***WHY SHOULD A BREEDER TRAIN PUPPIES EARLY?***

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***Training puppies at a very young age, 3 - 8 weeks of age and still in their litter, is surprisingly effective.*** *I do not use any treats for this training. I want just the interaction of cuddling and praising to achieve genuine cooperation between me and a puppy. I also want a puppy to trust being restrained by my hands.*

*I can always use treats in the future if I wish at any time. Used initially, treats seem to get good results, but their use teaches the puppy that treats are the chief goal of responding to our words and body language instead of affection. Puppies need to learn how to respond to human voices and body language first. Not using treats seems slower in effect, and not as much fun, but the results are better in the long run.*

*(I have usually done some hand feeding when I first introduced the pups to solid food, so they are accustomed to taking food from my hands at about 3 weeks of age.)*

***I start puppies on all of the basic obedience commands which will be used in both daily life and more formal training.***

# BACKGROUND to PUPPY HANDLING AND TRAINING

*I do not subscribe to stimulating puppies in artificial ways before they can stand on their feet at 3 weeks of age as some do. I do believe in handling them kindly from birth onward for natural reasons – checking their condition, weighing them, picking them up and handling them lovingly. (Puppies are the worst time wasters I have ever known! I love watching them.)*

*Once they are on their feet and walking I do like to provide puppies with a varied environment. I get them outside for much of the day unless the weather is too inclement. They experience a variety of footings – vinyl flooring and carpets, cement, grass, and dirt. I feed them in any of these locations. I provide the pups with a variety of safe toys and objects to roll, pick up, play with and manipulate, plus barriers, boxes and a house to climb into and out of. I add in some water play and swimming if possible, in a kiddy pool. I keep them in the house overnight at least, and they grow up hearing the vacuum cleaner, TV and hi-fi, as well as everything else the other dogs and humans are doing.*

*I allow the mother to stay with them as much as she wishes unless I have a problem with weaning them (anytime from 4-7 weeks) and drying her up. Then a separation for a few days, except when I am there to supervise, may be in order. (I find my bitches, which are both house pets and working dogs, tend to leave the pups for extended periods of time after they reach two weeks of age, but return in a hurry at any sign of real distress from the pups. Nonetheless, they often enjoy playing with and teaching the pups over the following weeks.)*

*I am careful about human visitors. For the first several weeks, I insist the bitch is left undisturbed to raise her babies. When I then allow visits by strangers I am very conscious of puppy health. I require visitors to take their shoes off and wash their hands thoroughly with Chlorhexidine 4% before coming into puppy areas. I do not allow visitors to enter who have been visiting other kennels or dogs the same day. I don’t mind if they have a dog of their own, which is mature and healthy, and which they have left at home.*

*When people come to look at puppies, I supervise every single second, unless they are experienced doggy friends. I don’t allow them to pick up puppies. The risk of dropping puppies and injuring them is too great. I insist that children sit still on the floor without yelling or squealing.*

*I do like young puppies to be handled and played with lovingly by the occasional friend, neighbour, or gentle child. How many of them can resist coming over once or twice to see the babies? If the puppy is raised in a naturally busy household, this step will occur spontaneously. If any children living in the house are dog savvy, let them handle the puppies as they wish. (Watching TV while cuddling a puppy is wonderful for both parties.)*

*As the pups reach 7 weeks of age, I start crating them individually at night, at least several times before they go to their new homes. I also take them a car ride or two, but not anywhere that they might be exposed to risk of infection. I have found they do fine going home without these preliminaries with a sensible new owner who can teach them these things if I have not, but both the puppies and new owners will appreciate that I have done so.*

*I try to raise the puppies so their housebreaking is started, one reason why I like them outside during the day. Inside is more difficult, depending on setup, but I want the puppies able to leave and eliminate in an area away from where they eat and play.*

# (At three weeks)

# 3 weeks - TO BEGIN - SHOW POSING

*All of the following skills are simple for puppies to learn and useful in real life. Both for training, and because I am evaluating the babies’ conformation, I start with “****hand stacking****” the pups daily at 2 ½ - 3 weeks of age. This is the beginning of restraint when needed and stays.*

I cradle the puppy in a standing position in profile to me, on the ground, or easier, on a grooming table. I hold the puppy’s head and neck supported in the “V” formed by the thumb and fingers of my right hand, and the rear in my left, with my fingers partially in the crotch to support the pup in a show stance position. I make the pup stay still. If needed, I give the pup a little jiggle, or rock it forward and backwards/up and down like a rocking horse to make it hold still. (I learned a few years ago from my daughter that the latter technique is used with laboratory rats to dizzy them temporarily without harming them, to make them hold still for lab procedures. I guess that is what I am doing to the puppy!)

I look at the teeth and bite each time once I have the puppy posed. (I may have to hold and sit the puppy at first to achieve the examination, or merely rub my finger across the front teeth gently several times. After several weeks, I should be able to lift the lips and check even the back teeth.

