

Consistency in the Family

It is important for your entire family to work as a team to successfully train your new pet. Your puppy/kitten will need to learn:

- ✓ the meaning of your words
- ✓ the rules in your home
- ✓ your expectations of him or her

You will confuse your puppy/kitten if words, rules, and expectations are inconsistent from one family member to another. Children can be great little trainers. It is recommended they be **at least three years of age** to help with training. Children should be **supervised** during training sessions. **Pets and children should never be left alone unsupervised.**

Since puppies do like to chew and kittens like to sharpen their claws, discuss these natural behaviours of puppies/kittens with your children before their favourite toys are chewed, clothing is ruined, and various other problems occur. Let your children know that cruelty (actions such as shocking, hitting, shaking, pulling ears, pulling tails, grabbing, or rubbing the pet's nose in faeces) will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Many times children don't even realize that what they are doing is cruel to the animal. In addition to children, **babies and toddlers should never be left alone** with your pet or *even with your most trusted adult dog, unsupervised*.

Puppies and kittens have some basic needs—physically, mentally, and emotionally. They need to **eat on a regular schedule** (consult our vet) and require free access to clean, fresh water. Puppies need to **relieve themselves frequently** as well as **nap many times throughout the day**. Playtime, rest, and exercise are all important to young dogs or cats.

Puppies and kittens should have a safe, comfortable place to go when they are not being supervised. Ideally, puppies/kittens should be **socialised a few minutes each day**, and they should be **trained for 5 to 10 minutes at a time**. This time can be gradually increased as the pet gets older. Each training session should remain short to make it easy for the puppy/kitten to pay attention, but more sessions can be added throughout the day.

To care for your pet and to maintain consistency while training, **develop an action plan** for your family. Adults should be actively involved in supervising the following activities. Consider these questions when developing your plan:

- ✓ Who will feed the puppy/kitten and when?
- ✓ Who will keep the water bowl clean and filled with fresh water?
- ✓ Who will be in charge of the puppy's/kitten's bedding to make sure it is clean?
- ✓ What training techniques will you use for housetraining? Crate training? Litter training?
- ✓ Who will be in charge of training the puppy/kitten in these areas?

- ✓ Who will socialise the puppy/kitten to different people, places, and things? How often and when?
- ✓ Who will play with the puppy/kitten? How often and when?
- ✓ Who will take the puppy for a walk? How often and when?
- ✓ Who will brush the puppy/kitten? How often and when?
- ✓ Who will trim the puppy's/kitten's nails?
- ✓ Who will brush the puppy's/kitten's teeth? How often and when?
- ✓ Who will supervise the puppy when not in his/her crate? How long and when?

Develop a **chart** outlining everyone's **duties**. Have each family member check off their duties as they are accomplished daily and continue this for a three-month period.

Give your puppy or kitten room to make mistakes. Being overly demanding and short tempered can have long-term negative consequences on the behaviour and enjoyment of your pet over its lifetime.

Always be consistent. If your pet is not allowed to do something today by one person and then allowed to do the same thing tomorrow with someone else, the pet will become confused with the mixed signals. This can even happen with the same person from one day to the next! **Mixed signals can confuse your pet** and lengthen the time it takes for puppies and kittens to learn what is right, wrong, acceptable, and not acceptable. Puppies and kittens can express their confusion by being overly excited, fearful, shy, timid, or aggressive. In many cases, you may see a combination of behaviour problems occurring. This does not have to happen. Your pet is constantly learning, and every waking hour to them is a learning experience. With time, patience, and training consistency, your pet will become a successful member of your family.

End all training sessions on a positive note. If the puppy/kitten is having difficulty learning a new cue, stop before you both get bored or frustrated and ask the pet to do something he/she is very good at, such as asking him to sit. Mark and reward this behaviour and end the training session.

Families that work together as a team can be great trainers. Keep the same message every time (be consistent). If more than one family member is training, all family members should train the exact same way. Introduce variations into your training (different locations, different people, and distractions) gradually. It does not matter what you are trying to teach your pet, **just be consistent**. If you are training a puppy to do his business outside, then take the puppy out the same door every time. If you want your puppy to be quiet while in his/her crate, don't open the door to the crate when the puppy is barking to be let out. If you do not want your kitten scratching or biting at your hands, never use your hands to play with your kitten. Use an appropriate cat toy instead.

Reward the behaviours you want in a consistent manner. Some people get upset with an animal because they think the puppy/kitten knows what they want. They call their pet hard-headed, or stubborn, or they say their pet has selective hearing. This can happen when you think the pet knows what the word "sit" means. You taught *sit* in the kitchen to receive meals, and now you are

outside and the puppy/kitten just will not listen to you. It is not because the puppy/kitten did not hear you, nor does the pet have selective hearing. It is because your puppy/kitten really does not know what “sit” means *outside*.

Dogs and cats do not generalise very well—they learn in context. That means the puppy/kitten has to be taught *sit* in many different places for the first few times, and if possible with different family members. Once he/she understands *sit* in various places with different people, the puppy/kitten now understands that “sit” means put its rear end on the floor whenever it hears that word.

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If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us

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