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HOW TO HOUSEBREAK YOUR NEW PUPPY

The following information is a guideline to help you with your new puppy. This along with past experience with puppies, obedience training classes and just plain common sense will all help mold your puppy.

Things that are cute now are not going to be so cute when your puppy gets older.

Here is a brief outline followed by more detailed information.

Start at the ideal age. The best time to begin housebreaking a puppy is when he or she is 7 – 9 weeks of age. At this time you can teach a puppy where to eliminate (a specific location) before it has established its own preferences (the entire yard). Even if your pet is a little older, you can start housebreaking – it may just take a little longer.

Take you puppy outdoors many times a day. Choose an appropriate spot to take your puppy immediately after it wakes up, before and after play sessions (try to encourage urination and defecation before playing) and generally about 20 minutes after eating.

If you take your puppy to the same spot every time, previous odors will stimulate urination and defecation. Stay with your puppy the whole time and praise your puppy when the job is done. Problems can result if you are unsure whether your puppy actually urinated or defecated and returns to the house too soon. Your puppy needs to focus on the job at hand so don't play with your puppy until he or she has eliminated.

Use a phrase while your puppy eliminates. If you repeat the same phrase (e.g. "go potty", "go peeps" or "take care of business" every time your puppy eliminates outdoors, he or she will learn that it is the right time and place to eliminate.

Once your puppy has eliminated outdoors, immediately reward him or her. Reward your puppy by praising, giving a treat or playing with him or her. Do this right away. Make the neighbors think you are a little crazy. Your puppy will NOT learn to eliminate outdoors if the reward comes when you return to the house. He or she will think the reward is for coming into the house, not the elimination that was done. Remember, a puppy's attention span is VERY short.

Supervise your puppy indoors as well as outdoors. Find a place in your house that allows you to watch your puppy as much as possible. This will help you catch your puppy if he or she starts to eliminate indoors. You can also leash your puppy or place a bell on the collar to help you keep track of your puppy.

When you leave home, put your puppy in a crate. When you can't supervise your puppy, leave him or her in a small puppy-proof area such as a crate. If the crate is large enough to accommodate the puppy as an adult, partition the crate to avoid having your puppy soil at one end and sleep at the other end. The general idea is that a puppy will not defecate or urinate in a place he or she is sleeping. And remember that puppy bladder and bowel capacities are limited, so let your puppy out at least every four (4) hours.

Don't punish after the fact. If your puppy has an accident in the house, don't go get the puppy, and rub his or her nose in it. It doesn't do any good because the behavior has already occurred. Instead, try to catch your puppy in the act. Don't swat your puppy. Instead stomp your feet, shake a can with stones or pennies or startle your puppy by yelling "outside!" Your puppy will likely stop what it was doing and you can take him or her outdoors to eliminate. If you catch your puppy right after messing indoors, eye contact, a quick "NO", and picking up the mess and taking it outdoors to show your puppy where he or she should have gone along with praising will hopefully remind your puppy where he or she should have gone.

Don't leave food out all day. Feed your puppy at set times every day and remove the food bowl after 15-20 minutes. This will create regular intervals at which your puppy will need to eliminate. Generally, puppie will defecate within 20 minutes after eating.

Thoroughly clean areas where your puppy has eliminated in the house. We can recommend safe and effective products that will help remove both odors and stains. It is important to clean the soiled area completely, otherwise your puppy may return to it and housesoil again.

Stick with the training program. Most puppies can be successfully housebroken by 14-20 weeks of age. Make sure everyone in the family is consistent with all aspects of training. Work with an obedience trainer and do your homework with your puppy. The time and effort you spend with your puppy now will pay off for many years to come.

The following information goes more into detail about housetraining.

This entire handout is also available on line.

For more information, visit our website and click on "Pet Health Links".

Houstraining Puppies

By Kathy Diamond Davis
Author and Trainer

Houstraining puppies is easy, right? How hard could it be? Little puppies learn it all the time, right?

Sadly, that's no longer the case. Most families are now two or more generations removed from farm life. Many people have grown up without dogs and don't have the ability to read dog body language that comes of being with dogs during the time the human brain most rapidly develops language ability, which is prior to age 6 years. While a typical scenario for dog ownership used to be a house on private property that could be fenced, now many puppies have to be houstrained from households with no outdoor area of their own. Until the puppy's vaccination series is complete, walking around on ground where dogs outside your own family also walk is of questionable safety. This is especially true of tiny breeds.

More puppies these days are being raised in cages than in the past. Large commercial-breeding operations and pet stores can achieve efficient sanitation this way, but it's at the expense of the puppy's preparation to become a dog in a human household. These puppies as well as the popular shelter puppies up for adoption share the disadvantage of being raised too close to their own waste. Adopting—or purchasing, if that's the thinking involved—a puppy from one of these sources guarantees extra houstraining problems.

We also have a popular notion that dogs are as easily trained to litter boxes as cats. Cats have instincts that fit using litter boxes. Dogs do not. Many dogs who were never houstrained to use the outdoors when relatively young are now losing their homes because they have accidents elsewhere inside the house. They are confused as to exactly where in the house is “okay.” This concept is too complex for a dog's brain.

Successful houstraining depends on aligning your handling with the dog's instincts and helping the dog develop the habits you desire. It also depends on holding up your end of the bargain: giving the dog a good schedule of chances to eliminate.

The dog is never going to “understand” houstraining. Elimination means completely different things to humans as to dogs. A puppy who acts upset when you find a houstraining accident is not “feeling guilty” because the puppy “knows it's wrong.” The puppy is showing submission to you, and possibly even fear of you. Nothing is being accomplished toward houstraining, and the puppy's temperament may be suffering harm right then and there.

You can make a brilliant success of houstraining your puppy, whether you've ever done this task before or not, if you have the proper resources for the dog you have chosen. It is important to realize that “success in houstraining” is relative by the size and breed of the dog, though.

Many small male dogs will never be able to handle the full run of your home without accidents, and that is also true of some tiny females. This is a real shock to those people who have chosen a tiny dog because they didn't want to deal with houstraining! The litter box confusion between cat and dog management is causing some serious problems for these little dogs.

There is no reason for houstraining problems to ruin your home if you properly manage a dog who is not houstrained. Breeders do this routinely. Some tiny male dogs used for breeding can never be houstrained. But while the dog is a puppy you can do the right things to create the best possible chance of houstraining. There are windows of opportunity to develop these habits most easily in a puppy. If you fail to houstrain the puppy starting the minute the little paws step foot on your property, it puts the dog at a disadvantage. This disadvantage will grow and grow, and at some point it may become impossible for even an expert to houstrain the dog.

