

Puppies 101: A Guide to Your New Companion

Bringing home a new puppy is an exciting milestone, but it also marks the beginning of a significant responsibility. To set your puppy up for a lifetime of success, focus on these core areas during their first few months:

1. Preparing for Success

A successful start requires preparation, patience and consistency.

- **Puppy-Proof Your Home:** View your home from a puppy's eye level. Secure electrical cords, lock away toxins/cleaning supplies, and use baby gates to restrict access to unsafe areas.
- **Essential Supplies:** Ensure you have a collar with ID tags, a leash, food/water bowls, a crate or playpen, and age-appropriate chew toys.
- **Set Up a Safe Space:** Create a dedicated "puppy zone" using a crate or playpen where your puppy can relax when not directly supervised.

2. The Critical Window: Socialization

Socialization is a proactive process of creating positive, controlled experiences to ensure a well-adjusted adult dog.

- **The 16-Week Window:** This is a special developmental period where interactions have a lasting impact. Focus on exposing your puppy to diverse people, environments, and sounds before this window closes.
- **Quality Over Quantity:** Socialization isn't just about playtime; it's about building confidence through positive exposure.
- **Health Balance:** The [American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior \(AVSAB\)](#) recommends starting socialization after the first set of vaccinations (typically at 7-8 weeks) to balance behavioral health with physical safety.

3. Potty Training Essentials

Consistency is the key to quick results in potty training.

- **Establish a Routine:** Take your puppy out frequently—especially after naps, meals, play sessions, or drinking water.
- **Reward Success:** Take treats with you and reward your puppy within three seconds of them finishing their business outside.
- **Manage Accidents:** Never punish a puppy for an accident; this can lead to fear-based behaviors. Clean indoor messes with an enzymatic cleaner like [Nature's Miracle](#) to fully remove odors.

4. Managing Nipping, Biting, and Chewing

Puppies explore the world with their mouths, but you can guide them toward appropriate outlets.

- **Appropriate Outlets:** Provide a variety of chew toys (like [Nylabone](#) or [Benebone](#)) and rotate them every few days to keep them "new" and interesting.
- **Teething Relief:** For sore gums, try freezing a wet washcloth or offering cold carrots as a safe, soothing chew.
- **Puppy Nipping:** If play gets too rough, stop interacting for a few seconds to teach that biting ends the fun. Make sure to use a toy to play—not your hands—otherwise your puppy may learn that biting human hands is a fun game

5. Reward-Based Training

Focus on what you *want* your puppy to do rather than what you don't.

- **Positive Reinforcement:** Use food, toys, or praise to reward your puppy immediately when they do something you like.
- **Keep it Short:** Puppy attention spans are short; keep training sessions to 5–10 minutes.
- **Force-Free Philosophy:** Avoid methods that rely on fear, pain, or intimidation to build a stronger, trust-based bond.

Additional Resources:

- **Video:** [Puppy Training & Socialization 101](#)
- **Articles & Videos:** [Fear Free Happy Homes - Puppies 101](#)
- **Find a Trainer:** [Force Free Florida](#)

Read through our other Puppy Resources for information!