involved in achieving that. All puppies require the consistent, responsible guidance of their owners in order to mature into balanced, well-adjusted companion dogs. What makes the training process such a necessary part of a healthy dog/owner relationship is that it confirms your position as leader at the same time that it provides your pup with the practical skills necessary to live happily with you. Training is a humane form of dominance. In following your directives, your pup implicitly recognizes and submits to your leadership. This goes a long way toward preventing problems before they have the chance to develop.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Discipline and Common Puppy Problems

No matter how well-behaved your puppy is, it is entirely normal for there to be occasions when discipline is necessary to correct bad behavior. Much like children, and aside from simply not knowing any better, pups go through bratty episodes when they vie with you for leadership, testing you to see just how far they can assert themselves. In such circumstances, you must respond correctly as a convincing pack leader, letting your puppy know without confusion the error of his ways. Too often new owners let bad behavior go unchecked, unintentionally allowing it to evolve into something more serious. This is usually because they are uncertain as to what constitutes legitimate discipline for a pup and are afraid of being abusive in any way. The unfortunate result is a spoiled, self-willed puppy.

It is also possible to err in the opposite direction. When owners administer discipline incorrectly, such as disciplining a puppy long after the fact (as commonly occurs in episodes of house-soiling or chewing, when the pup does not understand the reason for the correction), or by using ill-advised techniques such as a rolled-up newspaper or a harsh slap across the rear, puppies can end up manifesting shy, skittish behavior.

Especially with puppies, discipline must always walk the fine line between too much and too little. What makes discipline such a difficult topic to address is that it varies according to the circumstances. No book can tell you the precise correction to use in each particular situation; we can only
offer guidelines, which you must then apply to your own puppy. As we have emphasized, each pup is an individual, and what may be appropriate for one pup may be excessive for another. The real starting point for discussing discipline is for you to know your puppy, to be able to “read” his body language and get a feel for how he responds to correction. Then you can proceed intelligently, using only as much force as is necessary to make your point and without losing your own self-control.

This is why we recommend disciplinary techniques that mimic those your pup would receive in a natural setting, particularly from his mother or a senior pack member. These harmonize with his nature as a canine while effectively communicating your displeasure. For example, you will discover from your eye-contact sessions that your pup becomes highly sensitive to the message you send him with your eyes. Usually this will be kind and encouraging; however, there will be instances when your assertive glare will stop his behavior cold, particularly when it is accompanied with a deep, barklike “No!” We draw from the example of the alpha wolf, who regularly maintains pack order through a threatening growl and stare.

There are also times when a puppy merits stronger correction than simply a penetrating look or a strong verbal rebuke. Particularly if you have a puppy who is dominant and headstrong, you may find that he is unaffected by eye contact and voice tone. For your pup to get the point, you must express your authority with physical discipline that immediately follows his bad behavior. For these occasions, we prefer using the shakedown method, which resembles what the mother does to her pups to keep order in the litter. If the pup is quite young (8-12 weeks), grab the scruff on the back of his neck and shake it firmly with a “No!” If the pup is older, grab the scruff of the neck with both hands and lift him off his two front feet, making eye contact, then follow with several quick firm shakes as you say “No!” If your pup has advanced to the point in his obedience work where he understands the down, follow up your discipline immediately with a down-stay, since that position expresses submission and effectively reinforces your dominance.
Ordinarily, these disciplinary techniques are quite effective for puppies raised within a well-rounded program of conditioning and training. When applied correctly, they communicate your authority in a humane and convincing way that generally avoids the need for sterner techniques later on when the puppy is older. However, one word of caution: occasionally a five- or six-month-old puppy from one of the more dominant breeds (German shepherd, Rottweiler, Akita, or Doberman pinscher) may misbehave in a manner that merits stronger measures. For example, out of the blue your self-confident, five-month-old male German shepherd may growl at a guest you have invited into your house. In a situation like this, involving either the threat or actual manifestation of aggression, you should seriously consider using a firm cuff underneath the chin with your opened hand. We believe this because we have seen only too frequently the results of ineffective corrections involving aggression — the aggression escalates and then real problems occur. Better to nip it in the bud.

