

Bringing Home a New Puppy

Bringing home a new puppy is an exciting time, but those first few days, weeks and months are crucial for developing a pet that will be a well-adjusted and well-behaved member of the family. There are important health considerations, as well. I always tell my clients that bringing home a new puppy is like bringing home a new baby from the hospital- except the hospital won't release the baby until mom and dad have had an educational lecture from a nurse, watched a number of informative videos, and have spent a day or two actually taking care of the baby.

Shelters and adoption centers will spend anywhere from a few minutes to a half hour trying to educate new puppy owners about their newest family members. Good pet store representatives usually spend an hour or more and have the new pup parents sign some forms saying that they understand what they need to do. In all actuality, however, the new parents are playing with the new puppy or asking for a chance to play with him and are not really listening to all that important information.

We like to spend a long time with new puppy owners on their first visits to Sarasota Veterinary Center, asking questions to ensure that the new pet owners understand the importance of what we are telling them. The first thing to understand is that the puppy is a little stressed-first, from having left his or her siblings and then, after making new friends, having to leave them and come to your home, which is his second or third home in a matter of weeks. The puppy may not want to eat or drink due to this stress and could become hypoglycemic. We recommend hand feeding, if necessary, and using a

veterinary-approved glucose supplement to avoid this condition. The puppy's immune system also is not fully developed, and he or she may have received a vaccination recently that requires some recovery time. For this reason, we recommend keeping the puppies close to home for the first few weeks, just like you would do with a new baby. *This is not the time to take the pup to a dog park or beach or to visit all of the neighbors.*

The first few months of a puppy's life are when he or she is most impressionable. Bad habits, phobias and fears can develop that will last throughout their lives if you are not mindful of how to avoid them. It is a crucial time in their development, and socialization is a must. In the beginning, they can have human visitors and get used to being handled gently. When they are acclimatized to their new surroundings in a few weeks, they can begin to explore the world, but within reason. Do not overdo it and always ask yourself, "What would I do if this was a new baby?"

House-training and behavioral training, in general, begins immediately. If you let your new puppies get away with anything right off the bat, they will believe that whatever they do is normal, because that's what they remember. You have to begin teaching them the word "NO" immediately, but always praise them for being good, as well. Sitting quietly is a good thing, so praise them for that, too, and soon they will do it more often.

You are the world to this new puppy, and he or she will want to please you. Giving your puppy opportunities to succeed and praising him or her will lead to a well-behaved puppy. Similarly, letting your puppy know immediately what is unacceptable makes it easy for him or her to differentiate between what is good and bad. That

is positive, motivation-based training, and there are entire articles about this important topic.

Routine is important for puppies, along with lots of TLC. Remember that you have a new baby, and make decisions accordingly in those first few days, weeks and months. See your veterinarian within the first couple of days for an exam and to learn more about how to raise a happy, healthy and well-behaved puppy. Watching puppies grow and develop as they run and frolic in their new homes is one of the most enjoyable sights in the world.