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THE BIGGIE: HOUSETRAINING

Until he's about 3 months old, your puppy has to relieve himself quite frequently. If you're not quite sure how to go about house training him, this this might not bode well for your carpet. Understanding a few important factors can make for a much speedier and easier house-training process.

*** Timing is EVERYTHING.** Your young puppy will probably need to "go" right after eating or playing, right after waking up, and promptly at these times, before he has a chance to make a "mistake" in the house.

Remember, keeping your puppy on a regular schedule of meals and walks will make housetraining easier for both of you.

Here's a tip: Don't end the walk abruptly as soon as he relieves himself. This teaches him that relieving himself ends the fun outing - and he may figure out that "holding it" will result in more time spent outside!

*** Always let your pup know when he's been good.** On your walks, praise him lavishly (for example, say "Good Puppy! Good Puppy" in a happy voice) as soon as he eliminates. The basis of speedy, easy puppy training is clear and immediate communication on your part.

Use the same simple words and phrases to mean certain things. Don't expect your puppy to understand long, rambling sentences. Tone of voice is important, too. Your puppy will learn more quickly that "Good Boy" means you're pleased with what he's done if the words are said cheerfully.

*** A watchful eye is key.** Watch your puppy every minute that he's loose inside your home. If you notice him acting like he's about to eliminate, say "NO" right away in a stern but calm voice, quickly take

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him out, then praise him when he relieves himself outside.

Think of it this way: Every mistake your puppy makes in the house is a step backward in his house training - and every time he relieves himself outside, it's a step forward.

*** Never give "Delayed Punishment".** You should NEVER punish your puppy for mistakes he made in the house when you weren't watching. As with all training, the feedback that's communicated to your puppy - whether positive or negative - must always coincide with or immediately follow the puppy's action. This allows him to make a clear connection between the action and the feedback it causes, ensuring speedier learning.

If you were to punish your puppy hours afterward for a mistake he made in the house, he would probably hang his head and look sad while you admonished him. Many people who see their puppy act this way in such a situation think he is "acting guilty", and therefore they think he understands what he did was wrong. But all this behavior really means is that the puppy knows, because of his owner's tone of voice and body language, that the person is angry and upset. It doesn't mean he understands WHY.

Punishing a puppy for reasons he doesn't understand will leave him only confused and unhappy. This will lessen his trust in you and damage the bond that is developing between the two of you, and it will surely slow down the housetraining process.

*** Provide your pup with his own special place.** Finally, until he is completely house trained, it is most important to never let your puppy have the run of the house unattended. Have him stay in a confined area - a part of the kitchen fenced off with a baby gate, perhaps, or (ideally) a roomy crate or "den", anytime you're not watching him. A puppy is naturally less likely to relieve himself in a confined space. Because of this instinct, he's more likely to wait until it's time for his next walk.

Something to chew on.

Because of the new teeth developing in his jaws, your young puppy has a very strong urge to chew on things. In fact, he NEEDS to chew. Like a human baby who is teething, your puppy chews to help the new teeth emerge through his gums.

Rather than punishing your puppy repeatedly for chewing on things he finds around the house, give him plenty of toys that he's ALLOWED to chew, and praise him when he's happily gnawing on these. Hard nylon chew toys are an excellent choice.

Some objects, such as sharp fragments of cooked poultry or pork bones from the diner table, can spell serious tummy trouble. The best bets are durable chew toys equipped with a recess for hiding bits of dry dog food. These toys keep your puppy entertained and busy for hours.

Still, be sure to stow valuable or dangerous items, electrical cords, and your best pair of shoes out of harms way!

Digging it.

Puppies and dogs dig for different reasons. Some dig to make a cozy bed, and some dig for the pure joy of it (ever seen a kid having fun with a pail and shovel at the beach? You get the idea). But trainers say that probably the most common reason for digging is that the dog is bored and lonely. So an important first step is to prevent boredom and loneliness.

Your puppy needs companionship. If he's left alone in a yard all day with nothing to do, he's sure to be unhappy - and he might turn to digging for comfort. If you have to be away for most of the day, see that he has company for at least several short periods during that time. Have a neighbor or pet-sitter come over for play visits or to take him for walks. Provide him with plenty of toys that will keep him safely occupied.

If he still delights in making holes in the lawn, you can even create his own special digging area in the corner of the yard. By

burying a few of his toys there and making a fun game of it, you can teach him that it's OK for him to practice his earthmoving skills in this special place.

Jumping up for joy.

It's perfectly natural for your puppy to jump up in excitement and put his paws up on you as he greets you (and other people). After all, He's happy to see you! But although this is cute when he does it now, it might not be quite so cute when he's grown up - especially if he's a large breed, such as a retriever. Two things can help ensure that as an adult he won't make a habit of "saying hello" with his muddy paws:

** Be sure not to encourage your puppy to put his paws up on you.*

** Teach your pup to greet people calmly right from the start.*

Rather than punishing him, teach him to sit whenever you come in the door or when a friend approaches him. Give him praise or a treat EVERY time he sits, and simply ignore him when he jumps - this way, he'll figure out pretty quickly which behavior is more rewarding. He'll soon be sitting every time he sees you coming.

A final word.

Training your puppy and raising him to be the well-behaved, happy companion you've hoped for involves a serious commitment of your time, effort, and attention. Just as with raising a child, there may be ups and downs, but sharing your life with this loving (and loved) family member is all worth it.

If you have questions regarding your puppy's behavior, don't hesitate to ask your vet or local boarding kennel to recommend a reputable trainer in your area.

Information on local dog clubs that offer training classes can be obtained from the AKC at (919) 233-9767 or www.akc.org . Excellent advice can also be found in a number of books about raising a dog, including "American Kennel Club Dog Care and Training" (Howell Book House; \$16.99).

Most of all, enjoy your new puppy! Spend time with him and give him your best, and he will reward you with years of devoted companionship.