To make this correction effectively, your dog must be anchored in a sitting position with your left hand holding on to his collar. As you make eye contact with your dog, cuff the underside of his mouth with your opened right hand, rapping him sharply several times as you say “NO!” The discipline should be firm enough to elicit a short yelp, and it is best to follow it up immediately with an obedience command that reinforces your authority. After that, over the course of several weeks, stage “mock” situations that give your pup the chance to learn how he is supposed to act in such situations. By reinforcing correct behavior with generous praise, you establish a healthy pattern for him to follow that curtails aggressive displays.

Remember, use this correction with an older puppy only in the rarest of circumstances, and only when the puppy is emotionally strong enough to handle it.

Finally, there are a number of specific problems common to puppyhood that all new owners must learn to deal with. All puppies make “mistakes.” No amount of preventive thinking can possibly cover all the potential problems involved in raising your pup. Because he is still young and immature, your puppy will, at times, behave in ways that annoy and irritate you. When these inevitable occasions occur, you must be careful to respond with understanding and balance, avoiding either a passive, “he’ll eventually grow out of it” attitude, or the “put the baby to sleep with a sledgehammer” type of solution. Both of these extremes only make matters worse. Instead, by steering a more moderate course, blending prevention with correction, you can change unwanted behavior in a manner that is properly suited to your puppy’s young age.

Here it is important to distinguish puppy problems from the more serious behavior problems characteristic of older dogs. Unlike deeply ingrained, neurotic behavior that requires professional help to treat, most puppy problems are entirely normal. That is, they are the result of your puppy being a young canine and acting inappropriately within a domestic context. For example, it is perfectly natural for a dog to bark, chew, bite, play, dig, jump, and urinate — being a dog means doing these things. The difficulty comes about when these activities are not channeled to fit our domestic situation. Your pup has no innate idea how to behave in your home; he will simply do what comes naturally. Since it is you who introduced your puppy into your home, it is also your responsibility to train and teach him how to act and to help him learn from his experiences. This is much easier to do while he is a puppy, before problems have the chance to become something more serious. In what follows, we will consider a number of typical puppy problems and offer you some practical suggestions for resolving them that are both effective and humane.

As we have seen, puppies use their mouths to explore and investigate everything, especially each other. Should you watch a six-week-old litter of pups playing, you would observe them mouthing and nipping each other continually, chomping on ears, neck, muzzle, legs, or tail, learning how hard they can bite down before their playmate protests. Such behavior becomes a natural way for them to communicate and express themselves. With this background, it is easy to understand why your pup would direct this same sort of behavior toward you once he arrives home. Separated from his littermates, you are now the main focus of his attention, so it is only logical for him to express this by mouthing your fingers, arms, feet. At first this might seem like cute, harmless behavior, but his sharp milk teeth will quickly convince you otherwise. Furthermore, should you try ignoring it, his
mouthing will only get worse, becoming a normal way of behavior toward friends and visitors, as well. Before this becomes a bad habit, here is how to stop it.

1. When he starts to mouth you, quickly clasp your hand around his muzzle and shake it quickly as you say “No!” He should whine in displeasure. Then open your palm for him to lick. If he does so, praise him — licking is allowed. If he tries to mouth or nip at you again, repeat the correction.

2. Another technique that discourages mouthing is to let him experience an unpleasant result from it without any show of anger on your part. Begin by petting your pup around his neck and chest. As he begins to mouth your hand, gently put your index finger down his throat, just enough to elicit a gag reflex. (Anyone with long fingernails should not attempt this.) When your pup gags, remove your finger and open your hand for him to lick, praising him if he does so. If you do this consistently, your pup will quickly associate the unpleasant gagging with the mouthing of your hand and the behavior will stop.

3. The massage/dominance exercises we discussed in chapter thirteen are also helpful in teaching your pup to accept being handled and manipulated without responding orally. For corrections, use either a quick scruff shake or one of the two techniques described above.

4. Finally, avoid all tug-of-war games with your pup. They condition him to be mouth-oriented and unrestrained in his bite.