People will get rid of a dog over houstraining problems before they will get rid of one who bites people! Crazy as that is, it means failing to houstrain your puppy is profoundly unfair to the pup. You might be willing to live with an unhoustrained dog (but don't bet on it—the mess will wear a person down as time passes)—but if for some reason you have to give the dog up to another home, no one else may be willing to live with that problem.

All of this means you need to do some things before bringing home a puppy:

1. Study houstraining so that you have a plan in advance.
2. Choose a puppy or dog that fits the facilities, time, and ability you have to offer.
3. Bring the puppy home only at the time you are able to make houstraining a priority and see it all the way through. Most dogs are not capable of adequate bowel and bladder control for full houstraining until around 4 months of age. Small dogs frequently require much longer. Complete houstraining is rarely accomplished in a weekend, though you can get a management program started in a long weekend or vacation.
4. Wait to adopt a dog until you are able to provide suitable elimination opportunities. Until then, you can get a different species of companion animal that will thrive in the facilities and with the attention you can provide.

Schedule

The first element of houstraining is a good schedule. The schedule means you commit to taking your puppy outside at certain, regular times. The puppy is then able to learn to count on those opportunities to relieve bowels and bladder.

You can't explain to the puppy all the things you would like to explain about houstraining. Nor can the puppy tell you exactly what is going on with that little body. In fact, the puppy doesn't get enough warning at first to even make it outside. After all, that means getting your attention, persuading you to stop what you are doing to take the puppy out, waiting while you get ready and while you escort the puppy whatever distance it is to the outdoors and through however many doors, until finally, relief.

Besides the huge obstacles to the puppy having to be responsible for motivating you to provide access to the potty area, this method opens potential for behavior problems. Dogs who have to ask to go out to potty often ask to go out for other things. Dogs taught that you will only let them out when they bark may become problem barkers.

Dogs who develop a fear of going out (such as fear that you will stick the dog out there too long) may not tell you they want to go out—because they don't! They need to, but they don't want to. That's a lot of worry to pile on a dog.

Fortunately, scheduling solves this problem. Some simple guidelines will get you started:

1. Leave a puppy without access to a potty area during the day no longer than the number of hours equaling the pup's age in months plus one. This means an 8-week puppy should not be left without a chance to potty for more than three hours. If you are gone 8 hours to work, a puppy this young should have more than one potty break.
2. Don't leave a dog of any age longer than 8 hours without access to a place to potty. This creates a problem for people with long commutes, but violating the guideline can cause physical problems in the dog as well as serious fears that include separation anxiety. It's easy to see why dog walkers, pet sitters, and doggie day cares have plenty of clients.
3. When you are at home and awake, give your dog a potty opportunity at least once per hour. The fact that your dog can hold it all night or 3 to 8 hours during the day at some point does NOT mean the dog can or should be asked to do so around the clock. On the contrary, the dog's body has to catch up on waste elimination to compensate.
4. Watch your dog or puppy for signs that once per hour is not often enough. Some small dogs and young puppies cannot hold it this long. If your pup was doing okay on that schedule and suddenly cannot make it, take the pup for veterinary evaluation. Many things can cause houstraining problems, and for behavioral as well as medical reasons, need to be remedied promptly. Habits for life are being formed now, and you want everything aligned so those habits will be the right ones.
5. Before you leave the house for work, take the pup out to potty at least twice. Take the dog out promptly when you return, even if you were gone a fairly short time. Also take the dog out before and after every time you are going to take the dog with you on a trip away from home. It's important to establish this pattern so your dog can count on it. That helps the dog learn to relieve before your departure and to trust that you will be home in time and you will take the dog out in time to make it until you get home.

6. Associate a word or phrase with elimination in order to have a cue to give when you're away from home or in some other situation where you need to tell the dog this time and place is acceptable for elimination. Use any words you like, such as "go potty" or "hurry up" or "better go now."

7. Take your puppy out to potty any time the dog "asks," with body language indicating the need. Sometimes a diet change, treat, exercise, or other reason causes the scheduled time to be too long to wait. Most humans and dogs naturally develop communication about this—but don't count on it for housetraining. A schedule is far the better basic structure.

The dog dancing or bouncing, staring at you, resting the chin on your knee or pushing a nose at your hand can all be good signals. To encourage a dog to use a particular signal, just be sure to respond positively to that signal, in this case by taking the dog outside. Some people like a bell at the door, too.

8. If you think your dog has developed a habit of asking to go out more often than needed, you can try extending the time just a little. But truthfully, letting the dog out a few extra times is a lot less work than cleaning up a mess because you didn't "believe" what the dog was telling you! Every accident takes away from the habit you are trying to build, and puts the wrong scent into the house, too. It's worth a lot of effort to help your dog avoid accidents.

9. As your puppy matures, you may be able to reduce the schedule of outings. Watch for which outings the dog does not use for elimination, and you may be able to drop those. Keep in mind, though, that any change in a dog's physical state can cause the dog to need to eliminate urgently, or more often than normal. Aging dogs often have this change. Do not consider this a "behavior problem." It's a physical need that we have a responsibility to meet.

Crate Training

People mean different things by the term "crate training." The crate doesn't teach a dog anything at all. Only an intelligent human can do that. Misused, a crate becomes a nasty cramped jail cell. Used properly, crate time can help your puppy learn it's safe to be alone for reasonable periods of time, and that confinement is nothing to fear. It can also keep your puppy from carrying out undesired behaviors and making those habits stronger when you absolutely cannot supervise your puppy.

But when you can supervise your puppy, the puppy needs to be out of the crate and under your watchful eyes. Puppies have dozens of things to learn, and they need to bond to you. They also need mental and physical exercise. A crate should be used as little as possible.

It is entirely feasible to raise a puppy successfully with no crate at all. But it is highly desirable to teach a young puppy to rest calmly in a crate, as insurance for potential later life situations, including the destructive chewing stage that comes with the second set of teeth. Other confinement areas can work for this training, but the veterinary hospital, grooming shop, travel, medical-restricted activity, and emergency evacuation may call for crate confinement. When a crate is necessary, you don't want that to add stress to what may already be a stressful situation.

So get a crate for your puppy and condition the puppy to be happy in there. But don't overuse it. "Puppy-in-a-box" should be a mechanical toy, not a living creature. Occasionally you'll hear the advice, usually from well-intentioned people, to keep your puppy in the crate full-time except for trips out to potty. Don't do this. It will cause more problems than it could ever solve.

If your puppy is having accidents in the crate, there are three likely reasons. One is that you are asking the puppy to hold it longer than the puppy's body can do. You will have to change the schedule. Otherwise, your puppy's instincts to keep the bed area clean will be damaged and you'll have a bigger job to housetrain.

