

The Golden Retriever

Lives and breathes to love his family

Introduction

Joy and loyalty wrapped in sunshine is the perfect description of the Golden Retriever, a top dog for families, handicapped owners, and obedience competitors. The Golden lives to learn, to generate smiles, to romp with the children, and to please his owners. He's a bundle of canine cheer without an unkind bone in his body.

Although not as popular as his rambunctious cousin the Labrador Retriever, the Golden resides in the American Kennel Club's top 10 with more than 68 thousand individual dogs and 14, thousand litters registered in 1993.

Like many of the sporting breeds, the Golden was born in Britain in the 1800s. Breed ancestry includes the extinct Tweed Water Spaniel, a small Newfoundland, the Irish Setter and other water spaniels. The Golden was developed by Lord Tweedmouth at his estate on the Tweed River near Inverness, Scotland, for retrieving shot waterfowl. The foundation stock of the breed was a yellow retriever puppy of unknown breed and a Tweed Water Spaniel, both of which appear several times in early pedigrees.

In the early 1900s, Goldens were shown in England as Flat-coated Retrievers, Golden variety. The dogs made their way to the US with travelers in the 1890s, but were not exhibited in shows until after 1920. Initially, the dogs were used to hunt, but they gradually migrated to the show ring. Although the Golden color ranges from pale orange to deep gold, the deeper colors were originally preferred. Today the medium and light shades are more common than the burnished copper-gold.

Brains as well as beauty, along with an innate need to please his owners is the Golden trademark even above his handsome appearance. The first three dogs to achieve the Obedience Trial Championship instituted by the American Kennel Club in 1977 were Goldens.

The standard

The Golden is a well-balanced, strong, active dog with a kind expression, gentle manner, and an alert and self-confident disposition. He is trustworthy, friendly, and reliable; excessively shy or high strung dogs are atypical of the breed and usually the result of poor breeding practices or inadequate socialization.

Males stand 23-24 inches at the shoulder and weigh 65-75 pounds; females are a bit smaller and lighter. The body is a bit longer than tall.

Males have a broader skull and muzzle and a thicker neck than females, and neither should be coarse or overdone. The eyes have a deep and gentle expression with a spark of intelligence; the ears fall forward along the sides of the head but are set high so they do not droop like hound ears.

The tail is strong and well-fringed, and almost always wagging.

The Golden is a strong, muscular dog with fluid movement. He is well-angulated in the rear for endurance in the field, a trait that helps him work in obedience as well.

The Golden coat is dense and water-repellent with a good undercoat. The outer coat is firm and resilient and can be straight or wavy; the legs and tail are feathered with longer hairs. Color is rich and lustrous in various shades of gold. Although the color may shade to cream on some parts of the dog's body, particularly with the lighter-colored dogs, white markings are not permitted. In the show ring, Goldens with undershot or overshot jaws and dogs more than an inch off the stated height are disqualified.

Care and training

The Golden needs moderate daily exercise to maintain health and condition. His coat needs some grooming, and he does shed the soft undercoat. Although he is wonderful with children and eager to please, he must be obedience trained to channel both his enthusiasm and his strength.

Early socialization and puppy classes are important for the Golden youngster who must learn to curb his natural friendliness to other dogs and his exuberance for greeting people. Some dogs do not appreciate Golden overtures, and most people do not care to be leaped upon or bowled over.

Training must be gentle and consistent, never harsh, even for the dog that is easily distracted. However, firmness is also necessary, for a 70-pound dog with bad manners is a nuisance. Games go a long way; the Golden enjoys retrieving Frisbees and other toys and can be taught to locate hidden items.

If the Golden has a drawback as a pet, it is his perpetual effervescence, which can get him into trouble with other dogs and with neighbors and can be an annoyance for owners not able to give him frequent attention. However, most owners of this breed find the ebullience to be a treasure, the sweetness a joy, and the tight family bond to be reminiscent of childhood dreams of the perfect companion dog.

The Golden diet should be a premium food, and owners must be careful not to overfeed. Golden retrievers are susceptible to hip dysplasia, a condition that can be triggered or exacerbated by too-rapid growth of puppies. Many veterinarians and breeders recommend adult food of less than 25 percent protein instead of puppy food after three months of age. Owners must also guard against overweight in these dogs that often make a science of begging treats and table scraps.