---

**Chewing**

Puppy chewing is the flip side of mouthing, in which your pup focuses his oral attention on all manner of household objects and personal items, gladly chewing whatever is within his reach. Puppies are amazingly resourceful; if something can be chewed, your pup will chew it, and there are several very good reasons for this. Puppies have a physical need to chew that is associated with the teething process. This begins around three months, with the permanent teeth pushing up underneath the puppy teeth, and peaks between six and ten months of age, when the permanent teeth are set solidly in the jaw. During this period, if your pup does not have something to chew on, he will actively try to find something. Chewing also occupies your pup’s attention, relieving boredom and normal puppy tensions. A puppy can keep himself occupied for hours at a time if he has something to gnaw on. Hence, rather than waiting for a full-scale problem to develop, control your pup’s natural inclination to chew by following these guidelines:

1. The first priority in controlling destructive chewing is prevention. Use common sense. Before you even bring your new pup home, make sure that shoes, socks, books, and other personal items are picked up off the floor, and store valuable objects up and away where they cannot be damaged. Check to make sure that electric cords are safely out of reach and tape over electric outlets you are not using.

2. Once you have your pup, always be aware of where he is and what he is doing. Take the same attitude you would if you were caring for a baby.

3. Whenever you leave him unattended for any reason, short or long absences alike, confine him safely in a crate or a “puppy-proofed” area. It is astonishing how many complaints about puppy chewing come from clients who insist on giving their pups free rein in the house while they are away. This is foolish, sentimental thinking. It is completely unrealistic to expect a young puppy not to chew if he is left alone in the house unconfined.

4. There should be nothing in the confined area that could be easily chewed on, except for one permissible object that is his. Make this object the focus of all his chewing. To get him accustomed to it, use it right from the start for play sessions, as well as a replacement object after he has been corrected for chewing on something inappropriate (see below). We prefer meat-scented nylon bones because they are long-lasting, safe, and nonabrasive to the teeth, as are all natural hard bones. While pups love rawhide bones and squeak toys, these are too easy to destroy and older pups occasionally ingest large pieces of them, which can be quite dangerous. Also avoid traditional favorites such as old shoes or knotted-up socks. Once pups learn that chewing on leather or cotton is acceptable, they are unable to distinguish old articles from new ones. To your pup, a shoe is a shoe.

5. Before leaving your pup alone for an extended period of time, roll the nylon bone between your palms
for several minutes so that your scent is firmly on it, then present it to your pup as you leave. Keep your departure low-key and nondemonstrative, since highly emotional farewells can lead to separation anxiety that your pup will try to relieve in any way he can — through destructive behavior if that is a possibility, or by nonstop barking and whining. Leaving a radio set to a classical music station can also be a calming influence.

6. Beyond mere prevention, you should also begin actively conditioning him to ignore forbidden objects and to focus his chewing solely on the nylon bone. Initially this means using a quick shakedown whenever you catch him chewing on something inappropriate, always presenting him with the nylon bone instead. Follow with encouraging praise if he accepts it.

7. As your pup grows, concoct situations in which he must learn to ignore different objects placed temptingly on the floor while you are in the same room. Make sure his nylon bone is one of the objects. After you put your pup in a down-stay, pretend to read the newspaper, keeping a close watch on him out of the corner of your eye. If he starts to edge over toward one of the forbidden items, wait until he actually starts to put his mouth on it, then correct him with a firm “No!” pointing out his bone instead. If he repeats the mistake, give him a brief shakedown and present him with his bone again. Several such sessions should bring him to the point where he will ignore the various articles and play only with the bone while you are in the room. At that stage you can begin practicing leaving the room for very short intervals, so that should he go back to chewing on a forbidden object, your quick return can catch him in the act, the only justifiable occasion for a correction. The object of this exercise is to gradually prepare your pup for the day when he will be able to be trusted alone in the house while you are away.

8. Make sure your puppy receives plenty of exercise each day. Proper exercise helps to curtail boredom and high energy levels, two significant factors in destructive behavior.

9. A final, practical point: if you ever have to forcibly remove an object from your pup’s mouth, place your hand across the top of his muzzle behind the teeth, thumb on one side and fingers on the other, while your other hand pulls down the bottom jaw. Praise the pup as he releases the object.

Most puppies have the annoying habit of greeting people by jumping up on them, which is actually an attempt to reach the individual’s face. For puppies, the facial area of both dogs and humans is the chief point of contact, the primary reference point in all social encounters. This stems from behavior learned around the time of weaning; recall how wolf pups jump up and lick at the muzzles of older pack members to solicit food, which the adults then regurgitate for them. After weaning, this face licking continues with a more generalized meaning, becoming the ordinary way subordinate wolves greet those of higher rank.

