

# Why Train Your Puppy?

By Virginia Clemans, DVM

You should train your puppy because well-trained dogs are happy dogs. They are welcome almost anywhere because they behave nicely around people and other dogs. They stay when told and come when they are called. They are fun to take for a walk or a romp in the park. They can be taken on trips and family outings. They are respected members of the family in every sense of the word.



Untrained dogs, on the other hand, are unhappy dogs. They don't have many privileges. When company comes, they have to be locked away because they are too unruly. When the family sits down at the dinner table, they beg for food. If allowed off leash, they run away and become lost or hurt. Nobody wants to walk them on a leash because they pull and jerk and get tangled. And they stay home a lot, because nobody wants such a nuisance on a family outing.

Remember that your puppy has a life expectancy of 10 to 16 years! You can ensure that these years are going to be mutually rewarding by training your dog when she is young. The intent of training is to set guidelines for good behavior. You can accomplish this by teaching your puppy a few basic commands. Take "sit and stay," for example, a command you can use when you want your puppy to remain quietly in one spot for a short time. When the doorbell rings, you can tell your puppy to "sit and stay" while you answer it, rather than having her frantically charge the door.

When you're training your puppy, always use his name and repeat commands frequently, especially at first, and give him a food treat when he does well. As the puppy improves, repeat the commands less frequently and at greater intervals. Eventually, food treats can start to appear less predictably, but at the outset, the puppy needs that incentive to help him maintain his focus.

The keys to successful puppy training are consistency, patience and use of positive reinforcement. Everyone in the household must be consistent and work with the puppy in the same manner. Training should be fun for everyone, including the puppy. Children should be monitored to ensure the puppy's safety and to ensure that they aren't teaching the puppy the wrong behavior. Always reward your dog for good behavior; never punish for bad behavior.

There are many books on teaching your puppy basic commands using positive reinforcement; check out the pet section at your local library or bookstore. Remember, a well-trained dog is a happy dog, so take the time to train your puppy.

*Dr. Virginia Clemans has been Best Friends' chief veterinarian since February 2001. In addition to caring for more than 1,500 animals at the sanctuary, she writes an occasional column for the local newspaper and the Best Friends' newsletter.*

See also: [Clicker Training for You and Your Pets](#)  
[Positive Reinforcement: Training with Praise and Rewards](#)