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NON-AGGRESSIVE TRAINING FOR PUPPIES

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Although raising a puppy can be fun, too often the animal is allowed to become a monster. The importance of obedience classes for puppies and owners cannot be overstated. Early training is needed particularly for large dogs and those with dominant personalities.

It is critical that a puppy learn to be subordinate to its owner just as it would to a pack leader. Many times, the owner relinquishes the right to this control. Even putting a collar on the dog without its permission becomes impossible. Once established, this behavior is difficult to reverse.

Stable learning begins in puppies at approximately 8 weeks of age. Puppies have an extremely short attention span, so lessons should be kept short. Many training classes for puppies incorporate learning activities in games. Such instruction is not offered in all communities; however, an owner can work with a puppy to establish dominance even before the puppy is old enough to attend formal obedience classes.

Methods

Non-aggressive training for puppies basically means do not let the puppy do anything that would be unacceptable if it were an adult. Puppies bite in play. This is when the dog learns how much jaw pressure is necessary to create pain. Many owners endure bites by pup's needle-sharp teeth because "it is so cute," although painful. When a puppy bites a littermate, a yelp is elicited, play ceases, and the biting stops. In effect, the littermate has said, "when you bite that hard, it hurts." Thus, a puppy should be discouraged from biting people by diverting its attention or stopping play. Discipline is generally not effective because it is not understood.

Chewing also should be discouraged. Mouth-oriented games such as "tug of war" or "grab the sock" tend to encourage use of the mouth. Chewing and biting then become even bigger problems. Too many toys can encourage destructive chewing. To a puppy, old knotted socks are not different from good socks. Old shoes are essentially the same as new shoes, and sticks are similar to chair legs. A program of plentiful outdoor exercise reduces the pup's tendency toward rough indoor play and the ensuing problems.

Puppies must also learn to accept dominant behavior from their owners. Taking food away from a pup while it is eating ensures that food can be safely taken from the animal when it is older. If the puppy growls, the dish is not returned to it for at least five minutes. This process is repeated until the pup no longer reacts hostilely. Children in the family should practice this procedure under supervision, before the puppy becomes large enough to harm the child.

There are other subtle lessons to achieve dominance over puppies. The puppy can be held down on its back until it no longer resists. Frequent clipping of the toenails will accustom the pup to having its feet handled. Other helpful procedures include: holding the puppy in the air by its chest until it stops struggling, grasping the puppy's tail and moving it in difference direction, gently holding the puppy's mouth closed, manipulating the ears, applying a collar, and leading the puppy by holding the collar. Although each of these activities last only a few seconds, they help the puppy become accustomed to its owner's control.

By 6 months of age, the puppy's attention span is longer and training can become intense. This is a good age to start formal obedience training. Training can make the pet more enjoyable, but only if the owner is involved in the class. Sending dogs to trainers establishes a proper relationship between the dog and the trainer; it does not teach the owner how to insist on the same results.

Comments

Owners of young puppies should take a few minutes each day to establish dominance over the dog. These concepts will ensure that the owner will rule the life of the pet and not vice versa.