup. A schedule should be made regarding when the pup will eat, sleep, etc., and should include who is responsible for taking care of him. Puppies are creatures of habit, and dogs do best with a regular schedule. It's important that everyone be committed to taking time with the pup, and everyone should be consistent in working with the pup.

In addition to his basic needs such as food, water, and shelter, a puppy needs regular and ongoing exercise, training, and socialization. Make sure that your pup receives a sufficient amount of exercise, which can be in the form of playing fetch, playing in a safely enclosed yard, or walking. Talk with your veterinarian about what is appropriate for your puppy's needs. Running on a hard surface is generally not recommended for young pups whose bones are still developing and growing, but a nice walk would be very appropriate for a healthy pup.

Socialize your pup in many different situations. Have him meet a wide variety of friendly people. Get him used to everyday sights and sounds such as the vacuum cleaner, the television, and cars passing by. When he is appropriately vaccinated, take the pup to meet friendly, healthy dogs and puppies. A good dog daycare facility can help socialize your pup. You can also form "puppy play groups" with friends who have friendly, healthy puppies. Just make sure that the puppies have similar play styles and that one is not too strong or large to play with the other. Supervise all interaction and give the pups a time out or rest period when necessary. It's also crucial that young children learn to respect that the puppy is a living creature, not a toy. Teach them to be gentle with the puppy and supervise all interactions.

Also, last, but certainly not least, make time for training. Training includes formal commands and even teaching the pup how to greet people and how to be calm during grooming. Because puppies are sponges who are going to learn something, it's important that we train them from the beginning. It's harder to correct a problem after it's developed than to teach the pup what we want from the beginning. Enroll your pup in a class that uses positive reinforcement. Make sure that the trainer has experience and that you feel comfortable with him or her. Training classes are great for socialization. Private training is desirable for individuals who can't meet during the confined times that classes meet, or if you want more individualized attention than a class can provide. Best of luck with your new pup!