

Stubborn, Scared or Stupid?

Beth Bradley

Puppies have a way of pulling on our heartstrings and pulling on our common sense. Their cuteness overrides logic and we bring into our homes an animal that leaks, whines, chews, and generally turns our lives upside down. And in the chaos that ensues, we maintain our sanity by clinging to the knowledge that it won't always be like this. Eventually, our pups will learn manners and good behavior and we can enjoy loving them and having them in our lives.

Pups don't just "outgrow" most of their more challenging behaviors. The skills required for living with people don't come naturally to them. Housebreaking, leash walking, and spending periods of the day alone are not abilities that the pup develops naturally over time. They must be taught. And even behaviors that do come naturally, such as respecting a leader, must be shaped with training to ensure they are developed to work in the context of a life shared with humans.

Training a pup is challenging. Training takes time and is not a linear process. There will be times when your pup responds like a genius and the very next day will look at you like you've never said "sit" before. And to make matters worse, puppies are master manipulators. It can be very difficult to say "NO" to those adorable bundles of love. If they look scared or stressed, our gut reaction is to soothe them. If they act goofy and stupid we have to fight not to laugh.

I can assure you, your dog is not stupid. And while at times he may actually be scared or stressed, your gut reaction to soothe him will do more harm than good. And as for stubborn? Well, yes. Most pups go through a stubborn phase. That's why we train.

But if we allow our hearts (or our exasperation) to overrule our common sense, if we do not mark and correct the problematic behaviors, the problems will simply continue.

Correction: The problems will grow.

Exponentially.

So steel yourself to resist the big eyes and the heartrending whine and begin training your pup to be a well-behaved member of your family. Without training, he will continue and develop behaviors that make him a problem that is always stressed and causing stress. You will spend less time with him because he is difficult to control. With training,

he will become a happy, integrated part of your family. You will spend more time with him because he is well behaved and easy to be around.

Crate Time

Unless your breeder has already begun crate training, the first 48-72 hours may be pure hell for you. Yes, your puppy may scream and put up a big fuss the first few times he is left alone crate. If you are patient and consistent, he will come to recognize that being left alone to rest is not a life-threatening situation. Learning to tolerate alone time is beneficial in avoiding separation anxiety as well. However, it is mainly for safety's sake that it is imperative that pups learn to spend time in a crate.

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.

How do you deal with the barking and screaming? 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. If you have met the above criteria, let him to scream it out. If you let him out every time he cries or barks; he will realize that is how the door gets opened and you will never have a dog that is comfortable in the crate.

Leash Walking

Most breeders don't teach puppies leash walking, so that is up to you to do immediately. Initially allow him to drag a short leash around the house, until he is used to the weight of it. After a day or so, when your pup is accustomed to the feel of the collar and leash, pick up the end of the leash and walk toward something the pup likes, such as a treat you have cleverly pre-positioned on the ground.

Walking is vitally important to your dog's development and health. Even if your puppy does not have all of his vaccines completed, start walking with him immediately. Stay on the sidewalk or pavement and keep him away from other dogs' feces. He has enough immunity carried over from his mother's milk that short walks without a lot of sniffing are safe. Walks develop your pup's ability to function confidently in the world by getting him used to different sights and sounds. They are a bonding activity that establishes your leadership and builds his trust in you. Walks are also intended to help your pup expend energy so you should keep moving at a constant pace rather than allowing your pup to stop and sniff at every clump of grass.

Sometimes, a pup may resist walking. There is no reason to accept this. If he seems afraid to leave your property, start out by carrying him a few doors down and walking toward your house. He will begin to see that walking off your property had not killed him and will eventually transition to walking away from your home as well as toward it.

Do not stop and soothe your dog if he acts fearful or stressed. If he is "acting," you are teaching him that he can control the walk. If he is truly stressed or scared and you stop to soothe him you are telling him that he is right to be scared—that there is indeed reason to be scared. You know that there are no monsters on your block. Show him that you know this by continuing to move and lure him. Tell him through your body language and attitude "I'm the leader. I see no danger here. Follow me and the treat bag!"

