

## WHEN CAN YOU START TRAINING A PUPPY?



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## When can you start training your puppy?

This is such a common question. Back in the **OLD DAYS** when people used correction based training, they would recommend waiting to train a puppy until they were 6 months old. The reason for this was because the **CHOKE** chain could do damage to a puppy's neck. Well, the **TRUTH** of the matter is that a **CHOKE** chain **WILL** do damage to a dog of any age's neck, spine, and can cause [so many problems!](#) The other problem with waiting to **TRAIN** a puppy is that by 6 months of age the puppy could have **MANY** behavioral problems. A few of these behavior problems could include jumping up on people, soiling the house, chewing up the furniture, barking for attention or barking at people that pass the house and pulling the owner while on leash. If these are the only problems the owners are having then they are probably lucky.

### **So, when should you start training your puppy?**

My suggestion is to find a **positive CLICKER trainer** and start training your puppy the very day you bring him home. You can start teaching him right away what is acceptable by **REWARDING EVERYTHING** the puppy does that you like. Will the puppy make bad choices? **YES!** However, it is the owners responsibility to teach the puppy what is acceptable. Set your puppy up for success!

Puppies are learning every moment of every day. The question is: are they learning appropriate behaviors or inappropriate behaviors? You can start formal and informal training with a puppy as young as 8 weeks old which is usually about the age that puppies go to their forever homes.

Formal training is teaching the puppy cues (cues NOT commands) such as a positive interrupter, their name, sit, down, stay, come, and how to follow and pay attention to their new best friend "**YOU**". Teach your puppy what the clicker means by conditioning it. Then check for understanding when the puppy is slightly distracted. When you start clicker training with a puppy, you are teaching the puppy **HOW to LEARN**. Train your puppy to look at you when you make an interrupter noise (I use a kissy noise). Condition a kissy nose the same way you would condition the clicker (see the attached

video called: Clicker Basics). Kissy noise, then give a treat. Repeat Repeat Repeat! Then wait until your puppy is slightly distracted and make the kissy noise. If your puppy looks at you, click (capturing his attention of looking at you), then give him a treat (of **REAL** meat or cheese). Later down the road this can help you interrupt an unacceptable behavior in a way that is **NOT** threatening, punishing, or forceful in anyway shape or form. Capture the behaviors that your puppy does naturally. When your puppy sits, click and toss him a treat and wait for him to sit again. Repeat Repeat Repeat. Once the light bulb goes on, the puppy will realize that he made you click and got rewarded for sitting. Next, you will put it on a verbal cue, but only do this when he is repeating the behavior of sitting multiple times without you asking. To put a behavior on a verbal cue, say the cue before the dog does the behavior, then click and treat when the pup does the behavior. Only say the cue if you would bet \$100 that he is going to sit anyway. In no time you will have a **YOUNG** puppy sitting and downing. Train your puppy to give you attention without asking or nagging your puppy. To do this wait until your puppy looks at you, and when he looks at you click and toss a treat. When he looks at you again, click and toss another treat. You can put it on a cue if you want, but eventually your puppy will know that he can get amazing things just for looking at you. Sure you can use other methods such as luring, but I have found that **TRAINING** goes so much faster when the puppy learns the **CORRECT** behavior **ALL ON HIS OWN**.

Informal training is teaching the dog the rules of the house and how to behave in his new environment. To me informal training is the most important training of all... If you just make the excuse, "he is just a puppy and doing puppy things" then your puppy **IS** going to learn unacceptable behaviors.

The **KEY** is to set the puppy up to succeed. How do you do that? Well, you **MANAGE** your puppy. You **WATCH him 100%** when he is out and about with you. Put him on a harness and leash when he is in the house, so that he has only a few choices. He can choose to wander a few feet away which will not earn him a reward, or he can come in close to your side which **WILL** earn him a reward. If you have him on leash and you are watching **TV, you can REWARD** him when he calmly lays at your feet. If you have him on leash, he can't run off and potty behind a chair because you will be watching

