

FEAR AND NERVOUS

Puppy Primer Series

ANXIETY AND FEAR

Puppies brains develop until 13 weeks. Then this door closes and you cannot help them. You can condemn a puppy to a lifetime of anxiety and fear.

The best gift you can give your puppy is not freedom to do what it wants, and not fun. It is a structured environment that gives your puppy 'stress coping skills' the behaviors needed to be calm, and the 'follow me' behavior.



Never force puppies to meet strangers

GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY

You are running out of time. If you got your puppy at 8 weeks old then you only have 4 weeks to change your puppies life. The difference between a fearful/aggressive puppy and a confident puppy will happen in the first 4 weeks.

A well socialized puppy can have fun, adventures, and happy emotions for the rest of its life.

Q: Why can't I train my puppy like I have trained other dogs?

A: Have you looked out the window? Our world is becoming more and more crowded. Even in the Suburbs lots have dropped from 1/2 acre to barely larger than the house. Apartments are bigger. Factories and businesses are no longer 'across town'.

And, we now have a habit where we walk the dog. Yes, this is something new in the last 2 decades. Your puppy has no place to relax. Even in your own home the puppy is hearing other people, smelling strangers, and is flooded with noises.

Even if you, live in the country. Wild animals have lost their habitat to farmland. The wild animals are now rooting in your garden and garbage.

A: There is a second answer. 20 years ago professionals bred dogs. They mentored under other professionals. Most of them studied genetics. These people had kennels and training centers. Everything was done for the dog's care.

If a dog was nervous or aggressive than the dog was 'culled' from the breeding program. Today we have amateurs breeding dogs that should never be bred because of temperament. We also have new 'designer' breeds that are bred to 'pay the mortgage'. Many of these breeds should never be mixed.

“You are condemning a puppy to a lifetime of anxiety” Dr Ian Dunbar

Q: I already have a puppy. What can I do to give my puppy a better life?

A: If your puppy is under 13 weeks then do the 100 day challenge mentioned in this blog. If you can't find it then contact us and we will send you a copy. Second, get your puppy into socialization classes, puppy obedience, and then a puppy sport until it is 1 year old. This will give the puppy, and you, the skills needed to live in today's environment.



MY DOG IS OVER 13 WEEKS, BUT UNDER 6 MONTHS

You still have a window of opportunity. I suggest doing the 100 day challenge, and do one 'behavior' exercise every hour, on the hour, until your dog is one year old.

You have probably done no socializing, or did it wrong. Socializing isn't about forcing the dog to face scary things. It is about making the dog happy around scary things. So my suggestion is to start in the house and do exercises and give your dog treats. Then when your dog can do those exercises take it outside and repeat. If your dog starts being nervous then slow down.

Remember, your dog doesn't need to engage. You can sit across the field from baseball diamond and play with your puppy. If your puppy ignores the people then move 10-15' closer, tomorrow. Repeat until your puppy becomes interested in the people – and then move backwards 10-15'. You want your puppy to ignore the people and focus on you.

No, socializing isn't about taking your puppy around strangers and 'overwhelming' or frightening the puppy. If you made this mistake because you were excited when you got your new puppy then that is okay. Start today and do it right.

It will take 2 – 5 months to teach a puppy to stop being afraid. Don't fail your puppy. Don't cheat your puppy from a long and happy life with you. Take the time and patience to help your puppy.

STOP WALKING YOUR DOG

One of the first places that dogs learn fear is on daily walks. They are walking through other dog's territories. Something their instinct is telling them is bad. They are having leash jerks, and being corrected. This is wrong. (train the dog to walk nicely THEN take it out into public).

Only walk a puppy when it has the skills needed to walk nicely.

So, how do you do the 100 day challenge and get your dog's feet on 100 textures, and take your dog to 100 environments? Easy. Put your dog in the car and drive it somewhere that you can 'play' with your puppy. This takes the stress off the puppy and teaches it that when it leaves the house something fun will happen.

DON'T LET STRANGERS PET YOUR DOG!

