

## **The A-B-C's of Raising a Puppy (and keeping mistakes to a minimum!)**

**Beth Bradley**

If you have recently brought a puppy into your home, you have my congratulations and my sympathy. Congratulations, because raising a puppy will change your life! My sympathy because, well . . . raising a puppy will change your life. Sure, the little guy will steal your heart. He will also steal your socks, your sandwich, your sleep, and if you are not careful, your sanity. Face it; your puppy is a ball of fur filled with pee, poop, energy, and curiosity. He has an alarming lack of impulse control and his primary means of exploring new discoveries is his mouth. He will lick, chew, or eat anything—regardless of whether it is disgusting, valuable, or dangerous. He will run without looking, jump without thinking, bark without reason, and engage with other dogs who may or may not tolerate his underdeveloped manners. In spite of all this—you brought him home. Now you face the challenge of integrating him into your life. And the bad news is that housebreaking is the easy part! You still have to figure out the day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute reality that you are responsible for a living creature that has more speed and less common sense than a toddler. No doubt about it, raising a puppy is time and energy intensive. A few mishaps are inevitable. However, with the “ABCs,” you can minimize mistakes and manage the puppy phase with less stress on you and your pup.

### **A is for Allocating Time**

Allocate time during each day to give your pup structure. The amount of time may vary depending on your schedule and your pup's development. Nonetheless, whether it's 20 minutes or an hour—part of each day should be 100% puppy time.

- **Interaction** Ideally, you should allocate at least one block of time in the morning, one at midday, and one in the evening when you can give your puppy 100% of your attention. Use this time to play games, to walk together, and to practice attention exercises and other skills your puppy is learning. By designating specific times during the day for interaction, you ensure that your pup can expend his energy, bond with you, and develop good social skills. If you have other dogs in the home, you can use some of this time for supervised interaction. However, do not use your other dogs as a replacement for you. Although playing with other dogs is a quick way to burn energy and is important for socialization, your pup needs to bond with you. You should be his main source of exercise, interaction, and behavioral guidance.

- **Supervised freedom** Even when you are not directly interacting with your pup, if he is loose in the home he must be supervised. Set aside a certain amount of time when you can keep an eye on your pup while he explores his environment. If you think your puppy will behave when you leave him to his own devices, you are sadly mistaken. Many behavioral disasters are the result of giving too much freedom to a pup who doesn't have the experience, training, or self-control to handle it. Do yourself and your pup a favor—know where he is and what he is doing at all times! As your pup becomes accustomed to your home and your rules, keep a training collar and leash on him during periods of supervised freedom. If your pup is dragging a leash, you will have a means for correcting undesirable behavior and communicating that the trash can is not a snack bar. In a house with multiple dogs, supervision is even more critical. A puppy can be a catalyst for chaos, leading your previously well behaved dogs astray. It's the gang mentality: if the pup is doing something that looks fun (like tearing up your prize-winning roses) the others will be quick to jump in and join the party.
- **Rest and alone time** Your pup also needs time to rest and "chill." I have certain times each day when all my dogs are forced to nap and chill out. When you are finished with your "quality time" put your puppy in his crate or in an outdoor kennel while you go about your daily business. Weather permitting, a secure outdoor kennel allows your puppy to enjoy the healthy benefits of fresh air in a safe place. If you do not have an outdoor kennel, your puppy can spend time in his crate. Building alone time into the daily routine teaches your puppy to tolerate your absence without anxiety. It also gives him time to rest and recharge his body and brain after your period of exercise, play, or training.

### **B is for Being Realistic**

When you have a puppy or young dog, you must be realistic in your expectations. A puppy is a perfect storm of curiosity and energy combined with astoundingly poor impulse control and truly terrible judgment. You must not only set limits for your puppy, but also understand his limitations at any given developmental stage.

A puppy can learn basic commands and good manners, but his energy, physical needs, and curiosity will often override his training. Realistically, even a puppy that has some training will find ways to get in to trouble. Of course you must correct undesirable behavior. On the other hand, you don't want all your interactions with your puppy to be corrections. By taking steps to make it more difficult for your pup to misbehave, you can minimize the corrections while remaining consistent in your training.

- **Make sure your puppy has had enough exercise.** Many undesirable behaviors are simply your puppy's misguided attempts to use up his excess energy.
- **Keep items he might chew out of reach.** Put the garbage can where he can't get to it. Put your shoes away in the closet. In other words, "puppy proof" any rooms to which your pup has access.
- **Stay one step ahead of your pup.** You know his tendencies, so anticipate and, when possible, redirect his behavior. If he is a jumper, keep his leash low and tight when he greets someone so that he cannot jump. If he always barks at the mail delivery, distract him with a game before he has an opportunity to react.
- **Recognize when your puppy is just being a puppy and save him from himself.** For example, if he is in a chewing mood and relentlessly attacking one chair leg after another, put him in his crate with a bully stick. If you are having a party, don't expect him to be well-behaved with all the commotion in the house. Put him in his crate in a quiet area away from the action.