Another potential cause of a puppy soiling the crate is that the puppy is not well. Puppies are fragile, and their immune systems quite vulnerable. Take a puppy to the veterinarian within 24 to 48 hours of adoption, and also take the puppy to the veterinarian immediately at any sign of illness, including diarrhea. This is especially true of small-breed puppies. They have little physical reserve and need quick aid.

Also take your puppy for all the recommended care, including the puppy vaccination series. The vaccination interval has changed for adult dogs, but the puppy interval has not. Puppies need this protection. Their little lives depend on it. And the puppy needs veterinary checks, too. You need your veterinarian's expertise to watch over your little one.

The third reason for a puppy to be soiling the crate is that somebody has made the first error before the puppy came to you. Expect this problem with pet shop puppies, shelter puppies, and any other puppy who has been living completely in a cage. The puppy has been too closely confined with his or her own waste, and has suffered damage to the instinct of keeping the bed clean. Now you have to help.

Anytime your puppy is soiling the crate, get the puppy out of the crate for awhile and use a different confinement method. Two good options are a portable exercise pen or a small room with a baby-gate across the door.

You can buy pens of various heights and tops for them. If the dog jumps over a baby gate, you can stack a second gate above that one. Do not use a closed door to confine a puppy. That leads to more noise, as well as to some puppies developing habits such as scratching up the closed door or digging up the flooring at the base of the door! The puppy needs to be able to see out of the confinement area, and you need to be able to peek in at the puppy without awakening the little tyke.

Have water available to your pup all the time. You may read advice to limit water during housetraining, but this can backfire and can be a health risk. Dogs need water even more critically than humans do, and they cannot ask for it. If you restrict water, the dog may tank up on it when it is available and actually make housetraining harder. The health risks are graver, though.

So, at one end of the enclosure, put the dog's water and toys. If you can provide bedding without the dog eating it or eliminating on it, put the bedding there, too. And if you feed in the confinement enclosure, feed at that same end.

Put papers on the entire floor of the enclosure until the pup starts concentrating on eliminating at one end. It will probably be opposite of the water, toys, etc., but if not, move all the stuff to the end away from the elimination, and paper the end the pup is using to potty. If you want to use potty pads or a litter box, put it there.

Eventually you may be able to use a crate again. You might test it about 2 weeks after the pup stops all elimination in the confinement area. If the pup eliminates in the crate again, discontinue its use for another long period before another trial.

Always use a confinement area other than a crate if there is any doubt about the length of time you're leaving your dog without a chance to get out to potty. This takes a lot of stress off your dog and could make the difference between developing separation anxiety or not. That is not a problem you want with your dog!

If for some reason you are not training your puppy to eliminate outdoors, confinement to a small area with the litter box or whatever you are going to use is gradually extended to larger areas. Realize that it is not the dog's fault if there are occasional indoor accidents. This is just never going to make sense to the dog. Do not punish! In the event of accidents, reduce the size of the confinement area again.

Basics and Tips

Decide where you want your puppy to eliminate at your home. An outdoor fenced area that does not expose your puppy to other people's dogs is ideal. If you have this, you can housetrain your puppy straight to the outdoors—with perhaps some indoor paper use in a confinement area if you have to leave the pup too long during your work day or the puppy can't make it through the night.

If you don't have a yard, you may be able to rig up a box of grass sod or other arrangement on a patio. Like teaching the puppy to use the outdoors early in life, this creates a clear concept of the indoors as the "den area," and the outdoors as the appropriate place to eliminate. This is the fastest, clearest, and most enduring route to housetraining.

If you do not have safe outdoor facilities to use prior to full vaccination, you may have to wait to switch to outdoor housetraining until around 16 weeks, or whatever time your veterinarian gives the go-ahead. It is important that your puppy have SOME experience eliminating on grass as early in life as possible. If your breeder has done this, you're covered. If not, maybe you can find some safe grass for a few outings.

Some particularly conscientious breeders of toy puppies keep the pups until immunization is complete. If the breeder is able to provide the pup with proper social experiences, this is ideal. Tiny puppies are fragile to many things, including seizures from going too long between meals. The breeder should have the expertise, schedule and facilities to give the needed care.

Puppies need more frequent meals than adult dogs. Find out what food and meal schedule the puppy has been on in order to have some of that food on hand before the puppy arrives. On the first veterinary visit, ask about feeding and make any recommended changes.

Only on your veterinarian's instructions should you ever suddenly change a puppy's food. Dogs have to have time to develop the right friendly bacteria in their intestines before they can digest a new food. A puppy new to your home is under stress, and the intestines are immature. You need to make these transitions gradual unless there is a good reason to do otherwise. Just a sudden food change can cause serious diarrhea.

Everything your puppy eats is part of the diet. For housetraining, you need a low-fiber diet, such as a low-residue dog food. Dogs have different digestive systems than humans, and too much fiber is not good for them. It also makes it harder for them to hold their bowels.

Don't let anyone overfeed or feed junk. Unless your veterinarian recommends otherwise, give your puppy scheduled meals rather than leaving food out all the time. This has behavior benefits as well as health benefits. Follow your veterinarian's instructions because different situations call for different feeding.

Never punish your puppy over housetraining. It does not work, and it creates more serious problems than housetraining accidents. These include making the dog defensive about other things, making the dog hide from you to eliminate, causing the dog to lose trust in you, and even creating an aggressive personality. Punishment doesn't solve the housetraining accidents anyway, so it's just a problem all the way around.

When you first arrive home with your puppy, take the puppy to the place you have chosen for elimination. If that is a certain small part of your yard, have that area marked off with some sort of clear physical boundaries. A decorative fence, landscape timbers or flowerbed edging will do.

Each time you walk outdoors with your puppy, say "Let's go outside!" You can also ask your puppy "Do you want to go outside?" Associate the word "outside" with going out the door. The "go potty" phrase is not for this. "Go potty" means it's okay for the puppy to eliminate right here, right now. Don't confuse the two cues. You don't want the puppy to think you mean to potty inside on the floor when you say "outside."

In the right place, say "go potty" phrase, and wait for the puppy to eliminate. Praise softly, and try to reward in a way this puppy would like—as you get to know the puppy, you'll develop more options for rewards. These could include praise, petting, treats, a game, more time to play outside, going back inside immediately, or going for a walk. Be careful with the timing of your reward to make sure the pup has completely finished eliminating. Some puppies need to do it twice before they are really done. Many puppies need to run around a little bit—as do many adult dogs.

