

Early Training - 9 to 12 Weeks (Toddler)

As your puppy approaches nine-weeks, you will find that he is awake more, physically more coordinated, and can see more clearly, so he is becoming more inquisitive, bold and courageous. Whereas your little puppy may have followed you closely, this slightly older puppy will start to run off and feel a need to check out all that he hears and sees. Just as you would "child proof" your home if you had a toddler, you should puppy proof your home against an inquisitive puppy. Keep your shoes up, put the trash behind a cabinet door, and keep your children's toys put away.

Your goal remains to have an adult dog that:

- Comes when he is called.
- Stays where he is put.
- Walks well on a leash.
- Only jumps up on people or furniture when invited.
- Plays with his toys, and leaves your stuff alone.

Can be confined away from the family when necessary.

At this stage, the biggest mistake that owners make is failing to realize that you are still dealing with a very young dog. He is not yet old enough to be responsible for letting you know that he needs to go out, or knowing what objects are his to play with and which are yours and you want him to ignore.

Continue to use a crate to confine him when you can not keep an eye on him. When you are with him, keep your puppy in the room you are in. He is not trustworthy from a housebreaking standpoint, and you need to get him outside every time he changes activities. Furthermore, even more so than during the seven-nine week stage, everything is going to start going in his mouth. This is all the more reason that he should be where you can keep an eye on him.

Fortunately, he is old enough to be introduced to some of the obedience commands that you ultimately hope to teach him. So, have fun getting started!

Walking On A Leash & Other Obedience Commands

This is a great age to let your puppy start to drag a light leash or longer line (10-15 feet) around the house or yard, or whenever you are in a situation where he might not allow you to catch him. First, this will allow him to grow accustomed to being on a leash, and it will also afford you the ability to catch him if he starts to run from you.

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It's not necessary to insist that your puppy go the direction that you want just yet. Most breeds of puppies are still small enough to pick up and carry when they are resistant to going the way that you

want, so at this age, feel free to do so. To begin to train your puppy to respond to simple commands, you are going to have to appeal to what makes your puppy happy. Most puppies are very motivated by bits of food, so this is a good age for you to carry a pocket full of treats to reward him for the behaviors that interest you. Soft treats that the puppy can swallow easily without having to take a lot of time to chew make training the easiest. If your puppy seems finicky, try small bits of cheese or meat to motivate him. If you are worried about your choice of treat, check with your veterinarian. Most people reward the puppy with much larger pieces of treat than are necessary. Find a treat you can break into very small pieces so that you don't fill him up too quickly.



I follow Cinda as she explores the yard on her leash.

Sit is an easy command to teach your puppy. Start with the treat in front of his nose and gradually tilt his head up and back toward his tail until he falls into a sitting position. As he does, tell him to sit, praise him and then give him the treat. If you lift the treat too high in the air, he will jump up for it. Your treat should be just high enough for him to reach up for it, but not so high that it makes him jump up.



Cinda sits for the treat. The treat is a bit too high, as her front feet come off the ground to try to get it from me.

When your puppy has mastered sit, try to get him into a down position. Begin with him in a sit, and hold your treat in front of his nose. Slowly lower the treat to the ground. As his head lowers, stretch

the treat out in front of him so that he walks his front legs into a down position. You may need to put your free hand on his back to keep him from standing up and walking toward the treat, but avoid the temptation to push him into a down position. Tell your puppy down as he goes down, praise him and then give him the treat for doing so.



Cinda learns to lie down for a treat.

To start to teach your puppy to come, call his name and say come as you run from him. Most puppies love this game of chase and will run after you. When your puppy catches up with you, give him a treat and praise him. You may want to play this game with your puppy on a long line so that if he is distracted, you can call his name and come, and then give a tug on the line to get his attention before you start to run from him.



I'm practicing the come command with Cinda on a long rope. I get her to come quickly by moving away from her as she comes to me.

If you have been feeding your puppy in his crate, you may see him start to run ahead of you toward his crate as you prepare his meal. Tell him to kennel as he jumps in as a way to get him familiar with that command.

This is an age when large breed puppies get big enough to start to jump up on things. When you are

sitting in a chair and your puppy jumps up on you, tell him off and gently put your foot on his back foot. When he realizes that his foot is "trapped," he will leap off you and you can praise him and pet him for having all four feet on the ground.



Cinda jumps up on me, and I gently put my foot on her back foot as I tell her off.



Feeling the pressure on her foot, she puts all four back on the ground.

Educational Games to Play

Tug Of War

Much has been written about the horrors of playing tug-o-war with your puppy that is simply not true. The only negative side effect of playing tug-o-war is that you could create a dog that is possessive of objects if you were to always let him win the game. Contrary, playing tug-o-war affords you a great opportunity to teach your dog what drop means. After you have tugged and played, stop tugging and tell your puppy to "drop." When he does not, blow on his face. Most puppies will spit out the object and jump back from you. If blowing on his face does not cause him to spit out the object, try squeezing your puppy's front foot with your free hand. As he realizes that his foot is trapped, he will open his mouth to look down and see what's happening.



Cinda and I are enjoying a game of tug-o-war, but she refuses to give up the toy when I say drop, so I reach for her front feet.



She opens her mouth immediately when I squeeze her foot, and I praise her for dropping on command.