Golden retrievers are also susceptible to progressive retinal atrophy, an eye disorder that causes blindness; von Willebrand's Disease, a bleeding disorder; cataracts; heart problems; and skin conditions. The Golden Retriever Club of America is jealous of the breed's health, but the popularity of the breed has led to many poor quality puppies produced by commercial kennels and backyard breeders.

Norma Bennett Woolf

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Who's in charge here, anyway?

Why don't we get any respect?

***Q:** Help! Our one year old dog doesn't seem to have any respect for us. He's been to obedience class but he seldom obeys our commands. He's always grabbing our hands or head butting us when he wants something. He's become very demanding. He never seems to get enough attention even though we give him attention all the time. He even body slams us out of the way at the door so he can get outside first. He's a very loving dog but we need to get him under control. He's too big to be telling us what to do!*

A: You're absolutely right! It sounds like your dog has a dominance problem and is on his way toward becoming the leader of your family – his pack. He has also reached the age of adolescence where, similar to a teenaged child, he's testing your limits. Now is an ideal time to nip these problems in the bud.

A dog's social system has a pecking order. The leader of the pack is the "alpha." He (or she) gets the best of everything – the best food, the best place to sleep, the best toy, etc. The alpha also gets to be first in everything – he gets to eat first, to leave first and to get attention first. All the other dogs in the pack respect the alpha dog's wishes. An alpha dog doesn't ask for what he wants, he demands it. He lets you know in no uncertain terms that he wants his dinner, that he wants to go out, that he wants to play or be petted and that he wants these things right now.

Your family is your dog's pack. Most dogs fit easily into the lower levels of their human pack's pecking order and don't make trouble. They do what they're told and don't challenge authority. Other dogs don't fit in quite as well. Some are natural leaders, others are social climbers always looking for ways to get a little closer to the top of the family ladder. These dogs can become problems to an unsuspecting family that's not aware of their natural pack instincts. Some families unknowingly encourage their dogs to take over the pack. They treat their dogs as equals, not

as subordinates. They give them special privileges like being allowed to sleep on the bed or couch. They let them get away with disobeying commands. In a real dog pack, only the alpha dog would get this kind of treatment.

Dogs need – and want – leaders. They have an instinctive need to fit into a pack. They want the security of knowing their place and what's expected of them. Most of them don't want to be alpha – they want someone else to give orders and make decisions. But if his humans don't provide that leadership, the dog will take over the role himself. To reclaim your family's rightful place as leaders of the pack, your dog needs to learn how to be a subordinate, not an equal. He knew this once, as a baby puppy, because his mother taught him. She showed him very early in life that she was alpha and that he had to respect her. It's time to refresh his memory!

Before you can remove your dog from his alpha position, you must become alpha and earn his respect. Alpha is an attitude. It involves confidence, dignity, intelligence, an air of authority. A dog can sense this attitude almost immediately – it's how his mother acted toward him. Watch a good trainer or obedience instructor. They stand tall and use their voices and eyes to project the idea that they're capable of getting what they want. They're gentle but firm, loving but tough, all at the same time. Most dogs are immediately submissive towards this type of personality because they recognize and respect alpha when they see it.

Stand up straight with your shoulders back. Walk tall. Practice using a new tone of voice, one that's deep and firm. Don't ask your dog to do something – tell him. There's a difference and he knows it! As alpha, you're entitled to make the rules and give the orders. Your dog understands that instinctively.

Since your dog has been used to getting what he wants on demand, it's likely to take more than just a change in your attitude to make him mind better. He's been getting a free ride for a long time but you're going to teach him that from now on, he has to earn what he gets. This will be a shock to his system at first but you'll be surprised how quickly he'll catch on and that he'll actually become eager to please you.

Your dog already knows the command SIT. Now, every time your dog wants something – his dinner, a trip outside, a walk, some attention, anything – tell him (remember don't ask him, tell him) to sit first. When he does, praise him with a "Good Boy!" then tell him OKAY and give him whatever it is he wants as a reward. If he refuses to sit, walk away and ignore him. No sit, no reward. If you don't think he understands the command, work on his training some more. If he just doesn't want to obey, ignore him – don't give him what he wants or reward him in any fashion.