Don't leave the puppy outside alone. You need to know when the puppy eliminates in order to reward at the right time and to adjust the schedule, and the puppy needs to be free from worry about being stuck out there alone. Some people find it helps to keep a log of when the dog potties. Certainly you want a written record of any time the puppy has diarrhea, because if it continues, the veterinarian will need this information.

If you "catch the dog in the act" of having an accident, the rule about no punishment still holds! Hustle the puppy outside quickly, with no more than a "no—outside" spoken in a normal, calm tone of voice. Once out there, say your "go potty" cue and wait. If the dog does it, that is a huge success, and you want to give great praise and reward. If you weren't fast enough, still be upbeat with the dog outside. Just BEING there needs to make your dog feel your approval.

Dogs do not understand housetraining because to their instincts the urine and feces is not offensive, dirty, insulting, or shocking. If your dog is not too small and your house is not too big, the dog can often develop a sense of the house as the "den" area to keep clean. Otherwise, you'll need to confine the dog to whatever area the dog can manage. Sometimes people with tiny dogs are unwilling to do this, thinking the dog will not get enough exercise. But a tiny dog needs less room for exercise!

Housetraining does not automatically transfer to someone else's house, so keep your dog on leash, in a crate, or in a portable exercise pen when visiting. This goes for any age dog. Males in particular will feel duty bound to mark a new place. Take this responsibility off your boy dog!

You don't need a large yard for housetraining, but you do need to pick up feces frequently, preferably every day. If you're trying to cultivate nice plants in the area or if it doesn't get much sun, you'll also need to water frequently to dilute the urine.

As you can see, housetraining a puppy requires a great deal of individual attention. It's difficult to impossible to do this for two puppies at the same time. Experts will avoid taking on the task, and anyone else is likely to have extreme difficulty succeeding at it! For best results in housetraining as well as most every other aspect of successfully raising a puppy, raise one before acquiring another.

Cleaning

Not knowing the right products to use for cleaning presents a major obstacle to housetraining. There is no reason to have a ruined carpet or reeking home while housetraining a dog. If you do have odor, the puppy's instincts will be overwhelmed by it and you will get more accidents—the pup can't help it.

With the wrong products, owners may not be able to smell the odor (temporarily—eventually it comes back), but dogs can. One dog in the house having accidents that are not properly treated leads to other dogs doing it—including dogs who move there later. The scent is a signpost to the dog's instincts that this is the bathroom.

Once the spot has begun to dry, the only reliable product to use is a bacterial enzyme odor eliminator product. These come in various brands. The product must penetrate as deeply as the urine did. In many cases you will need to apply it more than once. You may also need to keep it active awhile by covering it with warm, moist towels. In severe cases, you may need a professional cleaning service.

This is one more reason to watch your puppy at all times the pup is not in the safe confinement area. When you see an accident happen or find it immediately after it has happened, you can use undiluted clear vinegar instead of the more expensive enzyme product as it actually aids training.

Apply the vinegar (or any other cleaning you do) without commenting to the dog. Vinegar gives a scent message to the dog that discourages the dog from using that spot again soon. It's a big boost to housetraining. Remember, no punishment. Just put the vinegar on the spot—liberally—and let it dry. It doesn't matter whether the dog sees you do it or not. You can hasten the drying process in carpet by placing layers of newspaper or thick toweling over it and stepping on that. It will pull liquid out of the carpet and pad.

These same methods work on other surfaces, too, including beds. It's not advisable, though, to have a dog on your bed for more than a few minutes before the dog is housetrained. And it's best if as much of your house as possible is washable when raising a puppy!

Don't use ammonia for cleaning around a puppy or dog. It smells like urine, and can lure the dog to eliminate there.

Teamwork

Housetraining is probably the first major goal that you and your puppy will achieve together. At various times in your dog's life will come times the body needs special care. Housetraining is one way the two of you prepare for that. Sick dogs, injured dogs and aging dogs often have special requirements you don't expect.

Housetraining the puppy is when you learn to aid your dog instead of losing patience and throwing a tantrum! It's also when your puppy learns to trust you and to look to you for help with physical needs. It's an important part of learning to live together, so give it your best. Your dog will meet you at least halfway—dogs always do.

Crate Confinement: Is It a Good Choice for Your Dog?

The use of a crate with a dog is so common that we may automatically assume it's a good tool for all dogs. Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't.

Good Reasons to Use a Crate

1. Puppies need to learn the skill of resting calmly in a crate. This will never again be as easy for the dog to adapt to as it is in puppyhood. Even if you prefer not to use a crate routinely, seriously consider doing this conditioning for your pup. We can't know what might be ahead in the years of that dog's life that will make a crate an absolute necessity.
2. Dogs who will travel by plane or go for professional grooming are going to have to be able to tolerate a crate, so crate-training is a must for these canines.
3. Emergency evacuation in time of disaster, staying with your dog in travel or rental housing, being a guest in a home that has other animals or doesn't like animals are all situations where you could suddenly need to use a crate.
4. Veterinary care and at-home nursing care require crate restriction for certain conditions. Some veterinarians have runs they can use with crate-phobic dogs in certain situations, but this isn't always workable.
5. Few people can afford the damage a dog may do left free inside the house during the destructive chewing stage, or when the dog has a severe case of separation anxiety. Even if you are wealthy enough that damage isn't an issue (and have no items of sentimental value that you couldn't bear to have chewed), the dog is at risk of chewing something that will be fatal. A crate is the logical solution if the dog can tolerate it.
6. If your dog ever has to be re-homed to a new family or your family situation changes (including a kid going off to college) or you move, the dog may experience separation anxiety and badly need the support of a crate to get through it. At these times, you want the crate to feel like a safe place to the dog as a result of good foundation training in the past. In fact, you want this at any time you use a crate with your dog!

Reasons to Not Use a Crate

First, let's note that you can still condition your dog to a crate, even if you're not going to use it routinely. It is in your dog's best interests to do so. If you're not using the crate day-to-day, it's easy to take this conditioning slowly and make it fun, fun, fun for your dog. So why not do it? A crate and the time to condition your dog for the ability to rest calmly inside it is good insurance for any dog. And remember—it's fun!

There are times and reasons that may make you decide not to crate your dog, though. Here are some of those reasons:

1. The dog has a medical condition that is worsened when the dog can't move around somewhat freely. Old dogs commonly have arthritis and some may stiffen up with close confinement. Inflamed joints on a dog of any age can react the same way. If the dog with such a condition needs to be prevented from running and jumping for medical reasons, you and your veterinarian may decide to use a small room instead of a crate or keep the dog with you on leash.
2. The dog has begun urinating or defecating in the crate. Not only is this messy, it's bad for the dog's skin and can damage the dog's instincts to keep a clean sleeping-place. This dog needs to be out of the crate, perhaps in an exercise pen or a small room with a baby-gate across the doorway, until the dog re-establishes the habit of a clean bed and you solve any problem causing the dog not to be able to hold it during confinement.
3. The dog is afraid of the crate. This fear can be difficult to distinguish from separation anxiety, and one fear can lead to the other. Some of these dogs are difficult to manage, which is why we want to condition all puppies to be able to rest calmly in a crate. That foundation can make a huge difference later.

