

## Top Five Mistakes People Make With Their Puppies

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Almost every one of these mistakes comes down to one word: spoiling. When you bring your tiny bundle of joy home you are the most excited you will ever be about your dog, this could be described as a honeymoon period. You are in love with your dog and will do just about anything to make him or her happy and comfortable. The problem arises when reality kicks in and your 10lb lab puppy turns into an 80lb dog. Not only is it not practical or safe for your dog to get away with what he got away with as a puppy, but it's also not fair to the dog. So as you are going through this list think to yourself, "If I wouldn't let my 80lb adult dog do this, I shouldn't let my puppy do this."

### 1. Allowing Puppies on the Couch and Bed.

There are many reasons for this so I will outline them.

- a. **Keeping your dog OFF the couch reinforces your role as a pack leader.** In a wild pack, the top dog gets the best seat in the house. I've often watched my own dog pack laying around and witnessed the Alpha dog walk over to the bed she wants, growl and posture, and the lower rank dog will jump up and give up her spot quickly. Your role as your dog's leader is vital to your dog's (and your) happiness. And contrary to popular belief, your role as leader is NOT developed by knock down drag outs, power struggles or physical discipline. It is developed by the everyday way you live with your dog.
- b. **Possession is 9/10 of the law.** Dogs, like human 2 year olds, are on a constant quest to possess. If dogs could talk they would run around like the sea gulls on Finding Nemo saying, "Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!" When you see a dog growl at their owner when told to get off the couch, the dog is saying, "Mine." And you have no one to blame but yourself! Dogs need to live in a world where everything belongs to YOU. And you *allow* them to have everything they have. Although this may seem unfair, you are thinking in human terms. In a wild pack the Alpha female will often take over the entire litter of puppies from lower ranking females and raise them as her own. Everything belongs to her, and this make sense to dogs.

Where you run into problems is where the dog thinks things belong to her. Why should she get off the couch? It belongs to her. Now you may be thinking, "my dog would never growl at me." But Rome wasn't built in a day. Most dogs will not begin to challenge their owner until they hit puberty, around 18 months. The more and more behaviors you allow that lower your own rank (probably unknowingly) the more likely you will have a dominant dog problem, or a disrespectful dog problem. There are certain breeds of dog that will be more or less likely to develop dominant dog issues.

- c. **It's Obnoxious.** No guest wants to sit on your couch and have a dog on their lap. As much as your friends will say it's okay, and will smile and nod, they don't like it. It puts your friends in a bad position. When a guest and your dog are BOTH on the couch, the dog often ends up in the guest's face, touching them, on top of them. In doggie language this is a major sign of disrespect. Observe a lower ranking dog getting the face of the Alpha, you will see growling,

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posturing and probably a mild bite. Because in the dog world, as in the human world, it's just plain rude to get in someone's face.

- d. **When your couch is covered in dog hair it creates a big problem for anyone with allergies.**
- e. **It's VERY hard to break.** Once your dog is used to access to the couch and bed, it's a very hard habit to break. It turns you into the bad guy, constantly chasing them off, throwing your hands in the air and being frustrated. You never have to break what you never allowed.
- f. **Access can always be granted AFTER rank and rules are fully established.** If you are one who really enjoys a good doggie snuggle on the couch or bed, simply wait a year. I know that sounds like forever, but better safe than sorry. And **ONLY** allow your dog up by invitation only. If you have ANY problems getting your dog off of the couch. Don't allow them up again. Your dog doesn't respect you enough. Sorry, the truth hurts.

