

# Around the Obedience Ring

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## A New Puppy: Getting Sartetd

*Editor's note: This is the first in an excellent series of articles that has been divided into three important stages of puppy development: seven to nine weeks, nine weeks to three months, and three to five months. It is Connie's hope that these articles will not only help GRCA members, but will also be helpful for breeders to copy and give to their puppy buyers. Please feel free to copy and distribute this information wherever it might be helpful. Simply remember that when you do, the title and author must be clear, as well as the publication from which it was copied. Write [GRNews@aol.com](mailto:GRNews@aol.com) if you would like a PDF of this article sent to you electronically.*

### A New Puppy: Getting Started

There is probably no more exciting time in a dog owner's life than preparing for the arrival of a new puppy. After the careful consideration of the seemingly endless decisions...what breed, what sex, which breeder, which veterinarian, which food, a crate or not...you finally come to one of the most important of all: How are you going to train him?

Perhaps a bit of common sense will help you with some of these decisions. Begin by imagining how you want your adult dog to behave. The most enjoyable dog to own,



***The excitement and anticipation of getting a new puppy is a special time. Use it also to formulate a plan for raising a companion that will be a joy to live with for a lifetime.***

1. comes when he is called,
2. stays where he is put,
3. walks well on a leash,
4. only jumps up on people or furniture when invited,
5. plays with his toys and leaves your stuff alone, and
6. can be confined away from the family when necessary.

Think about it. If all the above statements described your dog, would you be happy? If you answered "yes" to all

or most of those statements, then get started with those goals in mind as soon as you bring your puppy home.

### Seven to Nine Weeks – An Infant

It is common to bring a puppy home between seven and nine weeks of age. This age is irresistible, and you need to remember what an infant that little puppy is.

### **Feeding**

There are so many dog foods, it will be easy to be overwhelmed by all your choices. You may want to ask your breeder what your puppy is used to eating. If that is not an option, buy a high-quality dry food that is appropriate in its nutritional make-up and kibble size to the breed of your puppy. If you invest in a good quality food, it should not be necessary to supplement your puppy, but this is something you should discuss with your veterinarian.

A seven-to-nine-week-old puppy will be happy to eat three times a day. It will be easier to housebreak him if he eats on a schedule, so offer him some food, and when he loses interest and wanders away, pick it up and save it for the next meal. You may want to feed him some of his meals in his crate (see "Crate Training," below).

It is important for you to learn how to know if your puppy is the correct weight. A puppy carries extra weight over his ribs, so if you cannot easily feel his ribs, your puppy is probably overweight. However, if you can see the outline of his ribs, and especially his hip bones, he is underweight. Keep in mind that as he grows, the amount of food you feed him will be changing every few weeks, so measure your food, but make it a habit to look at him and feel his ribs so that you are ready to make changes as he grows.

### **Housebreaking**

It's important for your puppy to explore his new surroundings, and it's fun to watch him do so. Let him look around, but remember that he will have to go to the bathroom very frequently so you must keep an eye on him (photo 1). A dog is a den animal, and he instinctively does not want to go to the bathroom where he lives. Unfortunately, most of us live in homes that are so big the dog does not equate our entire house with his den. Therefore, it is important to keep any dog, and especially a puppy, that is not housebroken in the room you are in. If you let him



***Photo 1: Puppies like to explore and require constant supervision. Let your new puppy look around when you first bring him home, but remember he will need to go to the bathroom frequently.***

leave the room, he will equate this with leaving the den and think it is acceptable to go to the bathroom. As you let him explore, keep him in the room you are in. If you are in the bedroom, shut him in the bedroom with you. If you go to the kitchen, take him with you. If it is not possible to shut a door, put up a gate or put a 10- to 15-foot rope on him to constrain him in the room with you.

Your puppy is much too young to let you know when he needs to go out; try to watch for signals that he needs to go outside. The signals may be subtle like wandering a few feet from where he was playing, sniffing and walking in circles. Don't make the mistake of watching the clock to determine when your puppy needs to go outside; it is his change in activity that causes him to need to go to the bathroom, not the time that has elapsed. Every time your puppy changes activities, he should be taken outside. If he wakes up, take him out; stops playing, out he goes; stops eating, out again. Take him out before the accident occurs.