Make him sit before giving him his dinner, make him sit at the door before going outside, make him sit in front of you to be petted, make him sit before giving him his toy. If you normally leave food out for him all the time, stop. Go to a twice daily feeding and you decide what time of day he'll be fed. Make him sit for his dinner. If he won't obey the command – no dinner. Walk away and ignore him. Bring the food out later and tell him again to sit. If he understands the command, don't tell him more than once. He heard you the first time. Give commands from a standing position and use a deep, firm tone of voice. To keep him from body-slaming you at the doorway, put a leash on him. Make him sit and wait while you open the door and give him permission – OKAY! – to go out.

Alpha dogs are used to being fussed over. In a real dog pack, subordinate dogs are forever touching, licking and grooming the alpha dog. It's a show of respect and submission. Until your dog's attitude has improved, cut down on the amount of cuddling he gets. When he wants attention, make him sit first, give him a few kind words and pats, then stop. Go back to whatever you were doing and ignore him. If he pesters you, tell him NO! in a firm voice and ignore him some more. Pet him when you want to, not just because he wants you to. Also, don't get down on the floor or on your knees to pet your dog. That, too, is a show of submission. Give praise, petting and rewards from a position that's higher than the dog.

Don't allow wrestling or rough-housing with your dog. These games encourage dogs to dominate people physically. In a dog pack or in a litter, these games are more than just playing – they help to establish pack order based on physical strength. Your dog is already stronger and quicker than you are. Rough, physical games prove that to him. Where does your dog sleep? Not in your bedroom and especially not on your bed! Your bedroom is a special place – it's your den. An alpha dog thinks he has a right to sleep in your den because he considers himself your equal. Until your dog's alpha problems are fully under control, the bedroom should be off-limits. The same goes for sleeping on furniture. If you can't keep him off the couch without a fight, deny him access to the room.

If your alpha program is successful, your dog should start looking to you for directions and permission. He'll show an eagerness to please. Watch how your dog approaches and greets you. Does he come to you "standing tall," with his head and ears held high and erect? It may look impressive and proud but it means he's still alpha and you still have problems! A dog that accepts humans as superiors will approach you with his head slightly lowered and his ears back or off to the sides. He'll "shrink" his whole body a little in a show of submission. Watch how he greets all the members of the family. If he displays this submissive posture to some of them, but not others, those are the ones who need to work harder on their own alpha techniques.

Once your dog has begun to accept this new way of life and his new position in the family, you should take him through another obedience course with a qualified trainer. Obedience training is a lifelong process. Obedience

commands need to be practiced and incorporated into your daily life. In a dog pack, the alpha animal uses occasional reminders to reinforce his authority. Certain commands, like DOWN/STAY, are especially effective reminders of a dog's place in the family pack order and who's really in charge here. A well-trained dog that's secure in his place within the family pack is comfortable and confident. He knows what's expected of him. He knows his limits and who his leaders are. He's free to be your loving companion and not your boss!

Vicki DeGruy

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Dog Crates

The crate: a modern dog den

"Canis familiaris," the domestic dog, is descended from "Canis lupus," the wolf. Many thousands of years ago, wolves hung around caves, stealing morsels from man at the dawn of civilization. Submissive wolves may have left their canine pack to take up residence at the periphery of human camps. In return for watchdog duty, these beasts probably received food, shelter, and companionship in the human pack. Genetic variability and mutations in wolves produced domestic dogs of an amazing variety of sizes, shapes, and colors, dogs that were further refined into breeds created for specific purposes. Although the terrier puppy has never seen the great north woods and the Samoyed down the street never hunted a moose with a silent pack of wolves, they have wolf habits in common with all other breeds of dogs. All puppies, in the manner of wolves, need a den. Pianos and tables make great dens, but furniture doesn't have sides for confinement. Laundry rooms, spare bathrooms, and even playpens are too big for a puppy den; there's enough room in these enclosures for the pup to defecate or urinate in one area and still have room to play or sleep without stepping in the mess.

In the wolf den, the mother wolf cleans up the cubs feces until the youngsters are old enough to defecate away from the den. The cubs learn that the den is a place to keep clean as well as a place of safety and comfort.

A modern den can be a Fiberglas or wire crate that can be kept in any room in the house. It should be barely large enough for the pup to lie down comfortably. If your pup is one of the large breeds and you don't want to buy several crates as he grows, buy an adult-size crate and partition it so it fits his current size.

The crate is a multi-purpose piece of dog paraphernalia. It can be used for:

Housetraining

Simply take the pup outside after each nap or meal. Do not play with him until he has done his business. If he hasn't relieved himself in about 10 minutes, take him back inside and put him in the crate. Repeat the routine in 10-15 minutes. Remember, no play until the pup does his business and lots of praise when he gets the idea.