## 2. Allowing Puppies to Enter Through the Door/Gate First.

- a. **RESPECT!** A dog pack, much like a human family, allows the leader to go first. This is a sign of respect. Much like you would let your grandmother or a person that you respect go first, dogs do the same. This is one of the behaviors I am talking about when I say over time, when you allow your dog to disrespect you with multiple behaviors, they tend to get a really high opinion of themselves and it can turn into dominance problems. Remember, the door belongs to YOU. In the dogs brain, when you allow them to go first YOU are telling them that THEY are the leader. So who can blame them for believing you?
- b. **I've said it before and I'll say it again: when your puppy is 10lbs this is no big deal, but when your dog is 80lbs they could seriously injure someone, especially small children or the elderly as they are trying to push their way through.**
- c. **This is not safe for the dog,** especially when it comes to the outdoors and gates. You should always know who and what is outside before you let your dog out.
- d. **Dogs are very easily conditioned.** In a dog's mind, "Door Open = Me Run." Dog's need to learn that "Door Open = Me Look at Mama and Wait For the Ok." This is accomplished by NEVER letting your dog through ANY door without your permission. Always make them wait. Now if your dog is wandering through the house alone that's fine. You don't need to chase them all over. This is referring to when it's time for a walk, getting out of a car, getting into a car, going into the backyard, being let out of the crate etc.

## 3. Undersocializing

- a. When many people think of socializing, they think of socializing puppies with other dogs. This term really needs to be changed to "Ignoring." In reality, want your dog to IGNORE other dogs, ignore the kid on the skateboard, ignore the toddler running by. So that is what we practice; ignoring. Before your puppy is 12 weeks old she should be brought around and taught to ignore:

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- i. Children
- ii. People of different heights/builds/skin color than your own
- iii. Loud noises such as dump trucks, sirens, cars going by, dropping of large objects
- iv. Wheel chairs, crutches, electric scooters, loud appliances
- v. Small or strangely lit indoor environments (like a bathroom stall at Petsmart)
- vi. Large equipment like playground equipment, Christmas lights, inflatable bouncy jumps, opening umbrellas.

I do not recommend having strangers or anyone the dog is scared of give the dog treats. If a dog is afraid of something, we want them to realize that this thing/person is NOT going to come and get them. So having a stranger they are afraid of come and offer them a treat is only teaching them, "The things I'm afraid of are going to approach me and I'm on a leash and can't run." Not good. The best thing you can do to help your dog overcome it is ignore it and keep walking. As The Dog Whisperer Cesar Milan says, when the dog is walking their brain is moving forward and they have to "move on" mentally.

Another reason you do not want strangers giving your dog treats is because you want your dog to ignore strangers. Your dog will have a hard time paying attention to you if they think every stranger walking by has a treat. This is especially true for very friendly breeds like golden retrievers.

#### **4. Calling Your Puppy to Do Something Negative.**

- a. Calling your dog should ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS result in something positive. Whether you use his name, or you whistle or you say, "come here." It ALWAYS needs to be for a treat, or praise, or a toy.
- b. Never, ever, ever call your dog to:
  - i. Take something away that's in their mouth. Instead, trade them for a treat.
  - ii. Give them a bath
  - iii. Take them away from something fun, like playing with another puppy.
  - iv. Give them a bath.
  - v. Brush them.
  - vi. Put them in their crate or Ex-pen

If you call your dog to do something negative your dog will stop and think, "Should I come? It might be a bath..." Unfortunately we have to get our lazy butts up and walk over to the dog, put a leash on him and walk him over to get a bath. If you call your dog to do something negative, you will get slow recalls, and a recall could save your dog's life someday.

- c. In general, we use too many words with dealing with our dogs. If you're trying to tell your dog to go lay down, you don't need to say, "Rover! Go lay down." Just say, "go lay down." Dogs do not know they have a name, they know that Rover equals "come here" so it can be confusing to use his name before every command.

## 5. Not Using a Crate

- a. Many people will avoid using a crate because they feel it is cruel. (see my article on crate training.) When you do not train your dog to use a crate you are limiting their future. Dogs who are comfortable in a crate can travel with greater ease. Stay in hotels safely, stay with friends safely and be comfortable at the groomer. Almost 100% of groomers will use crates. This is to keep your dog safe from other dogs and chemicals. If your dog is crate trained he can travel anywhere with you and be safe.

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