# (At five to six weeks)

# TRAINING ROUTINE FOR BABY PUPPIES

*I often just play with the puppies as a group at 3-5 weeks of age, but do start individual training when they reach 5 ½ - 6 weeks. My routine takes about 10 minutes per puppy. I prefer to do it daily, but even twice a week accomplishes a great deal. There is no point in doing the routine when the puppies have just been fed or are tired. Choose a time when the puppies are active. (If a litter is large, do only a few at a time, or some one day, the rest the next.)*

*I put away all of the other puppies and dogs in the household, and work with each puppy singly, with as few distractions as possible in the environment. I want the other puppies out of sight and hearing distance, adult dogs not interfering.*

**1. SIT/DOWN/STAND**

*I either sit on the floor/ground beside the puppy, or put it on the grooming table. I praise gently and profusely as I accomplish each change of position as listed:*

First I cradle the puppy between my hands and say “*Sit*,” as I mold the pup into a sit. Cradle the puppy under the throat with one hand, supporting the head, and cup the other hand around the pup’s bottom, tucking the hind legs squarely under it into the sit position. I am warm although definite in my manner.

Then I tell it “*Down*.” Again, I lower the pup from the sit to the down position from beside the puppy, gently lifting the front legs out, and lowering the pup’s body to the ground/table, holding down on the withers if needed, until the pup accepts that it must stay down without still being held there. The trick is to lift the feet enough to clear the ground, but not too high.

Next I go back to “*Sit*,” followed by “*Stand*.” Continue to support the puppy under the throat as for the sit, and brush the back of your other hand under the belly, in front of the stifle, to get the puppy to its feet.

*Using the back of your hand prevents your fingers from poking uncomfortably into the belly, and achieves a stretched stand suitable for a show pose. Doing so may also be effective because it resembles the sensation elicited when a bitch slips her nose and muzzle under a puppy to check if she should wash it to make it urinate. The puppy naturally tends to “freeze” then for a few seconds in a standing position, or with a hind leg in the air.*

I repeat the whole sequence three times. I don’t rush, but I spend only a few seconds on each position.

# 2. STAY and RELEASE

*I set the pup on the ground if I have been working with it on a table*.

Then I set the pup in a “sit” again, tell the pup “*Stay*,” making it hold the sit for a few seconds about a foot from me with my hands a few inches away, ready to replace it if needed. I keep my face low and in view of the puppy while I am doing all of this. If the pup should not hold still, and breaks the sit, I pick it up and put it back immediately where it was left. When it has stayed on the spot in the sit for 3-5 seconds, I give the release word “OK,” and act excited so the pup jumps up and comes to me for cuddling.

I increase the time to 10 – 15 seconds over the next several weeks.

# 3. COME

Now I move or run away and call the puppy to “*Come*” over a distance of 2-4 feet. (I have previously used a cheerful “Puppy, puppy” to call the litter for meals, so may use this, and blend it with the puppy’s name and come command.) When the puppy reaches me, I reach out and cuddle/cradle it to me, even pick it up, praising all the while.

# 4. FETCH

I then try to get the puppy to fetch a toy it likes (“*Get it*”) over a short distance of 2-4 feet, and reward it with a few seconds of gentle tug-of-war when it brings the toy back. I then say “*Give*,” and make it release the object. I take hold of the puppy and just gently squeeze the pup’s upper lips between its teeth to make it release a toy if needed, calmly saying “*Give*.”

I repeat a fetch several times.

*I play fetch and tug anyway at other times, but this way I make certain none of the pups have missed their turn during general play. Less confident puppies may have deferred to a more dominant littermate, and not want to pick up the toy.*

*Good working potential puppies can be tempted to chase and grab a toy very readily. You have to be quick and accurate to encourage them to come back with the toy, so they learn the game is to bring the object back to you for further tug-of-war, and the wonderful game of fetching again. Note that many puppies do not fetch successfully until 6 weeks of age or so. Moreover, any older pups that have had no previous exposures to toys may take a few trials to become interested.*

# 5. WALKING ON LEASH and FOLLOWING

*Take advantage of the fact that puppies naturally do not want to lose “mother” in an unfamiliar location.*

*Before trying this, it helps if puppies have worn a collar for a day or two previously, or dragged a shoelace attached to it, but if the leash is slight and small, they should scarcely notice it.*

I put a light leash on the puppy. I pick the puppy up and carry it to an unknown open area, not its familiar play yard, then set it down. I entice the pup to follow me, saying “Let’s go,” turning in the direction I wish to go and tapping my ankle with my fingers to show it what is wanted. At first I stop and go with the pup, trying to avoid any pull on the leash, which makes the pup fight and bite at the leash. The leash should just hang loosely, unnoticed. Most pups follow with a bit of patience and encouragement. I walk as far as 300 feet or so.

Then I take the leash off, and encourage the pup to “*Go home*” with me. Most pups return for the distance readily without the leash on.

**With a final cuddle, I carry the puppy back to home base to join the other puppies. On to the next!**

*I have found this training routine creates a puppy familiar with being handled and restrained, and responding to loving human actions. The puppy is acquainted with all of the basics of formal companion dog obedience training, and is ready to learn and respond as a good pet or future working dog of any kind.*

*I demonstrate to new owners what their puppy knows before it leaves my home with them the first time. I suggest that they keep up the training for the next month, until they advance to higher level training in puppy groups.*