Protection from excited toddlers.

Children need to learn that the pup needs some quiet time. A blanket over a wire crate will help a child understand that it's time for Ranger to rest.

Playpen for puppies when you're not home.

If you need to take the kids to school or go to the grocery store, the pup that's crated will not chew the furniture or wet the carpet while you're gone. If he has already wet the carpet or chewed the furniture, you can put him in the crate and issue a stern warning that there'll be no more of that going on.

Sanctuary for the over-excited pup.

Don't let Rambo run amok through the house, terrorizing the cat, the kids, and the furniture, and don't feel guilty about restricting his freedom. Sending the pup to his crate is somewhat akin to sending a child to his room: he feels comfortable there and he knows you are angry, and you have a chance to recover from his outburst.

After the pup is housebroken, leave the crate open during the day. You'll find that the pup will nap in the crate by choice. You can continue to put the pup in the crate when you'll be away from the house as long as you don't leave puppies and young dogs confined too long and make sure they have plenty of exercise when you are home. People often cringe at the thought of putting their beloved Star in a box or cage. They think confinement is cruel. After all, people don't want to be enclosed in a space they can barely turn around in. But puppies aren't people. Their wolf ancestors found comfort, safety, and shelter in their dens, and modern dogs find solace and satisfaction in their own space as well.

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Give that dog a job to keep him happy

"My dog is always into something."

Q: *I'm almost at my wit's end. My Golden Retriever is 2 years old and he's so hyper! He's always into something, chews on the furniture, jumps up on everyone upsetting the guests, he digs under the fence and he's in my face all the time. I thought he'd calm down as he got older but he hasn't. Any ideas?*

A: Golden Retrievers are very energetic, enthusiastic, people-loving dogs. What you're describing—being “in your face” all the time, chewing, jumping up and excitability are normal activities for this kind of dog. This doesn't mean that they can't be modified with training but you need to understand that these are some of characteristics of the type of dog you chose. Golden Retrievers, like many sporting breeds, need training, exercise, attention and a job to do in order to be the kind of pet you want.

Goldens excel in obedience competitions. They are very trainable and willing at any age. Training, however, isn't a one-time thing, it needs to be practiced every day. For the Golden who jumps up, tell the dog to “*SIT-and-STAY*” when guests are about to come in the door. Until the dog is reliable on command, keep a leash on him and use it to enforce the command. Make sure you give lots of praise for obeying; Goldens thrive on praise. Jumping up is an expression of joy over seeing you or a new person, so make the experience of obeying your command (by using treats and praise) more rewarding than the act of jumping up.

For the dog that's in your face—well, that's where your people-loving Golden wants to be most of all. But I know there are times when you just can't have him on top of you. Sign up for obedience class and teach him what “down-and-stay” means. When you need to have your dog out of your hair temporarily, tell him to “down-and-stay or temporarily confine him to a dog crate.

Destructive behavior like chewing and digging, especially when seen in an active breed like a Golden, is often a sign of boredom and lack of exercise. A short term cure is to make sure your dog has plenty of appropriate chew toys.

There are bitter-tasting spray-on products you can get and apply to your furniture that will discourage chewing. Keep chewable valuables out of reach. If chewing while you're gone is a problem, get a dog crate. It keep will keep him safe and out of trouble when you can't supervise him.

For a long term cure for chewing and destructive behavior, your Golden needs a constructive way to use his energy. Daily walks are more effective than just being let out into the yard to amuse himself. Walks are fun and healthy for

both of you! Take advantage of your dog's natural retrieving and athletic ability—can he catch a Frisbee or a ball? Sure he can! Can you give him a job? Can he fetch things around the house for you like pieces of dirty laundry or put away his own toys? Sure he can—if you take the time to show him how. Obedience training and practice are effective, too. It takes a lot of energy to concentrate and obey commands! You can incorporate obedience commands into everything you do. Walks, games and work to do are all great energy-burners and give him the personal attention he craves.

Your Golden's greatest desire is to please you. You can show him what it takes to make you happy through training and praise. By the same token, you have to understand that your dog has needs, too. Every successful relationship, whether human or canine, involves an understanding of each other's needs and how best to meet them. If you give him what he needs—exercise, training, a job to do and adequate praise and attention, he'll be better able to give you what you need—a well-behaved, calm companion!