If your pup is resistant to walking, start with small goals. Although you should not give in and stop to “soothe” you can use food or toys to motivate movement. Offer the treat as you begin, and give it to your dog after a few steps. On your first day of leash training, you may reward after only 2 or 3 steps. Watch your dog for signs that he is faltering and lure him *before* he stops walking. Or stop and praise him *before* he throws himself to the ground. You don’t want him to associate his resistance with the appearance of a better bribe. If he does come to a full stop, show him the treat, but do not reward until *after* he has started forward motion. On Day 2, you may get 5 steps. Over time, he will walk longer stretches without needing to be lured. The important thing your pup should take away from each walk is that there is no reward in grabbing the leash or throwing himself to the ground. The only reward comes from walking with you, at your pace.

Even for a pup that is not resistant to walking, be realistic. Young pups can’t walk for a mile, but a short block should be no problem. Vary the location of your walks to continue building your pup’s confidence with new environments and to strengthen his bond with you as the leader.

Investing the time now in teaching your pup a socially acceptable walking routine means more happy walks in his future.

The Stubborn Dog or A Stress Free Dog?

When a young dog comes into class, I can tell if this dog has ever been told “no” and if the dog actually believed the “no.” There are some puppies that are so stubborn that they want to control their owners. This dog is usually barking and jumping at other dogs and people in the class. This dog looks like a hyperactive pup and everyone usually gets a big laugh out of it. Then, when the owner finally has had enough and tries to settle him down, the dog will mouth at the hand of the owner or the leash. If corrected with the collar and leash the dog will throw himself to the ground, and grab the leash or even better, stand on its hind legs and wrap his front paws around the leash. It can be exhausting and exasperating. If the person gives up, the dog learns that these strategies are successful and will repeat them. If the person stays consistent and corrects, the dog eventually (and yes, it may be a long eventually) realizes that he is out of options and will have to respect the person as his leader.

Puppies do not grow out of being stubborn. As exhausting as it is, their behavior must be addressed as it occurs. Otherwise, it will continue into their adulthood and you will be doomed to a lifetime of constant battling with your dog for control. One of the reason I often hear for people not wanting to correct their pups is that they don’t want to stress the pup.

Stress is one of the paradoxes of training. A pup who never experiences stress in a controlled environment is doomed to a life of stress. Mother dogs know this. They introduce stress into their pups' lives early. They correct them for overly rambunctious behavior. They clean them roughly. They leave them alone for periods of time. And when the pups whine at this perceived mistreatment, the mother dog ignores their distress. She instinctively knows what we as people who share our lives with dogs would do well to learn: "Good stress" teaches your dog that the world isn't ending if he doesn't get his own way. It makes your dog more resilient and confident. Correcting misbehavior is good stress. It's a brief moment of unpleasantness when your dog must control his impulse or be corrected. Either way, your dog lives through it and he sees that life goes on. Even better, it's completely predictable. If you are consistent with your corrections, your dog learns that he can avoid an unpleasant correction by avoiding the behavior that caused it. His world makes sense. The use of "good stress" reduces his overall stress of being uncertain how things will turn out.

Formal education at dog school is one of the most effective "good stress" tools for teaching a dog how to deal with the stress of not being able to jump and bark and act obnoxious when in public. Once the dog understands that he must follow the rules and there are consequences when he doesn't, the obnoxious puppy goes away. A group class has built-in distractions and "stressors" that are not life threatening so your pup can learn that controlling himself (or being corrected for not controlling himself) do not cause his world to crumble. He has the opportunity to see other dogs who also appear to be surviving the stress of controlling themselves (or being corrected).

In class, your dog is taught that you are 'pack leader' and that he must wait for your cue to respond to a situation. This will help so much when the dog is being restrained either for vaccinations or grooming. He is taught that being controlled is not a bad thing and when the restraint is all over, there is a cookie in his future. Dogs trained from a young age require fewer corrections and are more responsive to commands because they want to avoid corrections. And, even better, they learn how to handle a correction and that those corrections are not the end of the world or painful.

So as counterintuitive as it may seem, providing the "good stress" of training at a young age, especially in a class situation, makes your dog more confident and less fearful.

Conclusion

With their big eyes, floppy bodies, and goofy antics, puppies have the edge over us emotionally from Day One. We just want to love them. But when we get past the emotional reaction and listen to our common sense, we know that the best way to love them is to prepare them to live in a way that allows us to spend more time with them, to yell at them less, and to keep them safe. So even when they act scared, or stressed, even if your pup is stubborn, we must override our softer side. Mother dogs who put teeth on pups to correct them know this. We know it. We just need to follow through on it and give our pups the training and tools they need for a happy, healthy future.

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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