If you have a crate-phobic dog, you can recondition the dog's reaction to the crate, but you don't want to use the crate as a routine confinement method while doing the conditioning. That would undo the positive conditioning to the crate you're trying to establish.

4. The time the dog needs to be left alone is too long for crate confinement. Eight hours is a good top limit for crate time, even if the dog is doing great in a crate. Why risk trouble?

For pups under 7 months of age, the rule of thumb is to crate no longer than the number of hours equaling the dog's age in months plus one. When a dog has the experience of being crated too long and feeling trapped while needs go unmet, that is the perfect set up to begin fear of the crate, fear of being left alone, and other problems. So if you need to leave a dog longer than the dog can comfortably hold bladder and bowels or longer than 8 hours (whichever is less), use different confinement, such as a small room.

5. Is there any reason to crate this dog? If you have a dog who behaves wonderfully when left alone loose in the house, consider why you would crate. One reason might be that the dog is new to your home and you're not sure what the dog might do in the next few days or weeks. Better crate than sorry.

Another reason is when your 4-month-old puppy is housetrained and you think the need for a crate is over. Chances are the permanent teeth will erupt in the next few months and serious chewing such as you've not seen in this pup before will start! So don't stop crating at this age. Wait a bit to see how much of a chewer your pup is going to be. With large dogs, expect to use the crate to age 2 to 2 ½ years of age to get past the destructive chewing stage. It's not for life!

6. Does your dog have a job to do in your home? If one reason you have a dog is to deter criminals from breaking into your house or harming your family, the dog can't do this job confined to a crate. In such a case you're going to want to choose a breed, bloodline, and individual dog with a high chance of growing into an adult dog who can be trusted loose in your house (some are not likely to develop this ability, so do your research!). You're also going to need to do the right foundation work, including use of a crate to help management until the dog has learned to chew only the right items, to eliminate in the right place, etc.

Use Crates Thoughtfully

Dogs have at times had their lives saved by crates. They have also been able to handle stressful situations much more serenely because the crate has been built up in the dog's experience as a safe place. The skill of resting calmly in a crate is a life skill that can benefit almost all dogs.

There is, however, a disturbing trend for people to overuse crates with their dogs. Being able to spend several hours a day moving around the house rather than spending that same time in a crate will benefit a dog in many ways.

The dog loose in the house moderately exercises the body, which for some dogs can be all the exercise they need. Small dogs and "busy" types like herding dogs will keep going and going and going indoors, happily getting a great deal of exercise.

Dogs don't learn anything when crated, other than to accept crating—or to fear it, in certain unfortunate situations. To train your dog for the ability to be reliable free in your house, have the dog out of the crate and with you whenever you can supervise and teach. With maturity and training, the majority of dogs will learn to behave well in the house when you're not watching as well as when you are.

Dogs need mental exercise as well as physical exercise, and being free in the house allows more mental stimulation, too. You can help determine how your dog will use this wonderful brainpower by providing toys and games (hide treats around the house when you're going to be gone, for example) and working with your dog to establish safe play habits in the house.

Ideally, good crate practices start when you plan to acquire a dog, by getting a good crate (or two, or three!), deciding where to place it (bedroom, car, possibly family room), thinking through a good schedule for your dog, buying safe toys, and otherwise being well prepared to meet your new dog's needs.

If the dog is a puppy, consider the background. A pet shop or other puppy-mill puppy will likely need alternate confinement for a while until clean instincts can kick in, so have a plan for that. Ask the breeder or foster home of any dog you're adopting about that dog's experience with crates. Be prepared for separation anxiety to kick in when you bring home a new dog. Most separation anxiety of this sort subsides with time and sensible, stable management.

A dog who has previously been fine with a crate can develop fear of it for various reasons, sometimes reasons we don't understand. Do everything you can to keep the crate a happy place that feels safe to your dog. Be prepared to get the dog out of a crate, temporarily or permanently, if the dog develops a problem with it.

The crate is not the only way to confine a dog, and some dogs don't need confinement for much of their lives other than being inside a house or a fence. The more we understand about why we're using a crate with this dog at this time, or why we should avoid a crate with this dog at least for now, the better we can manage our dogs for health and happiness.

Destructive Chewing

Puppy teething doesn't surprise most families, although just how *much* puppies use their teeth may. Human babies have hands, so they use hands and mouths for necessary learning and exploring as their brains develop. Canine babies must do this exploration mostly with their mouths.

Puppy teeth are quite sharp, and the sharp tips become somewhat smoother through teething/chewing. When the permanent teeth emerge, they are not as sharp. At this point the pup may be housetrained, and early teething has largely subsided. Whatever confinement the family was using to keep the pup out of trouble, they may decide to discontinue. Then it happens.

What Nobody Told You

The *real* chewing comes after the dog has cut the permanent teeth. These teeth seem to require "setting" in the jaw by hard chewing. Dogs who don't do this chewing may have poorer lifelong dental health. But, the dogs who proceed to firmly set their shiny new teeth with robust chewing may have horrified families!

This completely normal stage of dog development is more pronounced in some breeds than others, and in some individual dogs than others. It can be greatly aggravated by anxiety, including separation anxiety, but some dogs who are simply going through the destructive chewing stage are diagnosed with separation anxiety.

To complicate the situation, you can *give* your dog separation anxiety by 1) coming home when you've imprudently left your dog with access to toothsome possessions of yours, 2) seeing a mess, and 3) freaking out at the dog. Do this enough times, and any dog will develop anxiety. Some dogs will develop anxiety if you do it just once. You think, using human logic, that the dog full well knows why you had that conniption fit at the sight of your sofa in pieces. The dog, on the other hand, has no earthly idea why you got mad.

Naturally, the next time you're gone and leave the dog with access to tempting toothables, the physical urging (it may even be pain) in the dog's jaws will result in another chewing episode. After all, the dog is not able to make a mental connection between chewing stuff at 2 p.m. and you getting angry at 5:30 p.m. You come home to the mess, and your human logic interprets this as deliberate defiance.

You act like a human, and the dog acts like a dog. Most dogs will submit to your anger the first few times, until your not accepting the submission and insisting on punishing the dog anyway results in the dog feeling cornered. Then all bets are off as to how the dog might react. You can ruin the dog's temperament.