Vicki DeGruy

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Puppy adolescence: trials and tribulations

Tales of teenage terror

Q:*Can you tell me where I've gone wrong with my puppy? She used to be so good about coming when she was called and doing what she was told. It seems like just overnight she's turned into a brat and deliberately disobeys me. She's already been to an obedience class but she acts like she's forgotten everything she learned. She's nine months old.*

A: Welcome to adolescence! You have the canine equivalent of a rebellious teenager. Young puppies are very dependent on people and other dogs for instructions. They have a strong instinct to follow and to fit in. At about six months of age, they start to think for themselves and test their independence. This is also the time when they start to question your authority. Instead of automatically obeying you when you give a command, they now ask “What for?” and “What will you do if I don't?”

This can be a trying time for your relationship. In fact, most dogs taken to animal shelters because of “behavior problems” are between nine and 18 months old — prime canine adolescence. Most of these problems could be solved if the owner understood what was really going on and how to handle it.

This is also a very critical time for your relationship. Dogs do grow out of adolescence but what they learn during that time will stay with them the rest of their lives. Your puppy is testing you. If she learns that you won't enforce your commands and that she only has to obey when she wants to, you'll be setting a pattern that will be very hard to break.

It's important that you only give a command when you mean it and only when you're prepared to follow through. If you've called her to come and she doesn't, go and get her. Every time, no exceptions. Work a short obedience practice session into your schedule every day to brush up on her training. Include obedience commands like “Sit,” “Down,” and “Stay” in your daily routine around the house so they become second nature to you and your puppy.

Be consistent. If you enforce a command sometimes but not always, she'll learn that she only has to obey you sometimes. Show her what you expect from her every time.

Be persistent. Teenagers and adolescent dogs are stubborn. To get your point across, you need to be stubborner than they are!

Be patient. A well-trained dog doesn't just happen, it takes an investment of time and effort. To get the full return on this investment, a teenaged dog needs guidance and time to mature. Adolescence is a temporary condition but the solid foundation you build now will support your relationship for many years to come.

Vicki DeGruy

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"No bite!"

Angel days and devil days: teaching bite inhibition to puppies

Q: My Dalmatian puppy is almost nine weeks old. I got him when he was five weeks. He's playful and fun but I can't get him to stop biting me. That seems to be the only way he likes to play anymore — rough! I've been telling him No!, holding his mouth shut while saying "No bite!" and even shoving my hand back in his mouth like a trainer told me to do. Nothing seems to work. In fact, he thinks I'm playing a game with him and gets more excited the more I try to stop him. Sometimes he walks right up and attacks me! What can I do? Is he vicious?

A: No, he's not vicious, he's just being a normal, rambunctious, and sometimes obnoxious puppy. To get control of your pup's biting, it helps to understand why puppies bite in the first place.

Biting and mouthing are normal behaviors for puppies. Dogs don't have hands so they investigate objects and their environment with their mouths. To a curious puppy, everything about this big world is brand new and exciting. He learns as he goes along. You can almost hear his thought processes as he discovers something he's never seen before: "Hmmm...what's this? [chomping on it] Something to eat? No? [tossing it around] Can I play with it? Maybe. Can I make it squeak?"

Playing is also a normal learning behavior for puppies, especially play-fighting. Play-fighting with littermates and other animals develops reflexes, coordination and physical skill. It also helps them develop social skills and teaches them how to interact positively within their canine society, their "pack." And it's great fun for them. Sometimes their fighting and "attacks" on us appear frighteningly fierce but to them, it's just a game. Much like a group of kids playing make-believe games and pretending to be grown-ups, puppies have their own games and pretend to be "grown-ups," too!

A dog's ability to control the force of his biting is called "bite inhibition." It's a critically important skill that every puppy needs to learn, the earlier the better. At first, they don't know their own strength nor how sharp their little teeth really are. Puppies learn to control the force of their biting from the reactions of their mothers and littermates during play and especially play-fighting.

We can teach puppies about bite inhibition, too, but some of the methods most often recommended aren't effective. Mother dogs' methods, however, are very effective, often more so than ours. I believe this is because they're speaking to their pups in the language they understand best -- dog language! A baby puppy is much too busy learning how to be a dog to take time to understand our human words and ways. That takes time and maturity. Puppies respond to dog language in a very powerful, instinctive way. We can take advantage of that by copying a mother dog's actions and using them for ourselves.