Some day, your canine companion may enjoy lounging on the couch with you while you watch a two-hour movie. For now, however, his attention span is shorter than a movie preview. As your puppy grows, his ability to maintain focus and respond to training will strengthen. Appropriate correction is not going to break his drive; however, constantly reprimanding him for being a puppy will. If you find that you are correcting over and over for the same behavior, then your pup may not be ready for the given situation. Alternatively, he may be overtired or overexcited and therefore unable to process the correction and adjust his behavior. If you have had enough and need some down time for yourself or you need to cook dinner, putting your pup in his crate or kennel is preferable to constantly correcting him. Address misbehavior as appropriate for your pup's development. While you of course cannot allow him to be unruly, always remember he is not an adult dog. Removing him from a situation is better than creating stress by overcorrecting.

Be realistic about what you expect from yourself as well. Some days you are going to have more time to spend with your dog than others. That's life; don't feel guilty about it. Recognize the issue and address it. If you didn't get the usual number of interaction times on a particular day, take a nice long walk with your pup before bed. The exercise will be good for both of you and you can start fresh the next day.

## **C is for Contain**

Puppies and young dogs need to be contained when they are not under supervision. Most dogs cannot be left unsupervised until they are at least a year old. Some dogs need even longer to be trusted on their own. If you already have a puppy in your home, you probably don't need me to tell you why he should be contained when you cannot supervise him. Nonetheless, the reasons bear repeating.

- **Puppies chew indiscriminately.** They can chew or even eat things that will harm them. There is no way to puppy-proof your entire home to the point that your pup can safely be left unattended. He could chew wires; he could chew furniture and ingest stuffing or fabric that will block his intestines. Contain your pup in a place that is completely free of items he could chew or eat. For young pups, this means no bedding when you are not around. A dog bed is as dangerous as a couch cushion when it comes to intestinal blockage.
- **Puppies don't think ahead.** Left loose in your home, your pup can find all kinds of ways to get himself into situations he cannot get out of. He can get stuck in a tight spot where he would have to wait until your return. He could knock things over and be walking around on broken glass while you are out. If he becomes frightened (or even just bored), he could scratch and paw at the door until his paws are injured. Contain your pup in a place that has no holes, levels, cords, wires, or objects that could cause unexpected problems.
- **Puppies are not solidly housebroken.** Your pup probably understands that eliminating indoors is frowned upon. However, he will not be very motivated to "hold it" if he can wander around the home to find an out of the way place to do his business. Contain your pup in a small enough space that he will choose to exercise some control rather than be confined with his waste.
- **Puppies need a place to feel safe and secure.** You might think that allowing your pup to have the run of the home is good because it gives him freedom and choices. However, too much space and too many options can be intimidating. A contained, quiet space of his own gives your pup a sense of security.

A crate is the safest and most reliable way to contain a puppy. When introduced and used properly, a crate becomes the puppy's safe place. If you choose to contain your pup in some other way, you must be vigilant that there is nothing in the space that can be a source of harm or injury.

Containing your pup when necessary is simply good sense. However, your pup should not be confined indiscriminately or for endless stretches of time. Before you contain your puppy, make sure he has had adequate exercise and opportunity to eliminate. The amount of time he can comfortably remain contained before he needs to go out again depends on his age and development.

## **Conclusion**

It's up to you to allow your pup to be a puppy and enjoy life while maintaining his safety and your sanity. Structure his day to ensure he is getting enough exercise, interaction, training time, alone time, and rest. When he is out and about, make sure you have 100% of your attention devoted to him. When you need some time to focus on other things, contain him so that he is safe and so that he doesn't get stressed from overcorrection. In short, allocate time; be realistic; and contain when necessary. By following these ABC's you can prevent your puppy from turning your life upside down, and instead focus on all the ways he enriches it!

### **About Beth Bradley**

As one of the top professional trainers and competitors in the United States, Beth is committed to improving the lives of dogs and people through training. She teaches basic and advanced obedience, competition dog training, puppy training, Schutzhund training, personal protection, Canine Good Citizenship, and therapy dog training.

Beth also trains and places service dogs for individuals with autism, and custom trains "cross-trained" companion/protection dogs for families and individuals. She consults for shelters in the tri-state area and for New Jersey law enforcement on cases involving canine behavior and temperament.

Beth began studying animal behavior and dog training at age twelve. She has worked and studied under many renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. After graduating from Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice, Beth worked as a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer. In 1989, she founded her own company and has made dog training and consulting her full-time career since 1995. Competing with her dogs, Beth has earned national and international titles and championships in both Schutzhund and AKC Obedience. In 2003 and 2009, she represented the United States in the FCI World Trials. In 2015, Beth and her dog Fyte qualified for the elite team representing the United States at the WUSV in Finland. Although Fyte is the youngest qualifying dog in the history of this worldwide competition, Beth and Fyte ranked third among the US competitors and posted scores that placed the US team in the top ten. Fyte and Beth went on to earn the title of USCA IPO 2015 Vice Champion and compete with the US Team at the 2016 World Trials in Meppen, Germany. In 2016, Beth's training made Fyte the highest ranked dog in United States, when they competed in and won the USCA/IPO Nationals Championship.

Beth is the author of *Real World Dog Training*, and has produced a number of training DVDs and videos. In addition, Beth trains and handles dogs for movies, television, and theater, with recent credits including appearances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, in *Board Walk Empire*, the *Batman* franchise, *Damages*, *Blue Bloods*, *The Good Wife*, *The Blacklist*, *Gotham*, and *Billions*.

Beth offers a variety of group classes as well as as private lessons.

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