



Good Habits are Hard to Break

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## Settle Down and Shush

High on the educational agenda is to teach your pup that there are times for play and times for quiet. Specifically, you want to teach the youngster to settle down and shush for short periods. Your life will be more peaceful, and your pup's life will be less stressful once he learns that frequent little quiet moments are the name of the game in his new home.

Beware the trap of showering your new puppy with non-stop attention and affection during his first days at home, for then he will whine, bark, and fret when left alone at night or during the daytime when you are at work and the children are at school. Of course the pup is lonely! This is his first time alone without his mother, littermates, or human companionship.

You can really help to ease your pup's anxiety by getting him used to settling down alone during his first few days at home. Remember, first impressions are very important and long lasting. Also keep in mind that the average suburban puppy will likely spend many hours and days left to his own devices. So it is well worthwhile to teach the pup how to spend time by himself. Otherwise, the puppy may become anxious when left alone and develop hard-to-break chewing, barking, digging, and escaping habits.

When you are at home, confine your puppy to his doggy den with lots of chew toys for housetraining, chew toy training, and teaching the pup to settle down peacefully and happily. It is important to confine your puppy for short periods when you are home in order to teach him how to enjoy his own company when left at home alone.

Open Paw is certainly not advocating leaving puppies alone for long periods of time. But it is a fact of modern day life that many puppy owners leave home each day to work for a living, so it is only fair to prepare the pup for this likelihood.

When you are at home, the key is short-term confinement. The idea is not to lock up the puppy for hours on end, but rather to teach him to settle down quickly in a variety of settings and be confined for variable but mostly fairly short, periods. Make sure the only objects within reach are stuffed chew toys. Thus the dog develops a strong chew toy habit right from the outset, if only because there is precious little else at hand to chew. And let me repeat: A puppy happily preoccupied with a stuffed chew toy is not destroying household articles and furniture, and is not barking.

When you are at home, it is also a good idea to occasionally confine your puppy to his puppy playroom (long-term confinement area) as a practice run for your absence. Occasional long-term confinement when you are at home allows you to monitor your pup's behavior so you have some idea how he will act when you are gone.

If your puppy barks or whines when confined to his short- or long-term confinement area, reward-train him to rest quietly. Sit next to your puppy's crate or just outside his puppy playroom and busy yourself by reading a book, working on the computer, or watching television. Completely ignore your puppy while he vocalizes, but each time he stops barking, immediately praise him calmly and offer a piece of kibble. After half a dozen repetitions, progressively increase the shush-time required for each successive piece of kibble—two seconds, three seconds, five, eight, fifteen, twenty, etc. Thereafter, periodically praise and reward your puppy every few minutes or so if he remains resting quietly.

If barking is still a problem after a couple of weeks, read Dr. Ian Dunbar's *Barking* booklet or *Doctor Dunbar's Good Little Dog Book* to learn how to teach your puppy to Woof and Shush on cue.

## What to Do at Nighttime

You choose where your pup sleeps at night. If you want your pup in his long-term confinement area overnight, or in a dog crate in the kitchen, or your bedroom, that's fine. Or if you want the pup tethered in his bed beside your bed, that's fine too. What is important, though, is that the puppy is confined to a small area and settles down quickly and quietly. Offer the puppy an intelligently stuffed chew toy and he will likely chew himself to sleep in no time at all.

Once you have housetrained and chew toy-trained your puppy and he has learned to settle down quickly and quietly, you may allow your pup to choose where he would like to sleep—indoors, outdoors, upstairs, downstairs, in your bedroom, or in your bed—just as long as his choice is fine with you.

It is a good idea to practice the nighttime routine during the daytime when you are awake and in a good humor. Don't wait to train your puppy until you are tired and ready for bed and your grouchy brain is barely functioning. During the daytime, practice having your puppy settle down in his bed or crate both in the same room as you and in different rooms so that he gets used to sleeping alone.

Should your pup whine at nighttime, check on him every ten minutes. Talk softly to him and stroke him gently for a minute and then go back to bed. But do not overdo it. The idea is to reassure your puppy, not to train him to whine for late-night attention. Also, do not go straight to sleep, for you'll probably be checking on your puppy after ten minutes. Once the puppy eventually falls asleep, you may find it enjoyable to check in on him and stroke him for four or five minutes. A lot of people dare not do this for fear they will wake the little critter, but it has always worked well.

## Sit, etc.

There would be more than a few disappointed owners if Open Paw didn't at least say something about training your dog to sit. Well, it's just so easy. Ask your puppy, "Would you like to learn to sit on request?" and then move a piece of kibble up and down in front of his nose. If your puppy nods in agreement, then you're both ready to proceed.

Say, "Puppy, Sit," and then move the kibble upwards and backwards along the top of his muzzle. As the puppy looks up to follow the kibble, he will sit down. Pretty simple, yes?

Now say, "Puppy, Down," and with another piece of kibble between finger and thumb, lower your hand, palm downward, to just in front of the dog's two forepaws. Your pup will lower his nose to investigate the kibble and then lower his forequarters with the side of his muzzle on the floor to nuzzle under your hand. Move the kibble slightly towards your puppy's chest, and his rear end will plop down.

Now say, "Puppy, Stand," and move the kibble forward away from your puppy. (You may have to waggle the kibble a little to reactivate the pup.) Hold the treat at nose level, but lower it a tad as soon as your pup stands up and starts to sniff; otherwise your pup will sit as soon as he stands.

Now try chaining a few commands together. Back up a couple of steps, say, "Puppy, Come Here," and wave the kibble. Enthusiastically praise your puppy as he approaches, and then ask him to sit and lie down before offering the kibble. Three responses for one piece of kibble—not bad, eh? Now have your puppy come, sit, and lie down as many times as there are spare moments in the day or as many pieces of kibble in the dog's dinner.

Repetitively practice the above three position changes in random sequences—Sit, Down, Sit, Stand, Down, Stand, etc. See how many position changes your pup is willing to do for just one food reward and how long you can keep the puppy in each position (short stays) before giving each food reward. Strangely enough, the fewer treats you give and the longer you keep each treat in your hand, the better your pup will learn. Welcome to the wonderful world of lure/reward training.

For more training advice please read Dr. Ian Dunbar's "How To Teach A New Dog Old Tricks" which is available at the Open Paw Store.