



IT TAKES A PACK TO RAISE A PUPPY

Raising a pup means meeting his needs – you are his family now!

Not too long ago, I read about a study that showed that when recorded birdsong was played to plants, it served to prepare the plants for morning and the coming light. Hearing the birdsong, the plants underwent specific changes that allowed them to make good use of the sunlight. The point of the article was that greenhouse operators using artificial lighting would be wise to use this simple approach to help plants use the light as effectively as physiologically possible.

When we raise puppies, it would be nice to know that there was something as simple as recorded birdsong to help trigger our puppies' minds so that our interactions with them would have the best possible effects. But puppies aren't plants - they're complex creatures zooming along at an astounding pace on their developmental timetable.

Compounding it all is the reality that while we are well meaning, we are still just humans trying to raise a baby dog. Hillary Clinton may or may not be right that it takes a village to raise a child; it definitely does take a pack to raise a puppy. In taking a puppy to raise, we become a substitute canine family. This is no easy task.

By the time the puppy is 7 weeks old, Nature has prepared the puppy to form deep bonds - in the world, with the pack around him; as a domestic dog, to form

bonds with us, his substitute family. This bond is heartwarming and charming - what is more adorable than a little puppy trustingly chugging along behind you? It is also absolutely practical: this behavior is what will keep the puppy alive, fed, protected and educated. From 7-12 weeks of age, the puppy is amazingly open to (even eager for) relationships.

But possible problems are already germinating, even at this tender age. Even though a puppy is quite willing to develop relationships, he does come to the table with some expectations hard-wired into his canine brain. He also has needs, ones that are typically met in a "natural" setting.

The puppy expects that there are rules in the world. His mother and other dogs had them and reinforced them according to their personal style. Even the pup's siblings had some rudimentary rules which were enforced through clumsy but oddly effective ways. (Fat puppies learn quickly that you can get much of what you want by simply sitting on a less hefty puppy. Biting hard on a rival's ear or lip can also be very effective.)

Even at the tender age of 7 weeks old, the puppy is watching you, trying to figure out what **your** rules are. Where he sees uncertainty or inconsistency, his canine mind cannot help but make note of this. As he grows, he may feel the need to test the weak areas in order to clarify what the rules may or may not be. He learns that there are those he should respect, those who are his peers, and those for whom he can set the rules. He is (eternally) interested in seeing where you, the neighbors, the cat next door and the Poodle he just met fall on the spectrum. Can he bark and make the cat run? Or does the cat inform him in clear terms that was a very poor choice? Are you a pushover who needs not be listened to, or are you someone worth

cooperating with because it's fun and rewarding?

Though he cannot articulate the concept, your puppy expects that leadership will be provided for him, or lacking that, that he is free to make up the rules as he matures. Like you, he'd prefer that his leader(s) be calm, consistent, and clear while also being benevolent, protective and aware. We all feel safe and trusting under such conditions.

And because he is always a dog in all his waking moments, and so always sees things from a dog's perspective, he assumes that you are deliberately communicating with him and offering guidance for him in your every waking moment. A puppy (or even an adult dog) cannot understand that your life is not devoted to guiding him 24 hours a day or that you play many roles in our often hectic lives as spouse, parent, worker, friend, etc.

Though puppy raiser-trainer may be only a part-time job for YOU, it does not change the fact that your puppy is a puppy 24 hours a day. Gaps in the guidance you provide for him will impact on the long term relationship between you and your puppy.

Depending on the individual dog, the breed and the situation, a lack of good leadership can lead to annoying and bratty behaviors, or it can lead to very serious consequences. **Loving a puppy is not enough; he expects and deserves clear, consistent guidance.** This means you setting the rules for what is and is not acceptable behavior for a future guide dog. This includes **never** pulling on a collar, impeccable house manners, brilliant obedience, utmost cooperation and willingness, and being connected to you.

In a natural setting, a puppy wouldn't have to pester anyone or eat the linoleum out of boredom or bark as a way to amuse

himself. His littermates would be there, just as eager to play as he. It is a humbling moment when you watch a litter of pups playing and realize that *this* is what you are going to replace in your puppy's life. The next time you find yourself exasperated with the puppy who won't stop pestering your other dogs to play, or who drops a toy invitingly at your feet for the millionth time, think of your puppy multiplied by 4 or 6 or 8 and what fun that many puppies would be having together. Then remember - *you* volunteered to be the substitute for all that.

The puppy needs to learn to inhibit his impulses - in other words, to develop some self control. Your pup has had time with the GEB "Puppy Lord" - wonderful adult dogs who excel as puppy teachers. They are great at teaching puppies this critical social skill by using perfectly calibrated growls, looks, and body language to teach pups that they may not steal toys or act rude.

When dogs teach puppies to control themselves, they do not make excuses for the puppy: "Well, I was trying to teach him to leave my bone alone but he got so excited and I suppose it did smell pretty good, so I just let him have it." **Humans** make excuses for dogs, forgetting that self control is a skill that must be taught.

For puppies to be welcome and enjoyable members of our substitute families, we need to teach them a great deal of self control. Puppies do learn self control from other dogs but only concerning matters that are of interest to other dogs. A dog would not bother to teach a puppy that he should not get up on the sofa or steal food from the kitchen counter. These things don't matter much to dogs, though they matter to us! But an older dog *will* teach a puppy that you should not steal another dog's meal or toy or simply take a direct line of travel over another dog's body - much more polite to go around.

When teaching self control, dogs are careful to make the lessons appropriate for the puppy's age. Before the puppy reaches 16-18 weeks of age, normal dogs are amazingly tolerant of puppy behavior. The careful observer will note a slow, subtle increase in what older dogs begin expecting from the puppy, but the overall impression is that a puppy can get away with almost anything. And the truth is, he can, thanks to the invisible (at least to humans!) but very real "puppy permit."

What the puppy doesn't yet know is this: there's an expiration date on that puppy permit. When it expires, the rules can change quite quickly. Behavior that was acceptable one day may be completely unacceptable the next. With my own dogs, I've seen a puppy's permit expire over the course of a single morning. Just before breakfast, a four month old puppy galloped over one of my older dogs - nothing more than a dirty look and a grunt was what she got for this behavior. Later that day, the puppy did the same thing and was shocked when the adult dog leaped up fiercely snarling and barking in displeasure. After a few repetitions over the next few days, the puppy learned to politely walk around - not over! - other dogs.

The expiration date is usually at 16-20 weeks of age, and corresponds with hormonal shifts in the puppy's body. Once the hormonal shift occurs, the puppy will find much less tolerance from the dogs around him, and increasingly, he will be expected to act in a more mature fashion. Smart puppy owners keep an eye on the calendar too, allowing puppies to be puppies under some broad but consistent guidelines. Very slowly - almost imperceptibly, you begin to ask for a little more self control, a little more respect, a little more responsibility from the puppy but never losing sight of the fact that the puppy permit is still in force.

Once the permit has expired, the wise handler can act just like a wise dog, and begin to push a little harder and expect more from the puppy.

From the best puppy raising dogs I've known, here are a few pointers for humans trying to raise a puppy:

- Tolerate puppies - they know not what they do
- Teach puppies - they know not what to do
- Be consistent with puppies - they forget things quickly
- Keep lessons short - puppies are easily distracted
- Puppies need to play - that is why puppies are born in litters
- Good social skills & manners are made, not born
- Remember puppy permits do have expiration dates – change your expectations accordingly
- Don't wait till the puppy has stolen your bone to teach him about manners
- Be careful what you teach a puppy - someday, he might think he's the one in charge
- Tired puppies are always good puppies