



Puppy Behaviour Guide:

A 5-step guide designed to help ensure you are equipped and ready to raise a happy puppy!



1. Socialisation...

Early life experiences play an important role in the behavioural development of dogs. Providing you have acquired your puppy from a reputable breeder they should have begun the socialisation experience, however you will need to ensure that this is continued. There is a socialisation period which takes place between 3 and 14 weeks of age and this is the prime time in which your puppy is equipped to learn about the world. By socialising your puppy, they will be introduced to a wide range of individuals (including humans and other species such as: other dogs, cats, and horses) in a positive manner. Socialisation can also help make vet visits a positive experience for you and your dog, as puppies will become used to being handled. By implementing a socialisation program, beginning from when you get your puppy and carrying on into adulthood you will establish a positive relationship with your puppy and it will help you to experience fewer unwanted behaviours as your puppy ages! Puppy or obedience classes are a great way to learn how to successfully socialise your dog.

2. Habituation:

The socialisation period is also an excellent time to work on habituation with your puppy. This is where your puppy will learn to be comfortable with non-threatening stimuli, such as: cars, bins, hoovers and much more! Previous experience in dogs has a major influence on their response to a stressful situation, therefore the more positive experiences a puppy has in its early months the better its reaction will be to new objects in the future. Alongside socialisation and handling already discussed, puppies should have the opportunity to explore new objects, have access to a variety of surfaces, indoors and outdoors and have gentle exposure to a range of noises, such as; traffic, fireworks and children (see useful links¹). Socialisation programs can be followed which suggest stimuli that puppies should be introduced to, along with the intensity of the exposure to the stimulus (see useful links²). Following the above will help in raising a behaviourally sound adult dog.



3. Training:

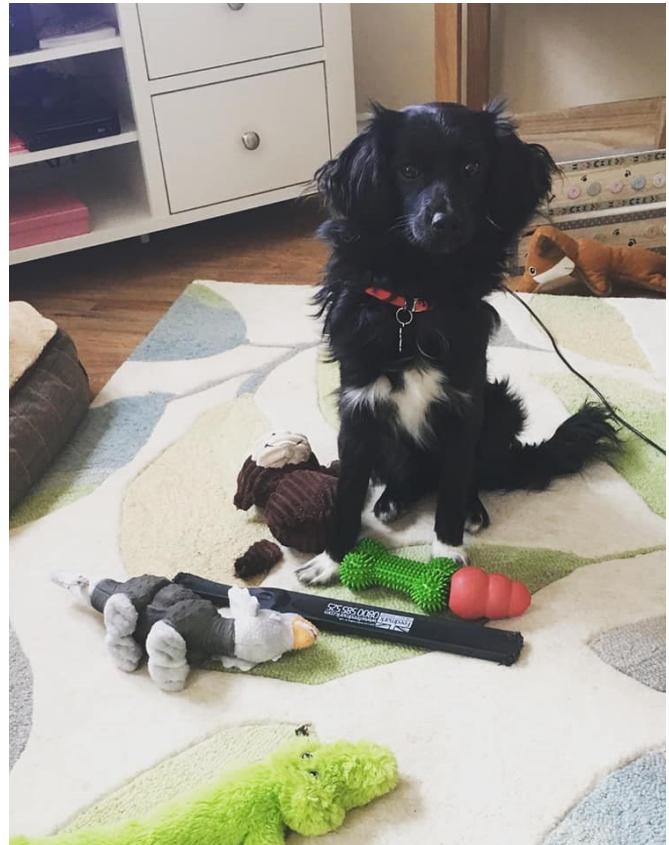
Enrolling your puppy in a puppy class can help reduce the likelihood of any behavioural disorders from developing in the future. Working towards training your puppy to be well mannered can massively improve your dog's welfare and will help with the engagement between you and your dog in shared activities, such as walking. Positive training techniques should always be used (the use of praise and food/play rewards) and the use of verbal and physical punishment should be avoided in all cases. The use of punishment is likely to lead to your dog showing fear responses, whereas using reward- based training can improve your dog's ability to learn. By consistently engaging in appropriate training and play interactions with your puppy it will help to improve general obedience in your adult dog!



