

How to Raise a Great Puppy into a Great Dog

By Brenda Howard

FIRST THINGS FIRST. - Whether you purchased your puppy from a qualified quality breeder, a pet store or rescued a dog from the pound - the very first thing you should do is visit your veterinarian. Your vet will go over the puppy in a "wellness" check to assure that all is well with your new friend. Important vaccinations will be given which will probably include Rabies, Distemper, Parvo, Corona and Lepto. These are vital to insure your puppy has a safe and disease free future. Your vet will also suggest a program to prevent heart worm infestation. In Texas it is very important to treat all dogs with heart worm preventative. It is far less expensive to prevent heart worm infestation than to cure it!

Spay or neuter your puppy as soon as your veterinarian believes it is appropriate. Unless you are an expert (years of study on a given breed) there is no reason to breed your companion dog. There is no shortage of dogs - they are in no danger of extinction and NO it will not make your dog a better pet to experience whelping a litter. The Humane Society of America has a vast amount of data proving that early spay or neuter is not detrimental to a dog's health. Altered animals run much lower risks of developing certain types of cancers, they are less likely to roam, and are less likely to exhibit challenging behavior to other dogs of the same sex. Be responsible - spay or neuter!

NEXT GOAL SOCIALIZATION! Puppies should not leave their family of origin until they are between 7 and 10 weeks of age. A six week old puppy is not developmentally ready to leave home! Puppies learn from their litter mates how to properly behave with each other. When you get a new puppy there are some absolute rules you must follow to insure that your puppy grows up well adjusted. Puppies that are brought up through their critical socialization period correctly are on their way to becoming confident, well mannered companions. A good breeder will have already laid the ground work for a well socialized puppy by gently introducing the very young puppy to various surfaces, noises and activities.

WHY is socialization so important? Properly socialized dogs are not fearful of a particular age group, skin color, or body type. If they are not fearful, they are less likely to run away from these people, bark at them or bite them to try to make them move away. Poorly socialized dogs lack confidence. These are the dogs that might bite a child in the face if cornered. They may pull out of a collar and run away in fear of a stranger. They may bark at the sight of every strange thing that they never became accus-

tomed to during their socialization period-people in wheelchairs, people wearing funny hats, people who walk with a limp. These biters, bolters and barkers often end up with a one-way ticket to the dog pound-all because they were never properly socialized as puppies.

HOW do I socialize my puppy? As soon as you get your puppy, start introducing him safely to many different sights and sounds. In a controlled situation, he should meet other animals, children of all ages, vacuum cleaners, stairs, crates, cars, pet stores, veterinarian's offices, and everything else you can think of. He should get to meet as many dogs as possible, as it is important to learn communication signals and proper social behavior from other dogs.

A puppy class is an excellent way to teach your puppy basics of good behavior as well as provide needed exposure to riding in the car, playing nicely with others, meeting and greeting other dogs and people. Training should always be done with positive reinforcement methods. Ask your veterinarian for referrals on training classes. Classes are fun!

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, and The American Boarding Kennels Association. Brenda and her husband, Walt Partin, are owners of BlooMoon Pet Resort LP.