If you have a particular place in the yard that you would like your puppy to go to the bathroom, begin by carrying him to that location and then setting him down. Don't try to walk him there. At this age, there's a good chance it's too far for him to travel before he stops to relieve himself. As he gets older he'll be able to make the trip himself.

If your puppy does have a house-breaking accident right in front of you, make an exclamation of disgust and take him outside ("No" or "Bad Dog" is

sufficient). It is not necessary to drag him to the mess or to rub his nose in it.

If your puppy goes to the bathroom in the house while you are not watching, there is absolutely nothing that you can do to correct him. Why? Dogs do not remember and feel responsible for actions in the past. If you drag a dog to an old mess and make a fuss, he does not say to himself, "I went to the bathroom there 20 minutes ago; that is why my owner is upset." Instead, he records the situation in his mind and makes sure the situation does

not occur again. In this case, the dog records, "If my owner is present, I am present and a mess is present, I will get scolded." The next time there is a mess on the floor and he hears you coming, he will run. Our tendency is to give the dog human reasoning and emotions. Owners are often heard saying, "But I know my dog knew he was bad, he ran from me and he looked guilty." He is not running from you because he understands that he is responsible for the mess, but because he realizes that if he stays in the situation that includes himself, you, and the mess, he will be scolded.

### **Crate Training**

Crates are the cribs and playpens of dog training. A crate helps to prevent your dog from chewing and soiling the house. Crates protect a dog from consuming things in the house that could be harmful to *him*. A crate also calms anxious dogs and teaches hyperactive dogs to sleep when left alone. In addition, the crate becomes a home away from home whenever you are traveling with your dog.

Crates are not meant to be used to confine a dog for his entire lifetime any more than a playpen is used for the life of a child. They are simply a safe place for your puppy or adolescent dog to stay until he is housebroken and old enough to trust loose in your house or leave in your yard.

If the crate is used correctly, your

## Around the Obedience Ring, *continued*

dog will regard it as a “room of his own.” It is a clean, comfortable, safe place to leave your dog when he cannot be supervised. Most dogs will try not to urinate or defecate in the crate, which is why it is so invaluable for housebreaking.

There are many types of crates, both plastic and metal, as well as varied opinions about how to introduce your dog to his crate, placement, bedding, food and toys, etc. The bottom line is, what makes you comfortable?



**Photo 2:** *Keep the crate door open for the first few meals and let him wander in and out. Note that this crate “fits” the puppy’s size.*

A small puppy does not need a large crate, so you don’t need to have a permanent place to put it. Just as most of us loathe laying down a new infant and listening to it scream, you probably won’t want to listen to your new puppy howl in his crate. There are few noises more pitiful than a mourning puppy that has been shut in his crate before he was ready for a nap. To introduce your dog to the crate, place the crate in a “people” area such as the kitchen or family room. What looks comfortable to you? If your puppy seems hot-natured, and the metal crate pan is cool, you may not want to put anything in the crate. If you think an old towel or blanket makes it look more appealing, then put one in there for bedding. Put your puppy’s toys and a few treats in the open crate and allow him to come and go as he wishes. At mealtimes, feed your puppy in the crate. Young puppies are sometimes slow to eat, so the first few meals you may keep the crate door open and let him wander in and out (photo 2). When your puppy’s appetite improves, feed him with the door closed and let him out when he’s fin-

ished. (Clean up any spills promptly – it’s very important for the crate to stay clean!) Your puppy doesn’t need to stay in his crate long, but he will become comfortable eating his meal there.

The real trick is to put your puppy in the crate when he is tired and ready for a nap. The first few nights always produce a bit of anxiety, so after taking your puppy out and playing with him until he seems ready for bed, slip him in his crate and turn out the lights. If you had planned to put the crate in a room other than your bedroom, he may cry, and you’ll have to decide if you can stand it. However, there is nothing wrong with slipping him in his crate next to your bed, turning out the light, and dangling your fingers through the side or door of the crate to comfort him as the two of you drift off to sleep.

If your puppy wakes you up at any time in the night, you must get up and take him out. It’s important that he learns that you will help him keep his crate clean. There is no need to play with him or feed him, simply let him go to the bathroom, and then return him to his crate.

When you put him back in the crate, he may fuss, and you are faced with a decision. If you take him to bed with you, he will quickly learn that waking you up gets him a reward, namely the rest of the night in your bed. You should probably try to ignore him, but again, if you are soft hearted and can’t stand the whining, having the crate next to your bed where you can comfort him may be the best decision for you.