him and looking for signs that he needs to go potty. When you see the sign you can take him outside to his spot and when he goes potty, you can **REWARD** him with a treat, a ton of verbal praise, and or a fun game of tug. I like to explain it as if your puppy is a child that has not yet been potty trained. You would not let your child run around the house without a diaper on, so don't let your dog run around the house unsupervised. This is **TRAINING**, you are constantly watching your puppy and **REWARDING** all of his wonderful decisions. If you do not reward the good **STUFF** your puppy is doing, then he **WILL** find things to do that gets your attention. This is what I call, "environmental learning". The puppy learns that when he is barking, you yell and pay attention to him. So, he just learned a behavior that you really did not want him to learn. Why **NOT** just be **PROACTIVE** and reward the puppy when he is quiet and behaving how you would like him to. We often do not think about rewarding a **QUIET** puppy, but we should! Behaviors that are rewarded tend to be repeated often. So, if you reward the barking by yelling or paying attention to him when he barks, then you have just rewarded that behavior. Negative attention is attention. If you reward the quiet puppy at your side, then your puppy will learn to be quiet and hang out with you at your side.



Twix with an appropriate chew bone at 11 weeks old.



Twix learning to chill out on a dog bed outside.



Twix at 8 weeks before I brought him home to live with me.

Reward the good behaviors your puppy does, before he learns fun things to do on his own. Reward your puppy when he is hanging out in the back yard by giving him an appropriate thing to chew on or a fun acceptable puzzle toy to play with. If you just leave your puppy in the yard, he will find something fun to do! Usually his idea of fun

does not always match your idea of fun. Tearing up the patio furniture is great fun for a puppy as well as digging big holes in the yard.

Manage behaviors that you do not have time to train. For example: A puppy might love to get into the dirty laundry. Well, instead of punishing him for doing that, which let's be honest, he did not really know any better. He just knows that that dirty laundry smells really wonderful to him. Personally, I feel that it is the owners fault for allowing the puppy access to the laundry in the first place. However, to manage the puppy and prevent him from being able to practice the unwanted behavior is simple. **COVER THE LAUNDRY** with a lid or **DO NOT ALLOW** the puppy in the room that the laundry is in. Problem managed! If your puppy likes to chew on shoes, **DO NOT LEAVE OUT YOUR SHOES!** A puppy just knows that the shoes smell and taste really good. He has no idea that you paid hundreds of dollars for those shoes or that they are your favorite shoes. Again, it is your fault! **MANAGE** the behavior by **PREVENTING** the puppy from having access to those off limit items.

**TRAIN** your puppy the **MOMENT** you bring him home! Give your puppy acceptable things to do, play fun games with him, teach him his name, teach him to find you, and teach him to follow you, which are all **FUN** games for a puppy! **TRAIN** your puppy to do what you want him to do instead of **PUNISHING** him for doing what you do not want him to do. The bottom line, **DO NOT WAIT ONE MOMENT TO TRAIN YOUR PUPPY!** Learning is on going and **ALWAYS** happening. So, from the very moment you bring your puppy home, start working with him and teaching him how to be a part of your family!

By, Pamela Johnson

Here are a few videos that can help you with your puppy.

Clicker Basics - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omZt5Eu8nfe>

Positive Interrupter - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRg3FgmpjnE>

Name Game - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDdSUxi8X-o>

Coming when Called - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpzcHV-hROk>

Coming when Called - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMmwFYL2w7g>

Management - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEVrvNFTs3E>

Management - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IS4E5uahQ>

If you would like to learn more fun games to teach your dog to come when called every time you call him, check out my website at [www.pamsdogtraining.com](http://www.pamsdogtraining.com) and go to my products page. I sell a DVD that has tons of games, advice, training tips, and step by step directions of how to play each game. The DVD is called "[Play-N-Train Recalls](#)".

I also sell a DVD on training a dog to have a [ROCK SOLID STAY, LOOSE LEASH WALKING](#), and have multiple ebooks on training a dog to do tricks on my website at [www.pamsdogtraining.com](http://www.pamsdogtraining.com)

Puppies can also learn tricks! Puppies are sponges and can learn anything that you would like to teach them.

**READ! READ! READ!**

["Progressive Reinforcement Training Manifesto", by Emily Larlham](#)

**WATCH! WATCH! WATCH!**

[www.youtube.com/pamelamarxsen](http://www.youtube.com/pamelamarxsen)

[www.youtube.com/kikopup](http://www.youtube.com/kikopup)