The idea of using mother dog's natural training techniques isn't new. Respected trainers like Carol Lea Benjamin have been using them for years. To understand these methods, let's take a look at a typical mother dog disciplining her brood. We'll use my Heather (Chow) and her four rowdy puppies as an example.

When a playful puppy bites Heather hard enough to hurt, she squeals in shocked indignation. The puppy, surprised at her reaction, usually hesitates a moment, unsure of himself, then tries to bite again. Heather yelps even louder this time and whirls on the puppy, growling, showing her teeth and scowling at him fiercely. Then she turns her back on him and storms away, completely ignoring him and any further attempts to get her to play. A smart puppy picks up her clear message quickly: "if you can't play nice, I won't play with you at all!"

If the puppy persists or doesn't take the hint, Heather doesn't fool around. With a menacing growl and using her teeth, she grabs him by the scruff of his neck and gives him a shake. If he sasses back, she gives him another little shake, tougher this time. She doesn't let go of the pup till he's acknowledged her authority (in dog language) by relaxing his body, laying his ears back and keeping still for a moment. Heather disciplines especially obnoxious puppies by knocking them over with her paw and pinning them to the ground, growling angrily and pinching them with her teeth. The puppies shriek but they're not really hurt. She doesn't let them up again until they relax and lie still. After the correction, the puppy shakes his fur back into place and goes off in search of a playmate with a better sense of humor.

We don't have to growl at our puppies or shake them with our teeth, but we can modify Heather's technique for ourselves. The next time your puppy bites you, scream "OW!" in a high-pitched voice. Exaggerate a little. Then

refuse to play with him or pay attention to him for a few minutes. If he doesn't get the message, give him a little scruff shake and scold him in a low-toned, threatening voice. You can exaggerate a little on that, too! Sound meaner than you really are. For puppies that just won't quit or seem to get wilder with every correction, flip them over on their backs, scold them in that same low, scary voice (growling) and gently but firmly, hold them in that position until they stop struggling.

We sometimes give puppies the wrong message about biting by some of the games we play with them. Wrestling and tug of war can encourage a puppy to bite and make it hard for him to distinguish when it's okay to use his teeth and when it's not. To make it easier for your puppy to learn good manners, it's a good idea to avoid these games.

Puppies seem to learn a great deal about bite inhibition and authority between five and eight weeks of age through play with their mothers and littermates. This is an especially good reason not to buy very young puppies. Puppies that were acquired earlier need to be taught these important things by their owners. They might require a little more intense use of Heather's methods than puppies that stayed with their litters longer. Puppies that receive little or no training in bite inhibition, either from their mothers or their people, may grow up to develop behavior problems. I noticed that Heather picked out certain puppies for a little "extra" correction two or three times a day. She'd roll them over, pin them down for no apparent reason, growling at them if they didn't lie quietly. I noticed, too, that the puppies she chose were the most outgoing and dominant in the litter. She gave them regular reminders of her authority and the behavior she expected from them. I've found that using her technique myself works very well on puppies that've become too big for their britches!

Even with their mothers, puppies act a lot like kids -- they're always testing and pushing their limits. They have angel days and devil days. With patience, persistence and a few hints from your puppy's mother, you'll be able to tip the balance toward the angel's side!

More on kids and dogs is available in the article: [Kids And Dogs: Safety first](#) and Vicki DeGruy's award-winning column: [Kids and Dogs: A common sense approach](#).

Vicki DeGruy

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Puppy chewing

Puppy days can be frustrating or fun -- you choose which!

*Higgledy, piggedy, pop
The dog has eaten the mop.*

So goes a children's rhyme according to the venerable Mother Goose. And so goes many a mop according to frustrated mothers who clean up after playful pooches.

Every family that has taken a dog into its heart has suffered the destructiveness of needle-sharp teeth that demolish dolls and seat cushions, splinter furniture and door frames, and tear bedspreads and panty hose. That such a tiny bundle of fur could be responsible for such waste is beyond belief. Almost. Puppies chew to ease teething discomfort, to play, to explore the environment, to assuage hunger, to establish dominance, and to relieve boredom. Families can plan a response to active puppy teeth that will soften the impact on possessions and limbs while the pup is growing.

Some suggestions

Buy Blackjack several toys he can chew on. Hard rubber balls and Kongs, sterilized bones, nylon bones, and knotted ropes are available at pet supply stores. Knotted rags and old socks and shoes are acceptable as long as the

pup doesn't get confused between the discarded item and a pair of \$100 Nikes or Katy's new t-shirt. Soft squeak toys are fun for small puppies and for games of fetch, but are not sturdy enough for chewing exercise for older pups.