Other dogs, not so submissive, will see your anger-completely unexplainable from the dog's point of view-and react in a defensive manner. Either way, there are no winners here, only losers. The dog may ultimately lose his or her life, since destructive chewing is a major cause of people giving up their dogs. Often the first step is to put the dog outdoors to live. This can weaken the family's bond with the dog and also introduce new issues, such as barking that disturbs neighbors and brings authorities to your door.

How to Fix It

Dogs need chew toys of good quality that are safe for the chewing habits of each particular dog. It takes observation to determine which toys are okay for which dogs. Provide the dog with a variety of textures, so that whatever the teeth are screaming for at any given moment, the dog can locate a toy-within reach-that will fill the need.

When you're not able to supervise the dog, provide a safe area for the dog to rest. A crate, a comfortable dog run and a room in the house with a baby gate (or two, one stacked above the other to provide adequate height) are all possibilities that work for some dogs. Avoid putting the dog behind a closed door in a room, since this often leads to the dog developing habits such as clawing up doors or the flooring at the bases of doors. Baby gates that allow the dog to see through the doorway tend to avoid these complications.

The destructive chewing stage can last for quite some time, but in most cases will end by the time the dog is 2 years old or so. If you do an excellent job of directing a puppy to appropriate toys using the instructions below, some dogs will be focused on their toys by the time they're a year old and able to have more house freedom. If you've waited until a destructive chewing problem has emerged and are now starting to deal with it in a dog several months of age, plan on restricting house freedom until the dog is a bit older.

Either way, don't just give up and toss the dog outside because you don't want to use a crate or other confinement forever. Rarely does it need to be forever, unless you have a situation that requires confinement for other reasons. Destructive chewing is a stage that, with your help, the majority of dogs can come through very well.

Another tool you need for this training is a bottle of Bitter Apple spray or similar product. Bitter Apple has been around for a long time, doesn't harm dogs if they ingest it, and doesn't stain most surfaces. It's also readily available. This is a training tool, not a protect-the-house tool. Alcohol-based, the spray evaporates quickly and has to be applied three to four times a day to keep its bittering effect active.

Let's look at a teachable moment. You are in the same room with your dog, perhaps watching television or reading a book. A few good dog toys are within easy reach on the floor. The Bitter Apple spray is also handy. The dog, exploring, starts to chew (or any movement showing intention to chew) an inappropriate object.

You get up. Take along the Bitter Apple spray and a dog toy as you calmly go to the dog. Spray the OBJECT the dog is chewing (do not spray the dog), while you calmly say, "Leave it." *Instantly* animate the dog toy and get the dog excited enough to want it. Do not carry this to extreme teasing-it's not a game. Your goal is simply to direct the dog's attention to the toy, not to agitate the dog into a state of high activity. You want the dog to continue thinking of chewing, which dogs do when relaxing.

As soon as the dog wants the toy, give it to the dog. When the dog settles with it to chew, softly praise the dog and withdraw, back to what you were doing before. You've completed a successful lesson.

You will need to repeat this many, many times. You're helping your dog form strong chewing habits of choosing a dog toy every time. A young dog with jaws urging "Chew! Chew! Chew!" is apt to make many mistakes. You actually want these mistakes made in front of you-you do not want to scare the dog into hiding from you to chew.

The longer the dog was allowed to keep making mistakes about chewing before the human family wised up and started this training, the more habits there will be to overcome. Additionally, the dog needs time to mature. Your patience will pay off. Your dog is learning a lot of other good things in the process of this training, including the fact that you're smart and a good person.

If you notice the dog going back to an inappropriate item of a certain texture unlike the dog's toys, by all means get some toys of that texture. This may be a texture your dog's teeth need at that point in development. Don't use discarded human items for toys. It's not fair to expect a dog to consistently know the difference between old shoes and new shoes! Use dog toys.

During the most rampant chewing stage, it pays to bring in new and interesting toys frequently. Some people rotate the toys to keep them interesting. Just remember to keep an assortment of textures available to the dog at all times. This will likely mean you have some toys in every room where you and the dog spend time.

If you find something your dog has chewed and damaged when you weren't watching, it's okay to do the training maneuver (*calmly*) if the dog is still chewing it. If the dog is done chewing it, you've missed your chance. There is nothing you can teach your dog about destructive chewing by punishing the dog. Your best bet is simply to do a better job with confinement and supervision, so that the dog is not again put into a position to make this mistake without your help to choose the right toy.

You're helping your dog form habits for life. Not only do you want the dog to chew dog toys instead of your things, you also want your dog to form the chewing habit! Yes, that's right! The dog who continues to chew on appropriate

toys through life will typically have better dental health. If you've ever had a dog with teeth that quickly got dirty and infected and had to have a lot of dental work, you'll realize that you want a dog who chews. Of course, you want the dog to chew the right toys!

Socializing Dogs to People

Ideally every puppy would receive a good foundation of experiences for the ability to cope with all kinds of people as an adult dog. Even if the genetics for temperament in your pup are not the best, or your pup has a bad experience when young, a good foundation of social experiences will give the best chance for a dog to have good social skills. If your puppy comes from two temperamentally-sound parents and is lucky enough to avoid any traumatic experiences with humans during formative months, you might never see problems from lack of good early socialization.

Bad experiences unfortunately happen without anyone being able to foresee or prevent them. What you can do, though, is give your dog plenty of positive experiences. That way when your dog has a bad experience with, for example, a man with a beard, several previous GOOD experiences with bearded men will have already taught your dog that a bearded man is not a bad guy!

Quality AND Quantity

Having lots of experiences with humans will not help your dog if those experiences are of poor quality. When "quantity" means a number of bad experiences, quantity is not a good thing. Your goal is to build in your dog a belief system that most encounters with humans will be safe. Your dog learns from experiences, and those experiences need to illustrate the message you wish to teach the dog.

A dog who has high-quality positive experiences with humans may still not be adequately socialized if there are not enough experiences. Let's say you have your dog Joe out for a walk and a passing man frightens him. Perhaps the man crashes into Joe, drops something on him, or steps on his tail. Maybe it's accidental, maybe the man is under the influence of some substance, but either way, Joe has a bad experience.

If when this happens to Joe he has previously encountered 50 men on outings, 40 of whom ignored him and 10 who gave him treats, what is Joe's opinion of men likely to be? "Gee, men are usually okay, but that guy was strange!" Give Joe several good experiences with men soon after this experience and he'll likely put it into the perspective of many good experiences and decide not to worry too much about men he meets.

