



These Early Training Mistakes Can Emotionally Scar Your Pet

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Story at-a-glance

- What you do in the first days and weeks of bringing your pup home sets the stage for your life together and is a major influence on how your puppy grows into a dog
- Top mistakes by puppy parents including letting your puppy have the run of the house, misbehave because it's "cute" and overstimulating him during socialization
- Punishing your puppy and putting off obedience training and housetraining are other common mistakes new puppy owners make

Adopting a puppy is an experience you'll never forget, but in the new-puppy excitement, it's important to focus on more than just puppy snuggles and kisses. What you do in the first days and weeks of bringing your pup home sets the stage for your life together and is a major influence on how your puppy grows into a dog.

Will your puppy be a well-mannered, [friendly dog](#) or one who's nervous and thinks jumping up is a perfectly acceptable form of greeting? While some of this is determined by your pup's personality, some is a direct result of your early days together. Here's what to avoid doing to make sure you're bringing your pup up right.¹

Top Five Puppy Parent Mistakes to Avoid

1. Letting Your Puppy Have the Run of the House — It's tempting to [open your front door](#) and let your puppy run through your house with abandon. But not only can this be overwhelming for your puppy, it can also be dangerous. Your puppy may not be accustomed to staircases, for instance, and he will almost certainly chew on whatever he can get his teeth into to — including your new furniture and electrical cords.

In his excitement, he may pee on your expensive rug or attempt to "play" with your less-than-forgiving cat. A better idea is to keep your puppy with you at all times, and with your full attention on him. This way, you can get him outside right away if he shows signs of needing to potty, and you can redirect him if he starts to chew on something he shouldn't.

Putting a leash on your puppy and attaching it loosely to your belt works well if you think you may be distracted for a moment. If you'll be leaving the house, your puppy should stay in his [crate](#) (and he can use this for nap time as well).

2. Letting Your Puppy Misbehave — Puppies will be puppies, and as such you shouldn't expect them to be perfect 100 percent of the time. That said, you also should take care to not encourage bad behavior or behaviors you might think are cute now, but which may become much less endearing as your puppy grows into an adult, i.e., jumping up on people, barking for attention or [nipping during play](#).

The best time for a dog to learn to play well with others is while he's still a puppy. So, for instance, if your puppy is biting too hard during play, don't encourage it. Instead, loudly say "Ouch," and stop playing immediately. Likewise, if your puppy barks at you to get his dinner, wait until he's sitting quietly to give him his food and avoid giving him attention if he jumps up on your legs. Setting the ground rules early will make things much easier in the future.

3. Bringing Your Puppy Into Potentially Scary Situations — Between 5 and 16 weeks, puppies are most open to investigating new environments and stimuli. Puppies not given a full range of socialization

opportunities by about 10 weeks can develop fear of the unfamiliar, so it's extremely important to provide appropriate social and learning opportunities in the early weeks — the key word being “appropriate.”

Socialization should be a positive experience for your puppy, so while you'll want to expose him to new people and environments on a daily basis, you'll want to make sure it's done in a way that still makes your puppy feel safe. While a trip to a dog-friendly shop or a walk in a busier part of town may be beneficial, avoid over-stimulation or potentially negative experiences at all costs.

Over-stimulation of a young puppy can result in behaviors that are the opposite of what you're hoping for — such as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance — so knowing when enough is enough is important. The first four months is when we need to build confidence, trust and positive experiences on a daily basis.

4. Punishing Your Puppy — Dogs learn best from positive reinforcement, not punishment. If your puppy does something he shouldn't, chances are it's because he's still learning. Avoid using negative punishments like scruff shakes, alpha rollovers, squeezing the puppy to the floor, nose thumps, holding the mouth closed or swatting. All this will do is frighten and hurt your pup.

Instead, redirect bad behavior and reward good behavior. If your puppy is chewing on something he shouldn't, provide an [appropriate alternative](#) and reward him when he uses it. Basically, [positive reinforcement behavior training](#) uses very small-sized treats (pea-sized; you can even use frozen peas if your dog likes them), verbal praise and affection to encourage desired behaviors in your dog.

5. Putting Off Housetraining and Obedience Training — You should start teaching your puppy where to go potty from the second you get home. Using consistency, positive reinforcement and patience, take your puppy outside to the appropriate spot right from the start; avoid using indoor pads for your puppy to piddle on as this will only confuse him (unless you plan on having him use these into adulthood).

Obedience training should also start early on, including teaching your puppy to come when called (recall). This is one of the most important commands your dog needs to know for his own safety and will also let you give your dog more freedom when he's older.

One piece of advice: be sure to reward your dog when he successfully comes when you call him; don't use it as an opportunity to do something your dog's not fond of, like trimming his nails. But positive body experiences, like nail trims, are also an important part of getting your puppy acclimated to stress-free physical examinations.

I recommend puppies ideally stay in obedience classes their entire first year of life, as you can't have a dog that's too well behaved. Sadly, shelters are full of dogs that never attended obedience class when they were forming their manners. My suggestion is to stay in class until all of your dog's behaviors make you proud (otherwise, you still have obedience work to do).

Be Sure to Transition Your Puppy to a Healthy Diet

When you adopt a new puppy, he'll be used to eating whatever food he was being fed at the shelter, most likely some form of [kibble](#). At first, keep feeding him this but gradually transition to a meticulously balanced [species-appropriate diet](#).

Puppies eat much more for their weight than adult dogs. A general guideline is that young puppies should be fed three to four times a day, while older puppies can be fed twice a day. You can also try letting your pup eat at her own pace for about 10 minutes three times a day. Generally, puppies can be moved to adult foods between 6 and 10 months of age, depending on their breed, size and current physical development.

With the above ground rules in place, concerning not only diet but also safety and training, you're setting your puppy up for a lifetime of health and happiness.

Last, but certainly not least, be sure to give your puppy plenty of attention and love. Not only are the snuggle sessions one of the irresistible benefits of pet ownership, they'll also teach your puppy that human handling is enjoyable, making vet visits and nail trims infinitely easier later on.