Whenever Taffy chews the wrong thing, remove her to a neutral area and give her something she's allowed to chew. No shouting, no smacks with a newspaper or hand -- just matter-of-fact corrections in a firm tone of voice.

"No, that's mine, here's something for you" is appropriate.

Confine Fritz to a [crate](#) when you cannot watch him. A confined pet cannot chew the furniture. Make sure he has a toy in the crate that he is allowed to chew.

Limit access to bedrooms, living rooms, etc. with baby gates and closed doors.

Teach "no bite" to eliminate attempts to chew parts of human bodies. Puppies should never be allowed to teethe on people parts. Never. Biting family members is an attempt to establish dominance. Even toy dogs try to become leader of the family pack if given the opportunity. When a fast-growing guardian breed is allowed or encouraged to mouth arms and legs, he will quickly become unruly.

If you cannot stop the pooch from biting on crawling babies and toddlers, separate kids and dog. Don't fall for the old "he really doesn't mean it" when Ranger nips or growls at the kids. It doesn't matter what he meant -- he's not allowed to put his teeth on babies. Ever.

Puppies that are allowed to rule the roost with teeth and growl will turn into dogs that do the same.

Join the in a game of retrieve or Frisbee. Be sure to teach "bring it" and "give it" so you don't end up chasing Duke through several counties to get the ball back. These commands come in handy when the pup steals Mary's slippers or snitches an ornament off the Christmas tree as well.

Each time you give the pup a toy or treat, say "take it" before he puts it in his mouth. Grabbing is not allowed. When Bandit has mastered "sit," he should do so before the toy or food is offered.

Put Daisy on a leash to teach the retrieve game so you can guide her back and get the ball. Grasp the ball firmly with one hand, open her mouth by placing the other hand over her muzzle and pushing in on her lips to protect your fingers from her teeth. Say "give" and open her mouth to remove the toy.

Don't be intimidated by puppy growling and don't overreact. As Daisy learns the appropriate responses, the growling will cease.

Never play tug-of-war with a pup no matter how cute this growling ball of fluff looks on the other end of a rope or stick. If you give up the game, Rambo wins and advances up the leadership ladder. If you pull the rope from his teeth, you may hurt his tender young mouth. Puppies that learn to play tug-of-war frequently look at any moving piece of clothing as fair game, even if there's a child inside.

Teach children that puppies must never be encouraged to chase or bite. Collies, Corgis, Shetland Sheepdogs and other herding breeds may try to round up children by nipping at their heels, but this, too, is unacceptable. Owners can understand that their herding breed pups may exhibit this behavior, but they should not allow it to continue.

Use discipline, not punishment for infractions of the rules. A stern "no" or "quit it" and banishment to a crate should handle most infractions. Puppies should never be hit.

Be persistent and consistent. If it was wrong yesterday, it's wrong today.

The millions of dogs destroyed at animal shelters are testimony to the myth that good relationships with dogs develop automatically. You can avoid many of the behavior problems that often result in abandonment if by doing some basic training to teach Rover to inhibit his bite reflex.

Norma Bennett Woolf

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Puppy social skills

Puppies need social skills to become friendly guardians

Introduction

Q: I recently bought a Rottweiler puppy and I'm having some problems. He's growling at my friends. I want him to be a watchdog as well as a companion to me but how do I teach him when he's supposed to be friendly and when he's not?

A: Socialization is the process of teaching a dog how to cope with and behave well in a human world. Socialization is important for any pet but it's especially critical for large, guardian breeds. They're natural watchdogs. They're suspicious of strangers. This is a natural, instinctive quality of this breed group. It doesn't have to be taught. Without socialization, though, they may become so suspicious that they won't let anyone touch them. They might even become aggressive. Most of the stories you hear about "vicious" dogs were inspired by dogs that weren't properly socialized.

Socialization should start as soon as the puppy is born. A responsible breeder lays a foundation for good behavior by handling the puppies every day. As they grow, the breeder allows them to go outside, to play and explore this big new world. The pups are introduced to a dog crate, house-breaking and the veterinarian. The breeder provides as many new experiences as possible to prepare them for the transition to their new homes. The breeder has merely started the socialization process. Now it's up to you to go on from there.

