

Seizing the Opportunity

By Martin Deeley

How we behave with a dog influences behavior not only now but often for the rest of her life. Playing with a dog is fun and when learning is fun, a dog will learn quickly. Therefore look for opportunities to show your dog what are good habits and behavior in a fun way and prepare your dog for the expectation of living in today's society.

The moment you meet your pup you begin teaching. I always hated someone ruffling my hair with their hand in front of my eyes when I was a kid. Yet we see that happen so often with pups. Sit on the floor and encourage a pup into your lap, cradle her in your lap and hold firmly yet gently. Take the opportunity to create confidence in your hands, stroke, and massage slowly and gently with soft pressure. If she struggles, apply light pressure enough to hold but not to hurt. If she throws a tantrum, hold her in a way which restrains. Only when she has stopped struggling for a few seconds should she be released slowly and gently. You took control in the gentlest way. This technique of hold and control usually works very well also with mouthing pups. Cradle her with your forearm alongside the outside of her body. When she begins to mouth, apply gentle pressure with this forearm until she stops. Smile at pup, no need for harsh words. While cuddling her, gradually touch every part of her body. When she is comfortable in your arms, slowly run your hands gently down her legs and touch her feet. Watch for the reaction and increase the touching until you can handle feet, ears, mouth, private areas, in fact any part of her body. Your veterinarian will need to do this so take the opportunity to prepare her. She will also realize hands are friendly.

The crate should be her den or room, so call it a fun name -condo, cockpit, office, palace, castle or whatever appeals, and have her comfortable with being in there from the very beginning. 'Wait' is a wonderful command to teach. It means "do not come forward over the threshold in front of you." With pup in the crate and the door closed, say "Wait" and show her the palm of your hand with fingers downward. Slowly unlatch the door, and restating "wait," slowly open just a small amount. As pup moves forward to come through the small gap, flick it shut with a light motion of your fingers and then hold it there. Repeat until she does not move forward, only then open the door fully. Gently clip the leash to her collar, say 'come on' (follow me) and walk slowly away from the crate. If she stays there just wait for her to figure it out - no need to pull. Now she has learned 'Wait' and "Come on."



A young dog needs to go to the bathroom many times, so 'Wait' quickly becomes a habit. Now add 'Wait' while you open and close the back door to the yard and avoid bolting through outside doors. When she waits, ask "Outside?" This is a direction rather than a question, and then take her out. And now seize the important opportunity of teaching her to go on command. 'Get busy.' When you are going on a journey or wishing to leave her in the house, you can ask her to 'go' prior to this and there is less risk of accidents.

Food time is great teaching time. Go through the crate 'wait' routine and put the food in the crate or after the wait, call her "here" and there you are waiting with her dinner. Hold the bowl at your chest height or just a piece of kibble and say 'sit'. She may jump around or even bark, if she does, turn your back and ignore. Frustration often will make her sit. The moment her butt hits the floor the food goes down. She will learn 'sit' and also that the quicker she does the quicker dinner arrives. While eating, remove her bowl for a second, and then replace it. Take the opportunity to let her know that even when you take her things they come back again. Do this also with her toys. She will be quite willing to come to you if she feels that coming and giving up her 'prize' is sharing. Occasionally put your hand in her food bowl and add her kibble ration in stages as she is eating. Your hands touching her belongings become accepted.

Teaching your pup good habits is fun and rewarding for you and her and what is nice is that by taking the opportunities presented every time you are with her, you will become habitual in what you do and not even realize you are training, simply educating for life, and you will tell friends "She was such an easy dog."

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