Can you ever sleep with your puppy, or allow him to nap with you? Sure. However, balance that with having him sleep in his crate. Remember your overall goal is to teach him to be confined when necessary. As he gets older, you may not use the crate to confine him. You may just want to shut him in a bedroom or out in the yard while you entertain. This is the age to begin teaching him to be confined without complaining about it.

Years ago, my husband and I raised a Doberman puppy who was horrible about crying and whining in her crate. We slept with the crate near our bed, and she would whine continually. We tried the crate in another room with no luck. It didn’t seem to matter how tired she was when we put her in the crate, the whining began as soon as the door

was shut. Finally, in desperation, we put the crate in the car in the garage and went to bed. We’re not sure how long she whined the first night; fortunately we couldn’t hear her, nor could the neighbors. By the third night, she had given up her tantrums, and we were able to bring the crate back in the house. She was finally convinced that sometimes she would have to sleep quietly when confined.

Between seven and nine weeks, it is probably a good idea to let your puppy sleep in the crate all night, eat his meals in the crate, and stay in the crate whenever you have to leave him. This may seem like a lot of “crate time,” but try to remember that this is only for the short term, until your puppy gets a little older. Furthermore, a puppy at this age takes a lot of naps, and that is what he will learn to do whenever he is in the crate.



**Photo 3:** *An inquisitive puppy gets into trouble when left alone.*

When your puppy is comfortable with his crate, how long can he stay in his crate before he will need to go outside? Ideally, when he wakes from his nap and cries, you will be there to take him outside. However, the answer to this question may well be dictated by your lifestyle. No one wants to leave a puppy alone all day, however you may not have an option if you are working full time. If that is the case, you may do better to put your puppy in a large crate, with the front half holding bedding, and the back half covered in papers so that your puppy uses the back as a bathroom if he must relieve himself while you are gone. This is probably a safer option than leaving him loose in a small room in your house where he could chew a piece of furniture or electric cord (photo 3).



**Photo 4:** *These two littermates are learning early puppy socialization by play fighting.*

Raising my first puppy post-college while working full time, proved quite stressful for me. Fortunately, it was fall and the weather was cool, so during the first few weeks, because I felt guilty about leaving her all day, I simply put her crate in my car, and used my morning and lunch breaks to let her out in the parking lot and play with her for a few minutes. I felt better knowing that I could check on her a couple of times during the day.

Once a young puppy is sleeping through the night, he will more than likely stay clean during the same amount of time during the day. The self control of puppies varies, but almost all puppies are sleeping through the night by the age of three months. The older puppy's self-control is usually great enough that he can be left for eight or nine hours in the crate. But keep in mind that long confinements are likely to present other mental and physical difficulties. Crate or no crate, any dog consistently denied the companionship he needs is going to be a lonely pet and may still find ways – destructive ways – to express anxiety, boredom and stress.

### **Chewing**

A small puppy comes to your home having learned to play with his littermates by chewing on them (photo 4). Your puppy is going to chew on you. It is inevitable, and it does not mean that he is a bad or aggressive puppy. He is simply trying to play with you the same way he played with his littermates. Unfortunately, his needle sharp teeth hurt, so you will want to stop him from biting you as quickly as possible.



**Photo 5:** *When your puppy bites you, make an exclamation of pain and give him a shake.*

When your puppy bites you, make an exclamation of pain and give him a shake. You are mimicking what his littermates did to him when he bit them too hard. You are biting him back, but you don't need to use your mouth to do so. It doesn't matter where you grab him. Young puppies have a lot of loose skin and you can grab him anywhere as you let him know that he hurt you. He should back away and look startled at your response. Your correction should be quick, and then it's over and you can continue playing with him as you were before he bit you (photo 5).

If you have a young child that you fear your puppy will hurt, encourage your child to play with the puppy with a toy so that the puppy has something to focus on besides the child's clothes or hands.

It is also inevitable that your

young puppy will want to chew on your shoes, the table legs and anything else that is at his eye level. When he does, simply remove the object, or move your puppy and give him a toy of his own. At this age you are wasting your time by scolding him. He is simply too young to care or to understand what your displeasure is about.