To a puppy, everything in the world is brand new. He's never seen any of this before! Try to remember his perspective as you teach him what's expected of him. Dogs learn from positive and negative experiences. They learn fastest from positive experiences. You'll get best results if you make it easy and rewarding for the puppy to do what you want. It's important to have patience and a good sense of humor!

Throughout his life, your dog will need grooming and medical exams. The first thing every puppy must learn is to allow himself to be handled and touched all over his body. Several times a day, pick up your puppy and put him on his back in your lap or on the floor. Be gentle but firm. He'll probably struggle to get away so rub his tummy and talk to him until he relaxes. Run your hands all over him — down his legs, fiddle with his toes, feel his ears, lift his lips to look at his teeth, scratch his back. He might nip your fingers in play and wriggle all around while he's getting his "massage". It's important that you make these sessions enjoyable but don't let it turn into a wrestling match or a tug o' war game. Have everyone in your household and your friends handle the puppy like this every day. Gradually increase the length of time the puppy must lie quietly until he'll lie there to be massaged as long as you want. Introduce a brush and the nail clipper during some of these sessions and make the brushing feel good. As your dog grows up and it's no longer practical to hold him in your lap, encourage him to lie on his side for his massages. Grooming and nail cutting are much easier on both of you when the dog lies quietly on his side. Your dog will look forward to grooming if you've shown him since puppyhood how pleasurable it can be.

Building tolerance

The guardian breeds can be reluctant to meet new people and must be taught to tolerate strangers. Many puppies enjoy the people they meet and want attention. Others don't. Some puppies learn to like it but a few never do. It really doesn't matter how your puppy feels about it, though. The most important thing is that he learn to tolerate being handled by strangers because you want him to. Without this training, visits to the vet, the groomer or boarding kennel will always be difficult or even impossible.

When a visitor wants to pet your puppy, pick him up and put him in the person's arms. Shy or frightened puppies often do better when picked up than if approached on the ground. Both of you should talk to him in a happy, cheerful voice. Have your visitor offer him some of his favorite treats. If the pup's frightened or upset, ignore it. Don't baby him or use a comforting tone like "There, there, puppy, don't be scared, everything's okay" because it backfires! The puppy usually responds by becoming more frightened and acts even worse. Make your puppy feel secure by being confident and enthusiastic. Be gentle but firm.

Many kennel clubs, veterinary clinics and animal shelters offer “puppy kindergarten” classes. Created especially to help with socialization, these inexpensive classes are great opportunities for you and your puppy. They’re fun, too! Your puppy especially needs socialization in the world outside your home. As soon as he can be taught to walk on leash and has had his puppy shots, take him everywhere with you. Let him investigate everything. If he’s afraid or confused, find a spot for the two of you to sit and watch things go by. Bring along some of his favorite treats and toys. Let him check things out at his own pace and encourage him with a happy, confident voice. For some puppies, it might only take a few minutes for them to get comfortable in a new environment. For others, you might need to make several of these “watch and relax” stops throughout the course of a walk.

When you take your dog to the vet, be positive but firm. In order to work efficiently, the vet needs your dog’s cooperation. No vet likes to work on a growling dog that’s not under his owner’s control and some will refuse to serve them altogether. Encourage your puppy to stand quietly on the table. Keep gentle control by holding his head. When your puppy is old enough, four-to-six months of age, start him in obedience class! Even the most well-behaved puppy needs to learn to obey commands. Classes are inexpensive, fun, excellent opportunities for socialization and available in almost every city. Your veterinarian or the AKC can refer you to local training clubs that offer group classes at convenient times and reasonable rates.

Socialization with other dogs

Some of the guardian breeds are not “pack oriented.” Most of them are fairly solitary and don’t enjoy the company of other dogs besides those in their own household. They can still learn to be ladies and gentleman when on lead around other dogs, though, and puppy kindergarten and obedience classes are good socialization and training opportunities.

Some dogs are “born socialized” but most of them require some form of socialization throughout their whole lives. Like obedience training, it’s an ongoing process that’s never quite finished. Once your dog’s grown up, continue taking him with you whenever possible. If left at home too long out of sight of the real world, your dog may quickly forget how he’s supposed to act. Give him plenty of socialization refresher courses. Let him meet new people and make new friends. There’ll be plenty of people wanting to admire your beautiful dog and you’ll make plenty of new friends, too!

Vicki DeGruy

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