



# Puppy Training Insights

BY MEAGAN TYSON | SAN DIEGO PETS

**F**or many new pet owners, raising a puppy is like raising a child, replete with all the questions parents harbor. Meagan Karnes, dog trainer and co-owner of Metropawlitian Dog in downtown San Diego, offers answers to some of the most frequent questions asked by new puppy owners.

**SAN DIEGO PETS:** At what age is it appropriate for a puppy to have interaction with puppies, dogs and other animals? What about interaction with people and kids?

**MEAGAN KARNES:** Young puppies need socialization. At a very young age (i.e., below 16 weeks), keep interactions with other dogs controlled. At this age, puppies are not fully vaccinated and therefore aren't protected against many illnesses that can be spread from dog to dog. Some of these illnesses, including distemper and parvovirus, are potentially fatal to young, unvaccinated pups, so be sure to keep your pup protected by allowing only for controlled interaction with other healthy, fully vaccinated dogs. Also, keep puppies away from areas that unvaccinated dogs may have visited, such as public parks. Many illnesses can be spread through fecal mat-

ter in the soil. During this time, when puppies are vulnerable to contagious disease, socialization in controlled environments, such as in the home, is key. This is a great time for puppies to socialize with children and people of all ages. Just make sure the interaction and experience is positive for young pups. Ask strangers to wash their hands before handling young puppies to prevent the spread of disease. At about 16 weeks, after the pup has received its final round of vaccinations, socialization with other dogs, animals and people is key for proper development of social skills.

**SDP:** What training exercises can a new puppy owner do at home?

**MK:** New puppy owners can introduce basic commands at home by merely luring the dog into a desired position with a treat and rewarding when the behavior has been accomplished. It is also great to practice a puppy's recall - introduce this by calling the puppy's name in a tone of excitement and telling him or her to come. When the puppy comes, reward with a tasty treat and lots of praise. Start the exercise only a few feet away from your pup and move far-

ther away with each success until the puppy comes from long distances inside the home. Make sure to always reward a job well done!

**SDP:** What are the key things you need to teach a puppy for him to grow into a well-trained dog?

**MK:** Socialization is key when dogs are young. Introduce them to all sorts of new people, places, things and animals. Make the experience positive so that your pup grows up with confidence when faced with the unknown. At this age, it is a good idea to teach your puppy how to greet strangers. Never reward a puppy for jumping. Often, we pet a puppy when he or she jumps up for attention. This encourages the behavior, and therefore, the behavior will continue. Rather, if someone wants to pet your pup, wait for all four feet to be on the floor before any attention is given. This goes for treats, too! Never treat a jumping dog. Wait for the dog to be calm before you offer a treat.

**SDP:** Should owners get a trainer or professional help?

**MK:** It is definitely recommended that new puppy owners establish a relation-

ship with a trainer while the puppy is young. The trainer can help new doggy parents understand what to expect, and can detect potential problems before they arise and help to nip them in the bud before they escalate. Training at an early age makes for a well-rounded, sociable and confident pup.

**SDP:** How should pet owners select a trainer or facility, particularly for puppies?

**MK:** Select a trainer you feel comfortable with. Make sure to ask them where they were educated and how many years of experience they have, specifically with dogs similar in age and breed as yours. Ask for references, and check them! Ask past clients what they liked and disliked about the training programs. Don't depend on certifications or degrees. Many certifications are basic and only require an at-home study program that doesn't really test a trainer's hands-on capabilities with dogs. Last, make sure the person is someone you enjoy working with and that your pup takes a liking to him or her too. Make sure you agree with the trainer's methods and are comfortable implementing the suggestions they make.

**SDP:** Anything a new puppy owner shouldn't do?

**MK:** Never smack, hit or kick a young puppy (or any dog, for that matter). Taking your frustration out on a dog only tells the dog you are weak and not in control of your own behavior. In addition, it can scar young puppies and cause them to become hand-shy or even fear-aggressive. Also, never leave a young puppy unsupervised unless it is contained in a crate or pen. Puppies like to get into trouble and have been known to chew things such as household cleaner containers, cables and cords and other potentially dangerous items. Make sure your puppy is always supervised -- otherwise, create a secure space so that you can be sure he or she is safe.

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