### **Introducing Your Puppy to Other Dogs**

If you already have a dog, don't be in a hurry to introduce your puppy to your older dog. This can happen gradually over the next few weeks or even months. A seven- to-nine-week-old puppy of any breed is so small that it can be hurt by an older dog, even in play. However, if your older dog decides to discipline the puppy, there is a good chance the puppy can be seriously hurt. Let your older dog get to know the puppy by visiting with one another through a baby gate or crate. You have a whole lifetime to let them grow accustomed to one another. It doesn't need to happen in the first few days (photo 6).

### **Vaccinations and Vet Visits**

Your puppy needs a series of "puppy shots" that start when he is six weeks old and end when he is four months old and able to have his first Rabies vaccine. Even if your puppy has already had his first vaccine, call your veterinarian as soon as you get him

home and find out when he wants you to bring him in for his first visit. Be sure to follow his guidelines for his needed boosters.

Remember, the above guidelines are for the first two weeks that you have your new puppy. The next article will give you information about the next stage of his development, nine to 12 weeks.



**Photo 6:** *Introduce the new puppy to your older dog by using a babygate. A seven- to-nine-week-old puppy of any breed is so small that it can be hurt by an older dog, even in play.*

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## RAISING A NEW PUPPY

### Part II: Nine Weeks to Three Months – “The Toddler”

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#### “The 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:

1. comes when he is called,
2. stays where he is put,
3. walks well on a leash,
4. only jumps up on people or furniture when invited,
5. plays with his toys, and leaves your stuff alone, and
6. 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 cannot 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 than during the seven-to-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 and Other Obedience Commands*

This is a great age to let your puppy start to drag a light leash or longer line



**Photo 1:** I follow Cinda as she explores the yard on her leash.



**Photo 2:** *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.*

(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.

Try picking up the leash or line that the puppy is dragging and follow him. This will accustom him to having you hold the leash and also to the idea that the two of you move together (photo 1). 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.

"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 (photo 2).

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 (photo 3).

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 (photo 4).

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 (photos 5 and 6).

#### *Educational Games to Play*

**Tug-o-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



**Photo 3:** *Cinda learns to lie down for a treat.*



**Photo 4:** *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.*

to look down and see what's happening (photos 7 and 8).

Retrieving: It's such 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 (photos 9 and 10).

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 litter-mates 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



**Photo 5:** *Cinda jumps up on me, and I gently put my foot on her back foot as I tell her "off."*



**Photo 6:** *Feeling the pressure on her foot, she puts all four feet back on the ground!*



**Photo 7:** *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 foot.*



**Photo 8:** *She opens her mouth immediately when I squeeze her foot, and I praise her for dropping on command!*



**Photo 9:** *Cinda is very willing to run back to me with her toy...*

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 (photo 11). 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, 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 towel-drying him dry on your first attempt. That's OK; 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!

My thanks to Marty and Janine Fiorito for volunteering "Cinda" for the photo shoot.



**Photo 10:** *She knows I won't be in a hurry to grab it from 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.*

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### Part III: Three to Five Months – “Kindergarten”

*Editor's note: This is the last in an excellent series of articles that has been divided into three important stages of puppy development: seven to nine weeks, nine weeks to three months, and three to five months. It is Connie's hope that these articles will not only help GRCA members, but will also be helpful for breeders to copy and give to their puppy buyers. Please feel free to copy and distribute this information wherever it might be helpful. Simply remember that when you do, the title and author must be clear, as well as the publication from which it was copied. Write [GRNews@aol.com](mailto:GRNews@aol.com) if you would like a PDF of this article sent to you electronically.*

Golden Retriever puppies from three to five months old are physically big enough to knock you down and chew up items you care about, but not quite old enough to understand that they shouldn't do those things.

Recently a young man came to see me with his 5-month-old Weimeraner puppy. “He doesn't listen to me at all. He gets so excited when he sees me that I can't even get a leash on him. He ignores me when I say ‘no,’ and dashes around like he's possessed. Do you think he's stupid?” he asked. “No,” I replied, “I think he sounds perfectly normal.”

This is the age when you must learn to balance the behaviors you can train with those that you should manage. You

will continue to train your puppy to walk on a leash, come when called, and stay where he's put, but must realize that he is still a puppy, and will make many errors. You will simply manage his over-excitement when you have just come home after a long absence, when your guests arrive, or when he's feeling energetic and can't quite contain himself. He's not old enough to have the self-control needed in those situations.

