



Puppy Expert Christine Young Shares Critical Training and Socialization Tips for Puppy Care



Trainer Christine Young with a client's dogs. The Frenchie on the left is Babbett and the Golden Retriever on the right is Baron. Both dogs benefitted from early training with Young.

► **Working with puppies all day may sound like a dream job, but puppies are so much work! What are the first things you advise new puppy parents to do for their new family member when the puppy comes home?**

Every situation and every pup is different, but if you're looking to get started on the right paw, here are three fundamentals that will give you a good foundation:

1. Create a calm environment—Start shopping and setting things up before your pup comes home. Prepare a zen-like environment with safe containment areas. Schedule down time. When your adorable fur baby arrives, try to let go of expectations or agendas.

During the first few days, let them explore on their terms (not yours). Invite friends and family over **AFTER** your puppy has a few days of settling in. Please, please, please don't invite your crazy Aunt Martha over until your puppy has had a few days to get to know you and their new environment. **FIRST** impressions matter. Let your pup slowly absorb their new world at their own pace. This builds trust.

Be aware of:

- too much touching
- too many new toys
- too many people
- too many socializing opportunities too fast (see more info below)

If you have a multipet household, take time to have your puppy settle in before making introductions, and be sure you know how to introduce each pet safely.

2. Learn the often-neglected art of dog management—As you learn the art of dog management you will be creating environments and establishing routines to minimize undesirable behaviors. These changes can lessen or even eliminate repetitive problem behaviors.

Expect some of your puppy's antics to test your patience as they grow, often these are your dog's natural coping mechanisms. Before you focus on training to change the "bad" behavior, it is important to develop a solid management strategy.

When you invest in and learn how to use tools like baby gates, long lines, crates, privacy window film, and more, things will be calmer, cleaner, and more organized. Your socks won't disappear, the puppy won't jump on every guest, and your couch will still be in one piece. Over time when you combine management and training, your little one will learn how to settle quietly out of the way while you're making dinner or run to enjoy a long-lasting chewy treat in their crate when they hear a knock, instead of rushing or barking at the door. These early routines that you establish are part of the management process.

Establish sleep times in quiet spaces during the day. Your puppy needs more than a cat nap, and you're going to need some alone time, trust me. When you need a break, hire a pro pet sitter or dog walker if you have the budget or call up a friend or family member to come hang out with your little one, then run some errands or get some work finished. Restorative efforts like this go a long way.

Make sure everyone knows how to interact with your new buddy, so they don't mess up your training efforts. Teaching others is a great way to reinforce your own knowledge and skills. You not only help them, but you also solidify your own understanding of the subject. Plus, it feels pretty darn good to be the one who knows it all (even if you don't really).

3. Communication and body language—Dogs learn our body language much faster than we learn theirs. As you learn how to pay attention to details and read their signals, you will be able to communicate more effectively.

Be a keen observer. Notice what your new pup does when you or others touch them. Do they get loose and wiggly and seem to move toward you to ask for more? Great, you can continue! If not, the subtle changes in their body language (lip licking, stiffening up, or pulling away) are telling us that they are not thrilled about being touched, at least not in this way at this time. Look for signs that your puppy might need space or a different approach.

If we ignore these signs and force attention on a young puppy, it can create a dog who avoids snuggling or touch in general. If we respect their boundaries and our dogs believe their communication will be respected, they often settle in beside us asking for a closer relationship.

► **What is the most important skill you advise new puppy parents to teach their pup?**

I help them understand what *socialization* actually is. It's not just about playing with other dogs and meeting new people (although that's definitely important, too). The sensitive period for socialization is approximately from 4 to 16 weeks. These first couple of months are a time for your new family member to learn that new people, animals, places, events, sounds, scents, surfaces, and so much more are interesting to observe and get used to in their own time. The sometimes-shy pups can learn that they will always have choice and control and the enthusiastic pups learn that being polite and focusing on you will get them access to what they want.

Sit beside them and watch the world go by. Consistent and careful exposure is more important than engagement. Puppies don't have the ability to fully recover from too many negative interactions during this sensitive period. It's easy for an untrained pet parent to unknowingly make mistakes that can have lifelong consequences.

Keep a few top tips in mind:

- Puppies don't need to approach until and unless they are ready. (Let them come to you.)
- Distance is your friend when putting your puppy in new situations.
- Take time to relax, watch the world go by, and enjoy

their silly antics. HAVE FUN!

Yes, socializing (exposure to novelty) at a young age is most beneficial, but it's important to remember that it's never too late. Some new or scary situations will take more scheduled exposures with more involved training, and not all dogs will be able to handle these situations. Researching how to socialize or hiring a certified trainer to help you succeed is worth the investment!

► **Do you train adopted puppies versus purebred puppies differently or do rescue pups need any special considerations?**

I train every new puppy differently. I co-create a training plan with clients. I consider the breed or breed mix, personalities, abilities, and the schedule options. Adopted and rescue dogs, working line or high-drive dogs, and fearful pups often need special considerations. A fearful pup may need extra support to relax or gain confidence. A high-energy dog may benefit from specific brain games and lots of canine enrichment.

► **What are your favorite ways to teach resilience and confidence in puppies?**

Besides the choice and control that we touched on above, **canine enrichment** can make a big difference. If you're new to enrichment, think of it like a doggy amusement park that also stimulates their mind and body. By providing your pup with puzzle-like challenges and engaging activities, you encourage them to use their natural instincts and behaviors. Enrichment activities can range from food puzzles to more complex games. It's a great way to build confidence and it

has a long-term calming effect. Plus, your dog will think you're the coolest ever for providing them with so much fun.

A **predictable routine** builds resilience. Dogs, like us, appreciate having a sense of predictability in their lives. Any time you expose your dog to something new, your praise and creative support can prevent frustration and add to the fun. Make a novel safe chew treat to give them in a specific place to help them decompress. Don't hand them a chew and let them wander anywhere. At this young age, create that association exactly where you want them to relax. Here's a tongue twister to help you remember: select specific special chews for specific special places. A routine also helps your little one adapt to new environments and situations. When you gradually incorporate unexpected elements into familiar patterns, your dog's trust and confidence will grow.

Puppyhood goes by fast, so **be patient**, take deep breaths, and practice kindness. It is critical to stress that success depends on having realistic expectations for both you and your four-legged friend. Setting unrealistic goals can lead to disappointment and often hinders the progress when learning new behaviors. PATIENCE, consistency, and positive reinforcement are necessary. Likewise, setting unrealistic time frames for yourself quickly leads to frustration and burnout. Take things one step at a time and seek guidance from experienced, professional, and reliable resources. Investing a little more time and money early on may be exhausting, but it will be worth it. The rewards of a well-behaved and well-adjusted companion will last a lifetime!