Regardless of how natural this behavior is, however, when it occurs in human society, it quickly becomes an annoying and potentially dangerous habit. While a small pup jumping up might seem harmless enough, it becomes something more serious once that pup is fully grown. Furthermore, most visitors to your house will not appreciate your pup’s paws on their clothing, and pups in the habit of jumping can easily frighten young children or knock over an unprepared elderly person. Our advice is to stop the behavior as soon as it begins, following these guidelines:

1. Resolve to discourage all occasions of jumping up. It is not fair to your pup to allow him to jump up on you, then to correct him for jumping up on others. This is bound to confuse him. Keep your expectations consistent.

2. Whenever your pup attempts to jump up on you, simply grasp both of his front paws securely, holding them up long enough for him to become uncomfortable with the position. Show no anger. Most pups like to be up for only a very short time; when he starts to protest, continue holding on to him for several more seconds, allowing him to become very uncomfortable. Then put him down gently, helping him into a sit. When he experiences this response consistently, he will avoid jumping up on you.

3. Another possibility is to put the palm of your hand flat out in front of your pup’s face when you sense he is about to jump. This blocks the jump and disposes him to respond to a sit command.
Whenever your pup jumps up, grasp both paws securely, holding them up long enough for him to become uncomfortable.

4. Since jumping up usually occurs during greetings, teach your pup an alternative manner of greeting both yourself and other people. We recommend crouching down to his level when he comes to greet you, then guiding him into a sit and petting him calmly for several seconds. For greeting guests, practice bringing him up to people on leash, leading him into a sit-stay several feet before he reaches the person. Have the individual then approach. If your pup tries to jump toward the person, give a quick leash correction sideways as you move to the right. Circle him around on heel and repeat. When he allows the individual to pet him without jumping off the ground, praise him cheerfully.

When puppies start eating food and playing with toys, around four weeks of age, it is quite common for them to show the first signs of possessive behavior. For example, as the litter eats from a common dish, a dominant pup may suddenly growl and snap at his neighbor, trying to scare him away from his share of the food. Often, the other pup will growl right back, learning that he must stand his ground if he is to get his own portion. The same dynamics occur during play sessions: a puppy might be playing with a particular toy when another littermate tries to take it away from him. The first pup growls threateningly, and if he happens to scare the challenger off, he learns an important lesson about dominance and pack life. Thus, what we call possessive behavior begins quite early as a normal part of puppy development.

As a pup grows older, however, the situation changes radically. Possessiveness can easily evolve into a serious problem leading to aggression if it is not checked right from the start. Never procrastinate with this. Having your full-grown dog growl menacingly at you because you approached him too closely while he was eating, or because you were trying to take something away from him, is a very unsettling experience. By training your pup to let you pick up his food, or take any object out of his mouth, you assert your alpha stature in a healthy way before the behavior has a chance to develop into something serious. Here are three simple steps to follow with your pup to condition him away from possessive behavior.

1. At his feeding time, instruct him to sit. Place the dish down in front of him and let him begin his meal. After several seconds, pick up the dish and command him to sit again. Treat any growling with a decisive shakedown. After any correction, make sure you do not give him back the food until you have made him sit.

2. Teach your pup to take part of a biscuit gently from your hand. First instruct him to sit. After praising him, offer him a small piece of dog biscuit, making sure he takes it gently. This simple exercise teaches a pup self-control around food.

3. Each day, practice giving him the nylon bone, then
taking it away from him, praising him as you do so. If he resists, utter a clipped "No, leave it," praising him if he releases it. If he still does not let go, give him a brief scrub-shake with a verbal reprimand, then repeat the process. Then let him play with it.

---

**Submissive Urination**

We have noted how puppies, having been originally cleansed by their mothers while they are on their backs, subsequently demonstrate submission to adults by moving into a similar position, involuntarily releasing a small amount of urine as they do so. In canine terms, this reflexive act acknowledges authority and has a placating effect on the higher ranking wolf or dog, defusing possible aggression. Because of its deep, instinctive roots, it is not surprising that this same behavior is often transferred into a puppy’s new pack. In a domestic situation, submissive urination reflects the same recognition, only now it is directed toward a human alpha, and it can also occur during moments of extreme excitement. Needless to say, if the behavior happens repeatedly, it becomes an unwelcome problem that must be handled with sensitivity and understanding if it is not to grow worse.