#### **Learning Good Behavior on a Leash**

Your goal is to have your puppy learn that the leash is not on him to restrain him, but simply to keep him safe. You want a puppy that stands on a loose leash, and that looks at you when you speak or when you give a tug on the leash. You have reached an age where your puppy is ready to learn these things.

Stand with your puppy, holding the leash at a length that allows him to stand quietly beside you without getting tangled in it (photo 1). Imagine a circle

around you with a radius equal to the length of the leash. When your puppy tries to pull out of the circle, give a quick tug on the leash toward you. He may turn to look at you as if he is surprised by what happened. If he does not, reach down and poke him (photo 2). Another



**Photo 1: Cat holds the leash at a length that gives Robin plenty of slack to stand quietly, but not so much that it gets tangled under his feet.**



**Photo 2:** Robin is pulling on the leash and Cat can't get his attention with a tug, so she reaches down and gets his attention by poking him.



**Photo 3:** Cat gives Cinda a quick tug as she runs to the end of the leash.

puppy would nip or paw at him to get his attention, and you are simply mimicking that behavior. When you have his attention, praise him and give him a treat.

If your puppy can stand on a loose leash, it's time to try to get him to walk with you on a loose leash. Tell your puppy, "Let's go," and start walking. When he runs to the end of the leash, stop and give the leash a quick tug (photo 3). You may find it most effective to back up a few steps. If your puppy is startled enough to look at you, praise him for giving you his attention and offer him a treat.

It's perfectly OK to stop and let your puppy sniff and investigate his surroundings. You can walk along slowly, giving him a chance to explore, much like you would take a walk with a young child. When you are ready to continue walking, repeat the command, "Let's go," and, if necessary, give a gentle tug to get your puppy moving.

It will be tempting to walk your puppy on a retractable leash. Your soft side will want to give your puppy more room to run and explore than a short, 4- to 6-foot leash will allow. The problem with this is that when your puppy is on a retractable leash, he always has the sensation that the leash is tight. You may be inadvertently teaching him that it is OK to pull you.

If you want to give your puppy more freedom, use a long line. This will

enable your puppy to wander farther from you and explore, and it will also give you the opportunity you need to teach him to come!

### **Learning to Come: The Beginning**

Begin by taking your puppy out in the yard on a leash or rope that is 15- to 20-feet long. When he wanders away from you, say his name and the command, "Come." If he does not come, tug the leash toward you, and then back up until he catches up with you (photo 4). *Do not* reach for him, as this will cause him to jump away from you after coming near. You may need to kneel down to encourage him to come all the way to you.

Inevitably, your puppy will see something that interests him and run toward it to investigate. *Before* he gets to the end of the rope, say his name and "Come." If he is attentive, and turns toward you, he will avoid the collar correction. However, if he is inattentive, and does not come, he will receive a jerk on his collar when he gets to the end of the rope. When this occurs, encourage him to come back to you.

Soon, you will be able to walk your puppy toward another person, dog, or toy. He will begin to stay close to you as he realizes that running off may have the negative consequences of a tug. This is the first step toward gaining off-leash control. A puppy that starts to choose to

stay close to you, even though he does not feel pressure from a leash, can eventually learn to stay close to you when not on leash. You are still several months from achieving that goal, but you are headed in the right direction (photo 5).

### **Learning to Stay**

Puppy owners are always anxious to teach their puppies to stay. However, teaching your puppy to remain in a sit or down position for any length of time is probably going to be quite frustrating. What is easier to achieve is to teach your puppy to stay on his bed. This allows the puppy the freedom of standing, sitting or lying down, and the only rule you have to enforce is that he cannot leave the area of the bed.

### **Teaching "Place"**

First, a bed or platform needs to be selected. The more obvious the edges are to the puppy, the easier it is to learn. Starting with a place that is a few inches off the floor or that has a raised border is easiest because once the dog steps on the place, it is very clear to him when he steps off.

Tell your dog "Place" and guide him on to it with your leash. You don't care whether he stands, sits or lies down, so it is not necessary to give him any other command. Step away from your puppy, holding the leash as shown in photo 0



**Photo 4:** Cat practices “Come” with Cinda on a 20-foot rope.



**Photo 5:** Cinda sees another puppy across the yard and decides to stay close to Cat instead of going for a visit.

graph (photo 6). When he steps off the place, step toward him, tell him he’s wrong, “No,” and repeat “Place” as you use your leash to return him to the bed (photo 7).

