

# Bline's Awesome Aussies

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## **THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY TRAINING FOR YOUNG PUPPIES**

**Adapted from Lore I. Haug, DVM, 2003**

Puppies begin learning long before you bring them to their new home. They continue to learn every day from every interaction with you and their environment whether you specifically train them or not. Considering this, it becomes apparent how important it is to provide suitable structure and training from the start to prevent your new puppy from learning the wrong lessons. Many behaviors exhibited by puppies are cute and relatively harmless, but these same behaviors exhibited by an adult dog could be dangerous. Puppies do not “grow out” of poor behavior. Behaviors that puppies exhibit when they are young will typically persist unless you teach the dog a more acceptable alternative.

Kindergarten Puppy Training classes and puppy socialization parties can be a good way to get your puppy started. Private trainers are usually much better than commercialized classes (like at Petsmart.) These classes are available in many communities and typically enroll puppies beginning at 8-10 weeks of age. Do not wait until 6 months of age to begin training your puppy. By 6 months of age, your puppy has had 3-4 months to develop undesirable habits that must be corrected before good behavior will be established.

Puppies, like young children, do have short attention spans, so training sessions must be short. Short sessions (1-5 minutes) spread frequently throughout the day are more productive than one or two longer sessions. These training sessions should be incorporated into your daily routine and made fun for the puppy. Your puppy should not be able to distinguish “real life” from training.

### **LEADERSHIP**

All young animals of social species need guidance to help them learn acceptable behavior. When a puppy is incorporated into a human family, the human members should establish leadership over the puppy. It is extremely important that you provide consistent and effective leadership and guidance. Puppies whose lives have no structure frequently develop a wide variety of behavior problems particularly unruliness and aggression. Leadership does not mean you must physically dominate your puppy, nor does it involve instilling fear in your puppy. Leadership involves setting rules and controlling your puppy's access to its rewards. Your puppy should learn at least 4 basic cue responses (look, sit, down, and come). Always reward behaviors you find appropriate and desirable, and prevent (rather than punish) behaviors that are not acceptable. It is highly recommended that you read/watch materials by: [The Monks of New Skete](#)

### **MOUTHING/BITING/CHEWING**

Puppies explore with their mouths, and learn to temper jaw strength by playing with other puppies. When puppies play roughly and bite each other too hard, they will yelp and withdrawal from the game at

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least temporarily. If your puppy mouths or applies pressure with its teeth, immediately cease the game. It even may be necessary to get up and walk away. After the puppy calms down, the game can resume, but if the puppy begins to mouth roughly again the game should cease completely.

Encourage the puppy to chew on its own toys by playing with them with the puppy. If the puppy is found chewing on an unacceptable item, make a sharp noise or otherwise distract the puppy, and then give it an appropriate toy. Items on which you do not want the puppy to chew should be kept out of the puppy's reach.

## RESTRAINT/HANDLING

All puppies need to learn restraint and self-control. Every puppy and dog will need to be handled at some point in its life by you and other people. Puppies should learn to accept handling and manipulation without fear.

You should begin handling your puppy from the day you bring it home. Provide gentle restraint with lots of positive reward, including food treats, when the puppy is handled and behaving appropriately. **Gently handle and examine your puppy's ears, feet, mouth, eyes and other body parts on a daily basis.**

Hold the puppy by the collar and encourage the puppy to remain still. Start with just ONLY a few seconds of restraint and work up to a minute or more. This should become part of your pet's daily life. Some puppies are very fearful of being restrained and these puppies need to be handled carefully so you do not increase their fear. Puppies should NOT be physically punished for resisting restraint. Try to provide praise & treats immediately following successful restraint exercises.

## FOOD/POSSESSIONS

Aggression around food and possessions can be a dangerous problem. Puppies should learn to accept having people around their food and possessions. This is best taught early in life. Puppies may be allowed to defend their possessions from other animals, but this behavior is unacceptable and dangerous when directed at people, particularly if children are in the household. Begin by making a game of adding tasty treats to your puppy's food bowl while it is eating. These treats should be something the puppy likes as well as or better than its food. The goal is to imprint the puppy with the idea that approaching people and hands bring good things. Further steps can involve picking up the puppy's bowl, adding something tasty, and immediately giving the bowl back to the puppy.

## SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is a critical process in all animals. It helps your puppy develop coping skills and learn to properly interact with animals of its own and other species (including humans). Puppies with inadequate socialization are fearful of new people and situations and do not handle stress well. You should NOT wait until your puppy's vaccination series is completely finished before starting socialization and training. **The peak socialization window closes between 12-14 weeks of age** and most vaccination series are not completed until after the puppy is 16 weeks of age. By this time, your puppy will have missed out on crucial social lessons that could impair the puppy's behavior for life. Just be prudent in where you take

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your puppy. Do not let them out on the ground in public places where unvaccinated dogs may have walked.

Puppies are socialization sponges. **Things that they experience in this time period will stick with them forever.** Every new experience for your puppy should be positive — accompanied by treats, praise, and/or fun. Up until 6 months, you should only have your puppy in socializing environments that you have solid control over.

