

Realistic Expectations – Let's have a reality check!

I often hear: "But, I want my dog to (fill in the blank) now!" Puppies are high maintenance and owners need to have realistic expectations of their behaviors. I also hear: "I don't want a bunch of gates in my house restricting my puppy. S/he should know what to do! Some people expect that "puppy proofing" is a simple process. They think, "how much trouble could this little dog really get into?" And they reject the idea of crates, baby gates, and exercise pens as being too restrictive.

The reality is that a puppy's brain is built for exploration and creativity. Your puppy will find objects you didn't even know you owned! Biting, pulling, and shredding anything that's not nailed to the ground is typical puppy behavior. Chasing anything that moves; kids, your housecoat, the ties on your shoes. If it moves, they chase it! You may purchase chew toys, but his default is always pulling at the threads of your nicest rug or chewing electrical cords and table legs when he feels bored. Got dog toys? Great, however, don't give them all out at once. Make sure you're choosing 3-4 toys at a time and rotate them out every day or so. Watch your puppy light up when they have access to what they perceive as a new toy!



The reality is that the mindset of, "I want my dog to do — (fill in the blank)", needs to change to, "I want my puppy to grow up into a dog who —(fill in the blank). That means you have to manage your puppy well! Slow down and enjoy the puppy days for what they are and stop pushing your puppy by expecting him/her to behave as a mature adult dog. Each time in a dog's life is special and unique and they won't be stuck in puppyhood forever.

The reality is that you need to interact with your puppy when they choose to play with their toys. Even better, you can initiate these play sessions yourself! Puppies find it more satisfying to play with their toys in social contexts. They do not want to be alone. This is why puppies are so drawn to "off-limit" items like your shoes! Chewing on your shoe gets you to come over and play chase or keep away...fun! I recommend that you schedule in 5-10 minute play sessions, 2 or 3 times each day with your puppy with his/her toys.

The reality is that many people are not good managers. First and foremost, managing the environment is your job and anything left on the ground is fair game for your puppy. Manage by putting away things s/he's not supposed to have. Close doors to bedrooms, bathrooms, closets and laundry rooms or put up gates.

A key component of raising a well-behaved adult dog by managing the puppy's environment is to prevent him/her from experiencing and rehearsing undesirable habits. So, what does this mean? Give appropriate items to chew on and play with while your dog is confined in a play yard, exercise pen, etc. Perhaps give your puppy

a sandbox or digging pit so that s/he can engage in natural doggy behaviors in a safe place. Having a special confined space outside (with great things for the puppy to do) will allow kids to play in the yard without the puppy chasing and biting them.

Without management, good training can't happen! To have a dog that chews only his toys, eliminates outside, can relax alone quietly, greets humans without jumping up and plays without being mouthy, the humans must mold the dog's behavior. Puppies need management and the safest policy with newly adopted dogs is to treat them as though they were puppies too!

The reality is you need a few rules.

1. **Confinement:** Confine any puppy or untrained dog to one room, like the kitchen, to make dog-proofing the room, clean-up, and supervision easier. If that's not possible, give your dog a playpen in a safe puppy-proofed part of the house. Use crates! Perhaps you have one in the sleeping area and another in the main part of your house for the puppy to use for mealtime and nap time. The cost of the additional crate will be well worth the price when it helps your puppy be safe and happy no matter what time of day it is.
2. **Supervise:** Supervise like crazy! Never punish a dog late: it is abusive. If you catch them doing something they should not redirect them to what you want them to do and re-think your management plan so that you set your puppy up for success. Help your puppy get it right by providing chew toys, work to eat toys, and praise him when s/he uses them!
3. **Housetraining rules:** take him out often (every 30 minutes to an hour for a young puppy) and praise and reward immediately when s/he performs outside. Don't allow any playtime outside until after the puppy goes potty.
4. **Teach your puppy how to be alone:** Don't reward barking when the dog is left alone by returning to the dog. Do not leave your puppy and allow him/her to get upset and panic. Get your puppy used to being alone by coming and going many times in the day for short periods the first few days you have him, all done very matter-of-factly. When you leave the puppy unattended, make sure s/he must work to eat toy or chew toy so they can be occupied and able to self soothe.
5. **Play rules:** Burn your puppy's energy, both physical and mental. Practice the things you are learning in puppy class many times throughout the day in short training sessions. Take your dog out and about for socialization in areas where it is safe to do so. Remember that engaging your puppy's brain will tire him/her more than physical activity, so give the puppy something to "figure out" such as a puzzle toy, kibble hidden in a rolled-up towel, or a small box to climb in.
6. **Stop saying "NO!":** This word is negative, overused, and if heard often enough, your puppy will start to tune you out. When you need to "run interference", be fair, kind and consistent, and make it count as a learning opportunity. Redirect the puppy's actions or give them a cue they've learned in class such as "leave it", "touch", or "look". Do not roll your dog on his back or try to wrestle him into some "calm-submissive state." Alpha rolling and yelling "NO!" do not work and more importantly, they most certainly will create more trouble for you and your puppy.

The bottom line; be realistic and help your puppy become the awesome dog you want him to be!