This is the #1 way of making a puppy fearful of strangers. How would you like it if a stranger came up and started petting you, or your child. Or, what would you think if someone said, 'can I look at your purse', or 'can I drive your car?'

No, of course not. That is socially unacceptable. And it is just as unacceptable to let strangers pet your puppy because your puppy is a baby that needs to be protected.

So, how do you socialize your puppy? Easy. Have a BBQ or a party. Have a bunch of people over, but instead of petting your puppy, let them feed your puppy. Just let your puppy walk from one person to another. When your puppy approaches someone they give it a (very tiny) treat and then ignore the puppy. This is how the 'pros' do it.

Next time you do this have everyone dress weird, wear glasses, dance, walk around, jump, - just behave weird.

A puppy should meet hundreds of people by the time it is 1 year old. If you cannot do this then you need to act weird. Dance, jump, skip, wear strange clothes, sing, shout...daily, until the puppy starts to realize that 'different' is fun.



give less treats. Keep going to the harder challenge and offer 'better' treats. Your puppy will come around.

#4 Don't give up. People give up way too fast. This exercise should be done 2 – 3x a day until your puppy is a year old. It doesn't matter how busy your puppy is – it needs you, now.

#5 You are building a BEHAVIOR not teaching a TRICK.. this is important. When building a behavior we let the dog move forward at its own pace. We don't correct or use leash jerks. We don't use a stern voice if the puppy refuses. We keep the game fun and lively. Happy. The happier you are, the faster your puppy will learn to be confident.

#6 Don't show off. Your puppy has learned to walk the board that is 6" off the ground and jump into your pool. Fantastic. But don't start making your puppy show off to all your friends.

If you want to show off the trick then video it and put it on facebook. But don't force your puppy to do the trick in front of others or you will ruin all your work, and your puppy will become nervous or lose the 'joy' in the training.

CHALLENGES

The more challenges your puppy succeeds at, the more 'coping skills' it will have. Coping skills means the dog has been challenged 1000 times, and won. The dog enjoys challenges, and has learned there is nothing to fear. Public. This is how to raise a confident dog.

The more challenges the better. Whether it is climbing over a laundry basket, walking under a tunnel made of blankets and lawn chairs, standing on buckets. It doesn't matter, just find challenges.

But it isn't the challenge, it is what you do. You are the one who can make or break this exercise.

#1 Do not MAKE your puppy do the challenge. Do not use your dog's name, or correct. Never correct. Just patiently try to show your puppy what you want and repeat it over and over, with lots of treats.

#2 Do not try to get to the finish. If your puppy will only touch a laundry basket with its nose then praise that. Show it what you want but praise what the puppy gives. As it gains more confidence (and gets lots of treats) it will try more 'on its own time.' (Leave your agenda at the door when training puppies).

#3 If your puppy doesn't want to walk on the board that is 6" above the ground, but wants to keep jumping in the cardboard box then reward that, and let it do that. But,



FOLLOW ME & FOCUS

Following you is the foundation for most obedience. If your dog doesn't follow you then it will never heel. If your dog doesn't have focus you then it won't be paying attention to you when you need it to do something important.

Follow me and focus are time consuming, and they are not 'cool' looking so most obedience schools do not teach it. They would rather stick to tricks and tasks so that they look good by making it appear that your dog has learned 'skills' fast, even if those skills are not 'functional.'

There are many trainers out there who can teach a dog to heel quickly, or sit in a day. But when that dog needs to heel in public, around other dogs, or when being followed by a big man in a hat, you will find out that your dog doesn't have the 'coping skills' needed to heel. It has just been taught a trick.

If your dog is nervous then you need to work on Follow me & Focus every day until your dog is 1 year old. Even after your dog 'gets it' you still need to keep working.

*If you Want a Calm Dog,
Raise a Calm dog.*



CALM BEHAVIORS

If follow me and focus are the most overlooked behaviors, then calming is the most overlooked coping skill. A dog that cannot remain calm will eventually become nervous and anxious, or aggressive and fearful. If a dog is not calm then it must be something else.