**Socialize with dogs in a [positive puppy training class](#), a puppy playgroup, or a neighbor's yard, NOT the dog park!** One recent study found that dogs about 6 months of age were the target for the most aggression in the park, more than any other age group. Once your dog is old enough to go to the dog park, and you decide it's worth the risk, protect him from harm by moving along, not letting him get harassed by other dogs, etc. Dog parks always contain bullies (those that want to be the 'pack leader', be on the lookout and leave if the mix doesn't look safe.

**Many people are surprised to learn that the full socialization period for a puppy is two years!** But your dog will be your companion for 10 to 15 more years! Why not invest some time in him/her now? What sort of things should you socialize your new puppy to? Everything!! Your puppy should experience a bit of cold, funny noises, strange hats, interesting textures, calm restraint (praise and release it when it is calm), other dogs (your own dogs are not enough!) and many other things.

Take a look at the **Puppy's Rule of Twelve** by Margaret Hughes for some ideas.

By the time a puppy is 12 weeks old, it should have experienced the following, in positive, stress-free environments: *(If your puppy is over 12 weeks start right away with this socialization guide.)*

- \* **Experienced 12 different surfaces:** wood, woodchips, carpet, tile, cement, linoleum, grass, wet grass, dirt, mud, puddles, deep pea gravel, grates, uneven surfaces, on a table, on a chair, etc.
- \* **Experienced 12 different locations:** front yard (daily), other people's homes, school yard, lake, pond, river, boat, basement, elevator, car, moving car, garage, laundry room, kennel, veterinarian hospital (stop by sometimes just to say hi & visit, lots of cookies, no vaccinations), grooming salon (just to say hi), etc....
- \* **Met and played with 12 new people (outside of family):** include children, adults (mostly men), elderly adults, people in wheelchairs, walkers, people with canes, crutches, hats, sunglasses, etc....
- \* **Exposed to 12 different noises (ALWAYS keep positive and watch puppy's comfort level - we don't want the puppy scared):** garage door opening, doorbell, children playing, babies screaming, big trucks, Harley motorcycles, skateboards, washing machine, shopping carts rolling, power boat, clapping, loud singing, pan dropping, horses neighing, vacuums, lawnmowers, birthday party, etc...
- \* **Exposed to 12 fast moving objects (don't allow to chase):** skateboards, roller-skates, bicycles, motorcycles, cars, people running, cats running, scooters, vacuums, children running, children playing soccer, squirrels, cats, horses running, cows running, etc.
- \* **Handled by owner (& family) 12 times a week:** hold under arm (like a football), hold to chest, hold on floor near owner, hold in-between owner's legs, hold head, look in ears, mouth, in-between toes, hold like a baby, trim toe nails, hold in lap, etc...

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- \* **Eaten from 12 different shaped containers:** wobbly bowl, metal, cardboard box, paper, coffee cup, china, pie plate, plastic, frying pan, Kong, Treatball, Bustercube, paper bag, etc.
- \* **Eaten in 12 different locations:** back yard, front yard, crate, kitchen, basement, laundry room, bathroom, friend's house, car, school yard, bathtub, up high (on work bench), under umbrella, etc.
- \* **Played with 12 different puppies (or safe adult dogs)** as much as possible in a controlled environment. This does NOT mean at the dog park.
- \* **Left alone safely, away from family & other animals:** (5-45 minutes) 12 times a week.
- \* **Experienced a leash and collar 12 different times in 12 different locations.**

## SHAPING BEHAVIORS POSITIVELY

Showing your puppy the positive side of life is useful, but what about the times **when you want to tell your puppy "no"**? For starters, you don't have to shout or scare the puppy. If you feel the need to punish your puppy, you can do so by saying (not shouting), "no" and *use the natural method of grabbing the scruff at the back of their neck and telling them 'no' in a calm, serious voice.* But you would be surprised at how effective it is to tell your puppy **"YES!"** instead. What I mean by that is that you can use this word to praise your puppy what you *do* want him to do.

**How do I do that?** For example, to housebreak your puppy, show him where to eliminate and give him praise and a treat for going in the right spot. If you're sure he's about to go, you can say a cue first, like "go potty." It sure beats telling him, one square foot at a time, to not use your carpet as a toilet. If you ever catch him in the act, don't yell at him or rub his nose in it. Simply say, "No, Outside." Then take your puppy to the yard and praise him with a **"YES"** for being so clever when he pees outside. **When you tell your puppy "no" it should be serious and disapproving, but your puppy should not fear for his safety.** All that will get you is a puppy who goes behind the couch or out of sight to eliminate.

People often say, "She knows she's not supposed to go inside – she does it when I'm not looking!" But your puppy isn't thinking right or wrong. She just knows it's not SAFE to eliminate in the house NEAR YOU. She also thinks you're a bit scary sometimes, and isn't sure why.

## HIRING A GOOD DOG TRAINER

The value of creating a personal relationship with a puppy group trainer is priceless. *Stay in touch and continue to enroll in follow-up classes!* The first 2 years of your puppy's life will shape their entire future with you. Investing in them now, can save you future heartache. Most people seek out a trainer as a 'Last Resort', but the secret is that trainers LOVE it when they are hired by a family that is actively working hard to lay a solid foundation for their furry friend. It's much easier to work with a dog early in life before their bad habits have had time to settle in.

If possible, look for a puppy class run by a trainer that also does their own private training; versus attending classes through a large commercial business like PetSmart. Ask around to other pet owners and make inquiries on social media/community bulletin boards for recommendations. The benefits of training early is priceless and well worth the small investment made!