Remember, your puppy is a problem solver. Just because you keep him from coming off the bed in one direction does not mean he won’t try to get off the bed in another direction. Start circling the place, stopping your puppy every time he attempts to get off. Soon he will understand where his boundaries are.

You will also need a command that lets your puppy know when it is all right to get off his bed. A simple release command, like “OK,” is perfect.

When your puppy will happily stay on his bed while you are near him, it’s time to teach him to stay there even if you walk away. Begin by tying your puppy so that if he tries to follow you, the rope will stop him. Don’t tie him to the bed, as you don’t want him to drag the bed across the floor (photo 8).

When your puppy gets off the bed, tell him he’s made a mistake by saying “No,” then go to him and put him back on the bed while you repeat the command, “Place.” There is no need to scream at him; a quiet “no” will do. It probably won’t be long before he realizes that the bed is more comfortable than being stopped by the rope.

Do not be unreasonable in the length of time that you expect your

puppy to stay on the bed. Start with very short sessions, and give your puppy a toy or bone to play with while he rests on his bed. It won’t be long before you can have him remain on his bed while you eat a meal.

#### **Hints for Sanity When Things are Difficult**

Although a 3- to 5-month-old puppy is capable of learning a lot of commands, he is still a puppy and his antics will drive you crazy if you let them.

Very busy, active puppies will often start running through the house, jumping on and off furniture and creating chaos. If you frequently find yourself in a position of trying to catch your puppy, let him drag a leash in the house so that catching him becomes possible. If you are afraid that he will chew on the leash, use a piece of rope. It’s cheap, and if he chews it off, you can replace it with another.

Puppies go through stages, just like young children. It would not be uncommon for your puppy to go through a fearful period at this age. If your puppy seems to have become shy or withdrawn, maintain a very matter-of-fact attitude. Approach the object that he seems timid about with confidence. Avoid soothing him, as he will think you are praising him for his shy behavior. Instead, have an attitude that implies he

should get over it and be brave!

It is common for a puppy at this stage to become housebroken. However, don’t yet let your guard down. Even though he may not soil the house, he is still very capable of being destructive in other ways. Continue to use your crate or a pen to confine him when you are away.

*Most recently my husband and I raised a Labrador Retriever puppy. Just short of his 6-month-old birthday, we started letting him sleep loose at night. He had grown accustomed to his bed and was happy to be in the bedroom with us at night. However, he was over a year old before we trusted him to be loose in the house while we were away. There was no reason to have to come home to an unwanted mess because he had chewed a piece of furniture or shredded a magazine.*

As your puppy grows, he will begin to put his front feet on your tables and counter tops. Tell him “Off,” and if he fails to comply, simply touch his back foot with your foot. Feeling as if his foot is trapped will cause him to jump down.

At this age, it is very tempting to begin to put your puppy out in your yard by himself for exercise. When he’s tired of being out alone, he may start to bark at the door to be let in. Be careful about responding to him. There may be a time when you want him to stay in the yard while you entertain or clean, and having



**Photo 6:** Cat is holding the leash properly, but needs to give Cinda a little more slack to allow her to make the mistake of stepping off the bed. The bed is made of a PVC frame and an easily cleaned, lightweight sling.



**Photo 7:** Cinda steps off the bed and Cat uses her leash to stop her.



**Photo 8:** The rope is tied to the fence and is not so short that Cinda can't make the mistake of getting off the bed, but it will stop her before she gets too far. Then Cat can come back to her and put her back on the bed.

a puppy who barks incessantly at the door, determined that you will soon come, is very annoying. Instead, let him inside when you are ready, sometimes before he barks and sometimes after he's barked a few times and then quit.

Throwing something for your puppy to retrieve is a great way to exercise him, as well as tire him out when he's feeling exuberant. If you are having trouble getting him to bring the object back to you, let him drag his long line while you play. If he does not come, or tries to play keep-away, simply pick up the long line, tell him to come, and give a tug on the rope. Praise him for coming, even if he arrives without the object.

If your puppy is willing to come to you with the object, resist the temptation to grab for the object as soon as he arrives. Let him hold it for a few seconds and praise him for coming. Then, gently take it from him and throw it again. This way he will realize that the game will not end if he gets close to you and you don't intend to steal his prize!

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