If Joe has inherited a difficult temperament, he may require more good experiences and more time to offset his bad experience. The same is true if Joe has not had a large number of good experiences before this unfortunate one.

It's even possible that Joe will never be able to handle exposure to men, or to whatever type of person he decides to worry about. All dogs are not equal when it comes to the socialization they need and how they will be able to handle the world, with or without good experiences. All you can do is your best.

Bear in mind, too, that some breeds were selectively bred to have temperaments you might find difficult in a companion dog. Be sure to research breeds ahead of adopting a dog to find one likely to fit your lifestyle.

To establish the good social experiences with humans that your dog needs, plan contacts with people. Dogs don't tend to catch infections from humans, so there may be places you can take your puppy to meet humans before the veterinarian wants the pup around other dogs.

Keep outings short so the puppy won't get tired, and when in doubt, carry the pup to avoid exposure to contaminated ground. Try to do a little every day. The time can increase as the puppy matures and has more stamina and a stronger immune system. Try to remain aware of the dog's stress level at all times. Your goal is for every experience to end happily.

Don't let the habit of jumping on people get started because changing this habit later can put your dog's good attitude toward people at risk. It's also much easier to prevent than to fix. Don't let anyone pet the puppy or dog who is standing on hind legs.

You can gently hold the dog in four-on-the floor position (a chest harness in addition to the collar gives you a secure handhold that doesn't pull against the dog's throat), wait until the dog quits trying to jump, or even stand on the leash so it doesn't give the dog room to jump. Don't try standing on the leash of a big dog, though, or you can get pulled over!

If you happen to have the not-uncommon combination of a shy dog who also jumps on people, you can teach the dog to do "paws up" to your forearm, and hold the dog there for people to pet. The dog is under your control, so it can be a reasonable compromise while you work on training skills and social skills with a nervous young dog.

Another way to handle the jumping-up dog is to teach the dog to sit for petting and a treat, and this is a lovely behavior. If you start the non-jumping greetings early enough in a dog's life, it becomes such a habit that the dog is trustworthy even when highly excited and when around frail people. This is a goal well worth the effort, no matter what the dog's age.

Being able to take some initiative in greeting people gives confidence to many dogs, which is one reason they jump up. Once you've taught your dog not to jump up, it's helpful to teach the dog a cue phrase for greeting people, such as "Say hi." You can add a signal to this, pointing to the person you mean.

When the dog makes the approach, the dog will tend to feel more comfortable. The same is true when a dog offers a paw to shake hands. Dogs love structure, knowing what is going to happen next, and shaking hands can satisfy this desire.

Variables

Dogs notice all sorts of differences in people. With good socialization, dogs learn to ignore the differences that are not important, such as beards, hats, skin color, and the like. If you react in such a way that your dog thinks there is reason to fear that type of person, though, you can inadvertently create fear, suspicion or defensiveness in your dog toward other people. That becomes inconvenient, and sometimes downright dangerous. So strive to treat people the same no matter what their differences when you are socializing your dog!

In socializing your dog, you want to create positive experiences with every variation on the human condition you possibly can. Here are some differences to use:

1. Accustom your dog to people of as many different appearances as possible. This includes people who are tall, short, narrow, wide, bearded, short-haired, long-haired, and with skin all the colors of the rainbow. Whatever differences you and your dog come across, your goal is to teach the dog that these things are not important.
2. Get your dog used to people who smell different ways. Being in my 20th year as a therapy dog handler, I've come to believe that dogs are not as put off by scents as people are. If you don't like the way someone smells, you may notice it makes no difference to your dog. What you don't want to do is react in such a way that your dog will be afraid of that scent.
3. Let your dog get used to people moving in all sorts of ways. That means walking, running, limping, riding a bicycle, skating, skipping, and anything else you can think of or find. Keep in mind the dog's comfort and safety so your dog will have good experiences with these movements, not bad ones.
4. Accustom your dog to all sorts of sounds associated with people. That includes whispering, talking, laughing, coughing, singing, yelling, playing music electronically or with an instrument and all the other variations you can arrange.
5. Give your dog the experience of people appearing suddenly. This is startling to some dogs, so start at a distance and be prepared to distract the dog with an eye contact exercise.
6. Expose your dog to people wearing a wide variety of clothing.
7. Get your dog used to people carrying all kinds of objects. A safe distance from a construction site is a convenient place to work on this.

8. When you can actively work with your dog when someone comes to your home, this is a great opportunity to get your dog used to people in a potentially delicate situation. If you're not able to actively control the dog, though, put the dog into an area away from being able to see the visitors. You don't want any bad habits or beliefs to get started.

Remedies

An eye contact or focused attention exercise is a good way to handle your dog around people the dog might find stressful. When in doubt, start with having the dog focus on you, and release the dog's attention for brief moments at a time to see how the dog reacts to the person.

If the dog reacts badly to someone, increase your distance from the person and continue to work with the dog's attention on you. In the early stages of focused attention it's usually best to use treats to keep the dog's eyes on yours. This has the added advantage of giving you a reading on the dog's stress level. If the dog normally will eat a particular treat but will not eat it in that situation, that's reason to think the situation may be too stressful.

Don't let people corner your dog. A dog on a leash may feel cornered even with a lot of space around because the dog can't get away. If someone is pushy about petting your dog and won't listen to your instructions, walk on, keeping your dog's focus on you. Yes, it's a bit snobbish, but it's good for the dog! It tells your dog that YOU will deal with the humans, and that you are a leader worthy of following.

Acting out aggression or fear tends to fix both the behavior habit and the feeling more strongly. If your dog reacts in this manner to a situation, you need to stop putting the dog in the situation. Change the situation to one the dog can handle, and work gradually up to the level your dog needs to be able to cope with.

For example, let's say your dog is afraid of men encountered on walks. You need to take your dog out to eliminate, so you'll need to work the dog around men. How can you approach this training?

First, if the dog is aggressive toward men, get the help of an expert in person to work on the problem. Aggression is not a do-it-yourself project. Ask your veterinarian to recommend a behavior specialist in your area. Aggression and shyness are two sides of the same coin, so be alert for a fearful dog to show signs of aggression. If that happens, don't delay getting help.

In the case of a dog showing mild fear without aggression, it helps to "sideswipe" people—not by hitting them as you go by! But instead of walking up to someone and stopping and putting your dog in the position of having to deal with them, just walk by the person, keeping your dog's eyes on your eyes. At first have the distance between your dog and the person fairly large—whatever it takes for the dog to feel relaxed, maybe 20 feet. The dog may also feel relaxed when your body is between the dog and the other person.

If the person is willing to help, you can walk by several times, getting closer. For the first session, that may be all you want to do. You might do just that for several sessions.