1. Submissive urination must be clearly distinguished from house-soiling. The puppy does not intend to urinate, only to show submission; therefore he must never be reprimanded for this behavior. Punishment will only encourage a more pronounced display of submission.
2. It is vital to teach a submissive puppy the obedience commands in a positive, confidence-building manner. Whenever possible, use noncoercive techniques that avoid triggering submission by dominating physical contact (see chapter eleven). The pup needs to experience praise and encouragement in a manner that draws him out of himself.
3. Avoid highly emotional greetings, as well as situations in which you tower over your pup. Whenever you arrive home, ignore your pup for five minutes. Then, when you do greet him, crouch down to his level, guiding him into a sit. If possible, do this on a noncarpeted surface such as grass, tile, or linoleum in case a mistake does occur.

4. Stage controlled introductions to other people by bringing your pup up to them on leash and making him sit in front of them. It is difficult for a pup to urinate while sitting and the position is ideal for controlling excitement.

---

**Carsickness**

When a dog is able to ride well in the car, it significantly increases the time he is able to spend with his owner, making for a more flexible and enjoyable relationship. By conditioning your puppy to ride in your car at an early age, you avoid the headache of carsickness later on. Neglecting to work with a pup on car etiquette makes practical matters like trips to the veterinarian a major project, not to mention ordinary outings for recreation and exercise. Start taking your pup for daily rides in the car soon after he comes home, following these general guidelines:

1. Your pup should learn to ride in the back of the car. For safety purposes, use a crate, safety harness, or car barrier, to protect you and him from sudden stops.
2. Begin the conditioning process by taking your pup on a very short trip (up and down the block, for example) every day for a week. Make sure it has been two to four hours since your pup last ate, and avoid a route with curves. Keep the trip upbeat and happy, and follow up the excursion with a play session, so that your pup associates the car with something he likes.
3. Do not scold the pup for whining, and ignore any vomiting. Clean it up when you get back home, and try again the next day, making the trip even shorter. If necessary, limit the trip to going up and down the driveway.
4. When your pup shows no signs of nausea, begin increasing the distance of the ride. Always be sure to praise your pup at the end of the trip.
5. Though it is fine to leave the rear windows open a crack for ventilation, do not allow your pup to put his head out the window. This common behavior is dangerous, since your pup could be hit by a flying pebble or...
other foreign objects. Also, be sure never to leave a pup or adult dog unattended in a car out in the sun, since they are more sensitive to heat prostration and death from heat than we are.

---

**Stool Eating**

Coprophagy, or stool eating, is one of the more distasteful habits a young puppy can engage in. Though it is utterly incomprehensible to most owners, there are usually very specific reasons for the behavior which, when addressed quickly, can be resolved before they become chronic. There is no need for panic if you observe your pup doing this. Treated sensibly, most pups will overcome the problem without a lot of difficulty.

To understand why stool eating occurs at all, it is helpful to recall a pup’s first experiences in the litter. Puppies are naturally inquisitive. When they are with their littermates before weaning, their mother consumes all of their waste material. This is natural maternal behavior, essential for keeping the litter healthy. After weaning, much like little children, pups naturally investigate their own feces, smelling, licking, and even consuming them. This is why breeders and owners must be diligent about picking up stools. Keeping floors and yards clean helps control the problem right from the start.

Once a puppy is in his new home, stool eating can indicate one of several things. Often it points to a dietary deficiency. The pup is not digesting his food properly and subsequently smells undigested protein in the stools. This can be caused by poor food or an internal problem requiring the attention of a veterinarian. It can also be related to boredom. If a puppy is alone in a fenced-in backyard, for example, he may entertain himself with old stools. This is especially the case in colder weather, when frozen stools seem to be an object of particular fascination.

To treat coprophagy effectively, follow several specific points:

1. Make sure that the food you are feeding your pup is a high-quality brand, one that is both palatable and nutritious. Be on the watch for signs of poor digestion — large

2. Be conscientious about picking up your pup’s stools. While some professionals recommend mixing digestive enzymes or meat tenderizer with your pup’s food (they supposedly give the stool an unappetizing scent), or spraying Listerine or Tabasco sauce on an old stool (same idea), it is just as easy to take away the source of the problem. If your pup has a yard to play in, pick up stools regularly, or, if possible, as soon as he eliminates when he first goes out.

3. When you are walking with your pup in the neighborhood, do so on leash and do not let him smell the droppings of other animals. Give him a quick leash pop to direct his attention elsewhere. With consistent corrections, you will find that he will learn to ignore them.