4. Enrichment:

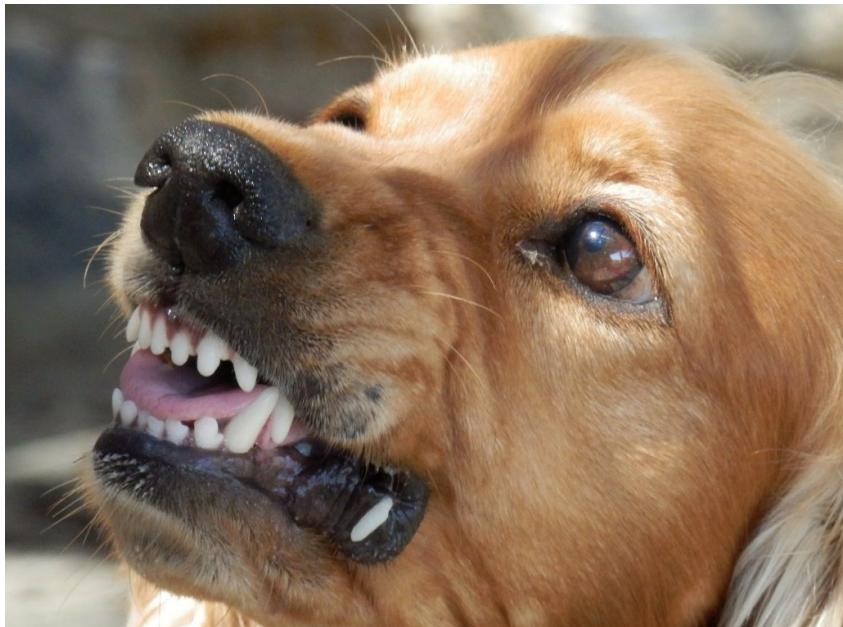
Enrichment can be used to improve canine welfare and can also help to reduce the chance of your puppy developing undesirable behaviours. Providing enrichment in your dogs life includes both social stimulation (this can include human contact/handling and contact with other dogs) and environmental enrichment including the use of; toys, music, odours and food. Enrichment helps to encourage species appropriate behaviour, it will help with both the physical and mental development of your puppy and helps to provide an environment which can meet their behavioural needs. Dogs are social animals; therefore it is important you consider how much time your dog will spend alone. If time spent alone cannot be minimal, then perhaps consider employing a pet sitter, or asking a friend/family member to spend time with your dog when you are out. Play is a simple method of providing enrichment for your dog. Toys can be used, dogs can show individual preferences for what toys they like, so try a variety of toys and observe what your puppy seems to show interest in. Play can also take place with other dogs, providing both your dog is comfortable and well socialised and any other owners of dogs involved are happy with it.

Sensory enrichment can also be used, for example classical music can be used to help relax dogs. Also consider using feeding enrichment toys such as the Kong™, puzzle feeders and scatter feeding. These can help keep a dog stimulated and entertained, as well as providing means of activity and brain stimulation if you cannot get your dog out as much as you would like (useful links³).



5. Understanding canine body language:

Observing body language is a useful way to understand how your dog is feeling. Therefore, it is a good idea to learn about canine body language, so you can recognise if your dog is anxious and can work to improve the situation. Being able to understand your dog's body language is also important for safety, as if fear responses are missed it can lead to aggression. Body language in dogs can be very subtle, however gestures often displayed by dogs include; movement of the ears, eyes, facial muscles, body positions, paws and the tail. The ladder of aggression (see useful links⁴) is an excellent guide for learning about fear related canine body language and studying this will help you notice the subtler signs, before your dog needs to reach the point of growling, snapping and biting to show distress. However, if you notice signs further up the ladder consult a qualified behaviourist for advice and support.



Useful links:

1. <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/dog-behaviour-health/sound-therapy-for-pets>
2. <http://www.simplybehaviour.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/puppy-habituuation-schedule-with-new-logo.pdf>
3. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/canineenrichment/>
4. <https://www.kendalshepherd.com/the-canine-commandments/>