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Your Smart Dog Five Things to Teach Your New Dog First September 2008

A pretty little Rottweiler named Copper is the newest addition to our family. My parents picked her out of the local shelter where she was being held as a stray. My husband and I were just wrapping up our vacation at my parent's place on Lake Anna, so we got to spend time with Copper during her first few days in her new home. **The focus of this month's newsletter are the first five things your newly adopted dog needs to learn.** But first, there are **three important things to remember** about bringing home a new dog.

First, assume the dog knows nothing. No house training, no leash manners, no social skills, none of it. If you start with that assumption, you can begin immediately teaching the dog what you want him to know. Don't wait for trouble before you begin teaching. In other words, don't wait for the dog to have a bathroom accident inside, don't wait for the dog to chew the couch, don't wait for the dog to be grabby with food. Just start teaching the dog what the rules are right away.

Second, know that there's something called a "honeymoon period," during which there are relatively few problems. Usually, the honeymoon period lasts for about two weeks. After the dog settles in and gets comfortable with its surroundings, you may begin to see more personality, more of the "real dog" surfacing.

Third, make sure you know what your dog's rules will be before you bring him home. Will he be allowed on the couch? Will he be allowed to sleep in your bed at night? Will he be expected to stay out of the dining room at dinner time? Will you use a crate? The answers to these questions are up to you – just be sure that the rules start as soon as the dog comes home. It's unfair to let the dog on the sofa for now, if you won't allow the dog on the furniture later.

Now, let's get down to those five things you want to teach your new dog.

House Training and Crate Training

House Training Assume the dog is not house trained – no harm if the dog is house trained, but oh the mess and trouble if the dog isn't and you assume he is. Treat the dog like you would a mobile toddler: don't let the dog out of your sight! Use a 6-foot leash if necessary, or use gates to block access to out-of-the-way rooms. Take the dog out every hour, whether you think he has to go or not. When he goes outside, praise him enthusiastically! Don't hold back – say it like you mean it!

Your dog can learn the new rules in no time and without frustration, aggression or domination, with a little bit of guidance from you.

Crate Training Toss a few good, tasty treats (better than crunchy dog biscuits) into the crate and let the dog go in and explore. Do not shut the door. Let the dog come and go as he pleases. **All meals are fed in the crate – door open if you're home.** Stuff a Kong full of peanut butter, cottage cheese, yogurt or other yummy and toss the Kong inside. Once the dog is contentedly chewing on the Kong, close the door and leave. **Try to tone down your comings and goings as if it's no big deal when you leave or when you come back.**

Reaction to Touch

Try to begin all touching up where the dog can see your hands. **Avoid surprising the dog – don't touch the dog if he can't see you coming and don't reach over the dog's head.** Bend down (at the knees, not the waist) if the dog seems hesitant or flinches when you extend your hand. Let the dog come to you and your guests – don't let your guests loom over, crowd, or force themselves on the dog.



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If the dog is somewhere you don't want him to be, call him to you in a happy voice. Don't reach for the collar to pull him down and don't forcefully yell. Get a yummy goodie or an interesting toy if you need to – but avoid pulling and tugging on the collar.

Obviously, no swatting, smacking, dragging or pushing the dog – anything physical is not a good idea!

Leash Manners

It's unlikely your newly adopted dog will have perfect leash manners. **Use either a flat-buckle collar or a martingale collar (limited-slip) on your dog.** Pass by the choke collars and prong collars – they don't actually teach your dog leash manners and they can actually hurt your dog. If pulling is a real problem, check out this specially designed no-pull harness: *Premier Easy Walk Harness*. It's a fantastic new product and I highly recommend it!

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Take part of your dog's breakfast or dinner on your walks. In order to earn his food, he'll need to be next to you. Start out by feeding a few pieces of kibble for free. Take one or two steps and feed another piece of kibble to the dog if he's close to you. If he reaches the end of the leash and is pulling, stop walking. Just cease all movement. Hold still and stay silent. When the dog turns to look at you, wondering why you aren't moving, say "Good!" and show (and give) the dog a piece of his kibble. Do this often and pretty soon, your dog will realize the best place to be is next to you! Be generous with those rewards and you'll progress quickly!

Giving Up Objects

This is ridiculously easy to teach your dog. **Don't wait until your dog has something of value to start teaching this – start now, before there are any issues.** Find a toy your dog likes and show it to him. When he shows interest in it, find a second toy or use a yummy piece of food to distract your dog. He'll most likely drop the first toy to get the second (or the treat). You'll praise enthusiastically, pick up the

dropped toy, and then return the originally dropped toy to the dog.

You can also drop yummy pieces of chicken into your dog's bowl as he's eating his dinner. Don't pick the bowl up, just drop the chicken in the bowl and keep moving. Do this often enough and the dog will begin looking forward to your approaching his bowl!

Gentle Mouth

Most puppies learn early in their life how to control the force of their bite. If they are playing with their brothers and sisters and bite too hard, the reaction is a yipe and turning away from the offending puppy. You can teach your dog this, as well. **Work on only the hardest of bites first, ignoring the lesser bites. When he clamps down, say "Ow!" and turn away from the dog.** Say nothing else, just turn away. As soon as the dog settles, you can return to him and talk calmly.

If you have a toy and your dog jumps for it and touches your hand with his teeth, drop the toy immediately and turn away from the dog. **Anytime your dog's teeth touch your skin, you immediately leave. No playing, no scolding, simply leave.**

Obviously, there are lots of other skills your dog will need to learn, but the five skills I covered in this article are the ones you should tackle first. Your dog can learn the new rules in no time and without frustration, aggression or domination, with a little bit of guidance from you.

If you need more help, please contact a certified pet dog trainer that uses positive reinforcement, dog-friendly training techniques in your area. If you need help locating a trainer, drop me a line, I'd be happy to help you find a qualified trainer in your area.

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