As the dog shows progress, you could make your passes closer, and slow down as you pass the person. Eventually you could stop near the person and keep your dog's attention while perhaps talking to the person.

If the dog gets more comfortable, you might have the person just lightly scratch the dog with one hand reaching from the side behind one ear—not reaching over the head. You might also have the person give the dog a treat. Another possibility is to have the person drop a treat for the dog, if you're willing to let your dog pick up food from the ground (that's a training decision).

If your dog is not showing comfort with being petted by people, you could make the choice to just teach your dog to ignore everyone else when out with you. This might seem extreme, but when you think about it, it's not so different from what some humans have to do in order to endure constant closeness to people living in neighborhoods and apartments.

In tight quarters, people give each other some "space" by simply not engaging every time they pass. Some dogs need more space than others, and if you can't give the dog physical space at that moment, you can create emotional space.

With practice and teaching your dog that you can be trusted to keep things safe, this kind of space can work for many dogs.

Children and Puppies

The combination of a preschool-age child and a puppy at a critical stage of socialization requires special handling. A typical result is a dog who is never good with kids because of things that happened during critical early weeks and months of the pup's life.

If you have a young child and want to add a dog to the family, your best bet is a dog already positively socialized to young kids. If you have a young child and a puppy, be aware that a puppy may not show the effects of the child's behavior until the pup is several months of age.

Be careful how any child is allowed to behave around any dog, and never leave a child under school age alone with any dog for even one second.

Good contact with dogs in the early years can have lifelong benefits for children, so it's worth a lot of effort to provide this contact for your child and the children of your acquaintance. Just make sure there is enough skilled adult supervision on every encounter. The ideal is one skilled adult handling the dog while another handles the child.

Companionship

What a sociable dog can do for humans is beyond scientific measurement and beyond words. It is worth a great deal of effort to socialize your dog well with humans. It's also a lot of fun.

Dogs are the ultimate ice-breakers between people. Handling a dog skillfully around other people is challenging and fascinating. You'll be rewarded by having your dog provide even more benefits in your life, as well as in the lives of other people.

[Socializing Dogs to Places](#)

Puppies and dogs who have never been to places other than their homes can become unable to cope with going anywhere. This becomes a serious problem when the dog needs to go to the veterinarian's office, to a specialist, or out for any other reason. Socializing to places is essential for a dog's mental health and for physical well-being, too.

Consult your veterinarian about what places are safe to take your puppy or dog. A puppy whose vaccinations are not yet complete or a dog with medical problems can be at high risk of catching a disease from going where other dogs have been. Some dogs pose more risk than others. Your veterinarian will know what diseases are going around among the dogs in your community at any given time.

Foundation Work

An orderly training class is an excellent idea for most dogs as part of their experience with places outside the home. In class you have the help of an instructor to coach you on handling your pup and also to help set up situations that will help your pup form positive beliefs about going places. Hopefully within a few sessions, you'll see your pup eager to enter the class area.

A dog needs to be healthy before starting class, and ready for outings that last longer than an hour. Your pup's first outings should probably be shorter than this. Short and sweet—the goal is to make each outing a positive experience for your dog.

Even if it's a big effort to get your dog to the place you're going for the outing, and you have to rearrange your schedule to do it, resist the urge to make the outing long. Don't try to turn what should be two or three or four outings into just one! What your dog needs is to go there multiple times and find out that each time is good. All-in-one doesn't work nearly as well.

Take your dog to a wide variety of places with a multiple characteristics. Try to notice what things your dog notices, and to make these things pleasant for the dog. Look for places that expand your dog's experiences. Here are some things to think about in choosing places to work with your dog:

Outdoors

Indoors

Wide-open spaces

Closed spaces

Other dogs present

No other dogs present

People present

No people present

Few others there, and others appearing unexpectedly

Raining

Snow on the ground

Hot weather (take precautions to keep your dog safe from overheating)

Night time

Lots of noise

Very quiet

Strong smells

Include trips to the veterinarian's office in your outings. Be sure to check with the office about the times to come when you won't be disrupting their routine. Several short trips to the office for a few treats and then on your way can make a huge difference in your dog's stress level when it's time for veterinary treatment.

Make going places more appealing to your dog by putting rewards into the trip out and the time spent at the location. Avoid rewards on the way home or after returning home, because rewarding then can cause the dog to want to get home quickly.

Good rewards will be whatever things your dog likes. These could include praise, petting, food rewards, games and time to play with favorite toys. This is a good time to use the toys your dog can only have when supervised. Such toys will tend to stay special to the dog and have a high reward value.

If your dog is timid or reluctant about places, it can help to go along with another person handling a confident dog your dog likes. Choose a dog who reduces your dog's stress and who likes going to the place you're going. Dogs will pick up positive attitudes from each other. But they will pick up negative attitudes, too, so avoid taking your inexperienced or unsure dog out with a dog who does not like going to that place.

Act confident and calm yourself, and be a good leader to your dog. Use the training skills that the two of you are working on together. If your dog is not ready to listen to you in a highly distracting situation, pick a quiet part of the outing to practice the training. As you practice in more and more distracting situations, your dog's ability will gradually improve. The maturing process helps, too.

If riding in a car makes your dog sick, take that into consideration. Work on the carsickness just as you work on any other aversion your dog has, gradually and with rewards. Try to separate socialization to places with any car rides that would make your dog arrive sick in the new place!

The Fearful Dog

If your dog has missed early socialization to places, you can still improve things. The same principles apply, and it's not really possible to predict how much progress the dog might make and how long it might take to see improvement.

The ability to cope with novel situations is both taught and inherited. Some puppies with the best early socialization may still be lifelong homebodies and always somewhat reluctant to go places. These are the dogs who would have serious problems without early socialization to places.

Some dogs who have missed out on early socialization and have never been anywhere will come around nicely when given good, positive socialization to places. A complicated combination of traits determines a dog's ability to cope. Steady nerves, just as one example, come from genetics; a mother dog with steady nerves and early handling of the puppies can instill the belief that the world is a safe place.

If your dog shows severe fears about going out, or behaves aggressively toward other dogs or humans on outings, get expert help in person. Your veterinarian can help you find a veterinary behavior specialist or other expert to help you work safely with your dog. Every time the dog acts out dangerous or seriously fearful behavior, that behavior becomes a stronger habit, so get help promptly.

Taking your dog on outings not only helps the dog learn to cope with a variety of places, but it also strengthens your bond with your dog. Training benefits by working in a variety of places, too. Whenever you take your dog out, keep in mind the goal of helping your dog learn to enjoy going new places. You will be amazed at the benefits from these happy outings.