

Do's and don'ts when owning a dog

■ BY HARRY KALAJIAN

Many people don't realize that some of the play they engage in with their dog or even certain improper corrections can have a negative effect. The effect is time-related, meaning that it may not show up till months later.

We all love our pets, and we never see ourselves doing anything wrong, but we do. Here are some guidelines to go by.

- First and foremost, never hit your pet or stick its nose in the mess it made.
- Always have a leash on your pet when going outside.
- Always try to change your going-out times, so your pet doesn't become dependent on a specific schedule. For example, if you always take your pet out for a walk at 10 a.m., it will get used to that. What happens if one day you can't go out at 10 a.m.? Your pet will get frustrated and will act out. But if Fido doesn't know just when he's going to go out, he won't bother you. Also, at times make sure that you go out without your dog, so it can learn to stay home by itself. And don't come home during your lunch hour just to let the dog out or spend time with it. Although your intentions are good, what happens one day when you can't come home?
- Don't buy chew toys that your pet can't distinguish from household items. For instance, if you own a carpet that has frills on the edges, don't buy a knotted rope that has frills on both ends, because your puppy doesn't know the difference. Stuffed toys such as teddy bears and pillows and many other items in your home may have the same type of stuffing it, and your puppy may end up destroying them.
- Don't waste your money on tennis balls. They will shred and break open. Buy a real dog ball; it will last longer.
- Don't expect your dog to know the rules of the house right away. You must teach and guide it to what is accepted and what isn't. Your dog will learn in due time.
- Don't feel bad if you have to confine (cage or crate) Fido. It's for his safety and to keep your home intact. Confining a puppy will also help with speeding up the potty training. You can always use the bathroom to cage him if you have no crate, but never close the door. (If you do close the door, he will bark, cry, whine and

become destructive.) Use a baby gate to block the exit. If you really don't want to cage your pet, there are different ways to confine it. Call us or get a professional trainer to help you.

- Don't allow your pet to get on the couch or bed without getting your permission. Fido should not have his own choice; he should only get on your furniture on your command and when you want him to.
- Don't ever play tug-of-war with your pet. This will cause undesirable behavior later on. Tug-of-war games with your pet teach it aggression, and most of the time it's the men of the house who do that. For some reason, some men get a kick out of their dog growling. Please don't do that. That kind of game increases the dog's confidence as well as bringing out its aggression, and one day you will be calling the trainer for aggression issues. If you're planning to train your dog for personal protection, it's okay – as long as it is with the guidance of a professional trainer who has experience in that type of training.
- Socialize your pet as much as you can, once it has had all its vaccinations.
- Avoid dog parks. Any professional dog trainer will tell you never to bring your dog to public dog parks, and I agree (unless it's a private, controlled dog park). Here are some reasons why: 1.) Your pet has a greater chance of catching something. 2.) When entering a dog park, all the dogs rush to see your dog. If your dog happens to be dominant, the alpha in the pack of dogs that are already there will make sure your dog does not pull rank. A fight may ensue. 3.) Although dog parks are intended to provide for dogs to play, very often it's more the owners who are too busy socializing themselves to pay attention to their dogs. 4.) Not all dog owners pick up their dog's poop. Some don't see it because they are too busy socializing. Your pet can pick up bacteria or a virus if any one of those dogs has not been vaccinated.
- The list goes on. I have seen many owners with horrible stories and experiences at dog parks. You're better off taking your dog for a good walk and always changing areas, so you enjoy it as well. The same amount of time you would put in at the dog park should be used in walking it elsewhere
- The bonding stage for pets and

owners is when the puppy is between the ages of two and three months. You can start obedience training for a dog as young as three months. Some trainers will tell you that the age of six months is the best time to start training. Well it's not, and here is why: A puppy of three months is like a blank sheet of paper or a brand new laptop. It's clear and ready to be programmed. A puppy of six months has already established many bad behaviors, so those behaviors have to be erased and replaced with accepted behaviors.

The older the dog, the more bad habits it will have. To train an older dog it will take more time. At a certain age certain behaviors cannot be altered, manipulated, modified or corrected. Just like children, the younger they are, the quicker they learn. As they become much older they get

more resistant to change. Much older dog are settled in their ways. I'm not saying the older ones can't be trained, I'm saying the younger the easier.

When training any puppy or dog, several things need to be taken in account: age, breed, gender, character, temperament and environment. Always remember: Patience, persistence, consistency and repetition will be your keys to success. Have a woof woof of a month.

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