Retrieving

It's such a fun to have a dog that will retrieve for you. It's also great exercise and a great way to wear out your energetic puppy. Begin with two identical toys. Throw one down a hallway or stand in a doorway and throw the toy into a room. Your hope is that your puppy will chase the object and then

want to come back down the hallway or out of the room. Take hold of your puppy as he comes past you. Resist the urge to reach for the object. If you are in a hurry to grab the toy, he will quickly learn to stay out of your reach. However, if you take hold of him, pet and praise him, and then get him interested in the toy that you are holding, he will willingly come to you as he will not fear that you will take his "prize." He will also learn to drop the object in anticipation that you will throw another object for him.



Cinda is very willing to run back to me with her toy.

She knows I won't be in a hurry to grab her when she gets to me. Instead, I pet her and praise her for coming. When I'm ready to throw it again, I take the identical object from my pocket and tease her with it so that she willingly gives up the one that she has.

Resist the temptation to throw balls for your puppy. A rolling ball can discourage a puppy that doesn't believe he can catch up with it. Also, resist the temptation to throw the toy more than three or four times. Playing the game until your puppy is exhausted is the quickest way to discourage him and cause him to become disinterested in the game.

As you take your game out into the yard, it may be more beneficial to let your puppy play this game while dragging his rope. As he runs after the object, follow him, pick up the end of the rope, and then call him, running from him, to get him interested in coming back to you.

If you have children, you should expect that when they run and play, your puppy will chase them and jump on them. He played "chase" with his littermates and will be thrilled that there is someone in your home that knows the game!

I happened to have a 12-week-old puppy when a friend was coming to visit with her five-year-old daughter. I showed the little girl how to get the puppy to sit and down and encouraged her to play tug-o-war. However, every time she tried to move through the house, the puppy was right behind her trying to play by jumping on her and biting at her feet. I gave the child a squirt bottle of water set to administer a jet stream of water if she pulled the trigger. I took the child and puppy into the yard and told her to run from the puppy, and then instructed her that if the puppy touched her at all when chasing her, that she had my permission to stop running, tell him off, and squirt him with the water. It was no time at all before the puppy would chase her and run with her, but would not get close enough to touch her. The rest of the visit was quite peaceful as she continued to practice her sit, down, and off commands.

Picking up Unwanted Objects

It is inevitable; your puppy is going to start picking up objects that you would prefer he leave alone. At this age, you have two choices. You can keep an eye on him and try to tell him no every time he disturbs something that is not his. However, this is usually quite frustrating for both the owner and the puppy, and furthermore, it is not uncommon for a puppy to discover that if he grabs the forbidden object and runs, members of his new pack will chase him. This can turn into a fun game for the puppy that is equally as annoying for the owner.

Your other choice is to be nonchalant about his picking up an unwanted object, and then calmly calling him to you. If you run from him, there is a good chance that he will chase after you, sometimes with the object, sometimes after dropping it. You can reward him for coming, and simply exchange the unwanted object for a toy of his own. This may not discourage your puppy from picking objects up, but what it will do is encourage him to come to you whenever he has anything in his mouth. Not drawing any attention to his picking up unwanted objects may well have the desired result. He may lose interest because you don't chase him, and it never becomes a play toy or something to chew up.

Introducing Your Puppy To Older Dogs

At this age and size, it is important to introduce your puppy to small dogs or cats that you own. This is a good time for your small pet to teach your puppy to respect him, while the puppy is still small enough for the older pet to do so. However, remain cautious and protective of your puppy around bigger, older dogs. Your puppy is still small enough that a larger dog could inadvertently hurt him, either in play or in an attempt to correct him for being a pest. A crushed skull or lost eye is not worth the risk of letting your small puppy interact with the older, larger dog in your family. If your larger, older dog seems curious and tolerant, then you might consider having your puppy on a leash when they are together. If your older dog growls or tries to warn your puppy that he's had enough, you want to be able to pull the puppy away in the event that your puppy ignores the warning.

Grooming Your Puppy

Start getting your puppy used to being groomed. Teaching your puppy to be still while you brush him is easier if you place him on a table. If you don't have a grooming table, stand him on your picnic table, or place a towel or other non skid material on top of your washer or dryer. Being elevated is often just intimidating enough for your puppy to be willing to stand still! Hold your puppy by the collar with one hand while you practice brushing him with your other hand. It is more important that the puppy hold still than that you effectively brush his whole body, so keep your sessions short. While he's on the table, lift up each foot and look at his toenails. Also get him used to having you look in his ears.

If you decide you need to give your puppy a bath, leave his leash and collar on him so that you can hold him still. Being still is more important than a first class bath. You may not accomplish much more than rinsing him and toweling him dry on your first attempt. That's okay; each time you try he'll become more familiar with the routine and be more apt to cooperate.

Your puppy is now three months old, and you have already begun to establish habits to help you

achieve much more than the six goals stated at the beginning of the article. You should be getting excited about all that your puppy is learning, but don't relax just yet. You've got a few more tough months ahead. Keep in mind, you're still dealing with a youngster, but you are certainly off to a great start!

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as well as to Janine and Marty Fiorito for lending us Cinda and Robin.*

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This series of articles is written by Connie Cleveland of founder of [Dog Trainers Workshop](#) located in South Carolina. Connie is a frequent contributor to Front and Finish and Golden Retriever News. Connie has generously given PSLRA permission to use her articles on our website.

Thank you Connie!