Are you teaching your dog to be calm? How many minutes a day to you ask your dog to lay down at your feet and stay there? Do you teach your dog 'not' to bark when the doorbell rings, or the mailman walks by? Or do you just yell and scream when the dog 'loses it' because he sees someone out the window?

You need to teach a dog calming skills and coping skills BEFORE your dog will be able to remain calm. Look at it this way, why should your dog be calm when the mailman comes if you are losing your temper?

A dog with Reliable Obedience Is a calm dog

The best way to teach calming is to play for 3 – 5 minutes, then stop and sit still for one. Repeat. If you walk your dog then walk for 50' and stop for 1 minute, repeat. Massage, every day, is also a perfect way to help a dog learn to remain calm.

CLASSES AND SPORTS

You would never expect a child to attend kindergarten, then remain home for the next 17 years, and then go get a good job. That is absurd, but it is exactly what we do with our dogs. We leave them home in isolation, bored for 20 hours a day, and then expect them to behave and obey just because 'we' want it. It doesn't happen.

Children need 18 years of obedience. Dogs need 1 year. It doesn't matter if you do puppy classes, obedience, and then some sport like agility. Join a club so you are not always paying top dollar for classes. This is especially important if your dog starts to be nervous or aggressive under 9 months old.

It doesn't matter who you are, you can work your dog daily. If you can't afford classes then learn from youtube!

Dogs need mental stimulation and guidance.

**'Obedience is a lifestyle' not
something that happens
between 4-4:15 because that
is your training time.'**

Suz Wiebe

IT'S NOT FEAR: HYPER, OVER FRIENDLY, BULLY, WILD, AND SENSITIVE DOGS

Too many times we default to fear. In many cases I've seen fearful dogs who are actually very sensitive and they have no boundaries. They are not sure what to do, so they act out.

Most of the time I see people who are anxious, so their dogs are anxious. I've spent months in classes with some people. We are not there for the dog. The dog is fine. We are waiting for the person to stop being frustrated, nervous, anxious, or angry. The dog is feeding off their emotional turmoil. You are upset and your dog doesn't know how to handle it – so the dog acts out.

Spoiled dogs learn that aggression gives them what they want. Or, they just withdraw and hide. Both of these are 'learned behaviors.



You can instill fear in your kids and get them to mind, but they won't function better in the world and your relationship will suffer greatly

Ian Dunbar



Unfortunately, most of us resort to pain and fear to 'stop' an annoying behavior 'in the moment'. How many times I've seen people who think they are potty training a dog, and instead all they are doing is teaching the dog to fear them.

Or, 'it was just a little leash jerk to get his attention.' It sounds benign but what you are actually doing is putting the dog 'on alert' that something is wrong. It is the same technique used when training attack dogs. But – there is no follow through on your part.

You now have an over aroused dog in an emotional vacuum. The only path they can follow is to react.

MY DOG IS NOT REACTIVE

When we fail our dogs we don't want to blame ourselves. Especially when raising puppies. We really do want the best for our puppies. No one sets out to create behavior problems in their dogs, but we do, most often when we are at home and 'reacting' ourselves.

Every moment of every day is a training session. Just because there is no collar on, and you are not in a class, doesn't mean you are not teaching your dog to be reactive.

What is reactive? It is the 'action' your dog gives to a) your emotional drama, b) its own fear or stress, b) a learned behavior associated with a specific situation, or d) a learned behavior that gets it the outcome it wants.

Reactive dogs are not always fearful or aggressive. Stop

focusing on the reaction, and start looking at the cause of the reaction. Sometimes we need friends and family to help. It may be hard to hear, but we need to give our puppy this time no matter how busy we are, or what problems we are facing in life. It isn't about us – it is about our puppies.

If you are the cause then change. It is that simple.

We hope this puppy primer helped. We have more puppy primers on our website.

If you have a problem with your puppy then ask for help. We may turn it into the next blog post, or puppy primer.

Sport Dog Training Center is a behavior and training center south of London Ontario that focuses on Working and High energy breeds of dogs.
