

Don't Give in to Puppy Pressure:

Developing a Strong Relationship with your Dog

By Mary Vanderlinden



Surprise! You're a new mommy or daddy! The moment you brought your new puppy home, you assumed the responsibility of a parent. Let's get right to the point, rearing a puppy is very similar to parenting a child: you must be firm yet gentle while establishing leadership. In this article, I'm going to share how to avoid puppy pressure and nurture your new friend into a respectable dog.



You may be asking, what is puppy pressure? It is the ability of your puppy to manipulate and train you to get what he wants. This happens when the puppy parent becomes reactive, loses the ability to be proactive, and gives in to the pup's demands. The result: the puppy becomes master of the house,

effectively running the roost while mom and dad become slaves to the canine. If the manipulation goes unchecked the behavior escalates and puppy may mature into an ill-mannered dog.

What does puppy pressure look like? Here are a few scenarios -

Lisa adopted Frenchie, an 8-week-old Bichon Frise, to be her new companion. At first, Lisa was determined to crate train Frenchie, but it turned into a nightmare at bedtime. Frenchie whimpered and whined. This prompted Lisa to look in on Frenchie to see if she was okay. Lisa let Frenchie out to cuddle and comfort her before gently putting her back in the crate. Lisa's interaction resulted in Frenchie's intensified crying. Eventually Lisa gave in to the sad eyes peering from the crate, and she let Frenchie on her bed. Now Frenchie never ventures near the crate and has a permanent spot sleeping right next to Lisa.

Dave is training Rex, his German Shepard. Dave is using high value treats which Rex really likes. While Rex is doing a wonderful job at mastering the skills that Dave wants, the treats are irresistible to Rex who is determined to eat the whole bag. Rex begins putting pressure on Dave with soft barks and a stare. Then, Rex begins to bark louder and with a more insistent tone. Rex makes a bold gesture and sits down with a thump in front of Dave. Dave reacts by petting Rex and giving him more treats to enjoy.

George loves his American breed, Junior, and takes the dog everywhere. George often carries Junior, a small Poodle Shih Tzu mix. One day, George tries to walk Junior in the park but Junior was

not into using his four legs. Junior lay spread-eagle on the ground, refusing to budge. George, feeling a bit embarrassed by

Junior's behavior, scooped him up in his arms and continued the walk.

Who is really in control in each of these vignettes? Can you pinpoint where the puppy parent went awry? All three of these scenarios are similar to a child throwing a temper tantrum. And, why do children throw tantrums? To get what they want!

In each scenario the puppy parent was reactive and the biggest sin - the puppy parent gave in and overindulged!

So, what do you do to resist puppy pressure and maintain your status as pack leader? Start taking pro-active and solution-oriented actions.

You must determine what is and is not acceptable and establish boundaries. You can do this with firm and gentle guidance. Help the puppy to understand that the crate is his space and allow him to get used to going in/out on his own, and importantly sleeping in the crate.

Remember that developing your puppy's good behavior starts with you, Mom and Dad. Do not be a reactive puppy parent: analyze situations and research solutions if you are unsure of what to do. Set a routine that is healthy for both you and your puppy. Set times for daily exercise and training: this will essentially be the time when puppy gets treats for making progress on a command or task. Can you reward your dog for just being a great companion with a new toy or bone? You bet! But, you decide when the time is right to give a special something to puppy.

As an involved puppy parent you will learn your dog's cues. By involvement and observation, you will quickly begin to understand when puppy is demanding treats, attention, or taking control, versus asking to go out when he needs a potty break or signaling when he is going to be sick.

One final and very important thought: always be positive and don't get frustrated. Coax puppy with kindness and use such moments as a learning experience. Remember - do not to give in to temptation. Think ahead about how you want your pup to behave and work toward that goal!

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