

Makes Your New Pup Feel Unsafe, Unloved and Insecure Right from the Get-Go

Do you start off on the right foot or the wrong one when bringing home a puppy or adult dog? Most first-time (and even repeat) pet parents wrongly assume it's simple — so they wing it. Have you ever made any of these five mistakes tied to a potential lifetime of suffering? Please don't repeat them.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Good dogs aren't born; they're shaped through consistent training, proper nutrition and socialization during puppyhood
- Many first-time puppy parents make mistakes in dog-rearing that have the potential to affect their pet's health and behavior for a lifetime
- One very common mistake novice owners make is in how they feed their pup — especially if it's a large or giant breed
- Another mistake many new dog guardians make is ignoring their pet's teeth and nails
- Crate training and positive reinforcement behavior training are two more areas where many puppy parents slip up

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Many first-time puppy parents assume there's nothing too complicated about raising a pup to be a healthy, well-balanced adult dog. But there's actually quite a bit to learn and put into practice to do the job of puppy-rearing well.

Remember, good dogs aren't born, they're created throughout puppyhood by intentional choices owners make. Rarely do "good dogs" occur by default. There are certain common mistakes novice puppy owners make that set their pet up for a lifetime of health or behavioral problems, including the following five.

Five Mistakes New Puppy Owners Make

1. **They guess at what food, how much or how often to feed their puppy** — Many puppies are overfed, and this leads to a variety of orthopedic diseases, especially in large and giant breeds. Large breed puppies require a diet that promotes slow but steady growth; smaller breeds often need energy-dense diets.

There are several factors involved in determining the amount to feed your puppy, including age, current weight, anticipated adult weight, breed, environment and activity level.

Puppies eat much more for their weight than adult dogs, and young puppies eat more than older puppies. Very young puppies should be fed three to four times a day; older puppies often do well with twice-daily feedings.

Feeding information on dog food packages give guidelines on portions to feed, but remember those are only general guidelines. There's no one-size-fits-all amount that every puppy should be fed, and it certainly depends on what type of food you choose.

Raw-fed puppies often need a larger volume of food than kibble-fed puppies, because most well-formulated raw food contains less fat and calories per ounce.

Another common feeding guideline is to allow your pup to eat at her own pace for about 10 minutes three times a day. However, again, there's no one-size-fits-all plan for every puppy.

Feed your puppy the amount of food required to keep her lean. You should be able to easily feel her ribs, spine and other bones; see an obvious waist when viewed from above; and an abdominal tuck.

Work with your holistic or integrative veterinarian to determine how many calories your puppy needs at each stage of her development. As a general rule, puppies can be moved to adult foods between 6 and 10 months of age, depending on breed, size and current physical development.

2. **They don't help their new pet learn to accept handling** — Most dog guardians can't resist petting and cuddling a new furry family member. But did you know snuggle sessions are a great opportunity to get your new pup or adult dog comfortable with having all the areas of his body handled?

Soon enough your new pet will need to visit the veterinarian or perhaps the groomer. He'll need to have his teeth brushed every day by you, and his nails trimmed on a regular basis.

The best way to prepare your new pup for all the handling he'll require throughout his life is to begin getting him used to having sensitive areas of his body handled as soon as you bring him home.

While you're petting him or he's resting next to you, start by handling his paws one at a time, and each individual toe.

Run your hand over his belly, abdomen and groin area, as well as his back and hips. Move his tail and check his backside. Lift his ears and run your fingers over the silky skin on the underside.

Rub softly around his eyes and lips, and gently slide a finger in his mouth and move it over his teeth and gums.

This will not only acclimate your puppy to human handling, but will also help you familiarize yourself with how his body feels to quickly identify any abnormalities that occur, like a lump or bump on or under his skin.

3. **They don't take their dog's teeth or nails seriously** — Two body parts many pet parents tend to overlook are their dog's teeth and nails. Your puppy needs to have his teeth brushed every day, or several times a week at a minimum. Initially this is more of a ritual to get the pup used to the process.

Like teaching a 3-year-old child how to brush their teeth, it's more going through the motions than actually preventing cavities.

But regardless of diet, some breeds are prone to developing lots of plaque well before a year of age and if you don't begin early, by the time your pet is around 3 years old, he'll have some degree of gum disease.

As time passes the situation only gets worse, leading to bad breath, painful oral disease, lost teeth and a big veterinary bill. Your dog's nails also need to be clipped regularly. How often depends on how fast they grow and how much time he spends on surfaces that grind them down naturally.

If you can't bear to do the clipping yourself, make a standing appointment with a groomer or veterinarian who will do it for you. Dogs very often develop serious paw problems from nails that have grown too long.

4. **They don't crate train** — Many dog guardians think crate training is cruel, but nothing could be further from the truth if it's done correctly. Unless someone in your pup's past used a crate inappropriately and caused her emotional trauma, she should enjoy having a little room of her own if you introduce her to it in a positive way.

Dogs are natural den dwellers, and a crate affords you the opportunity to work with your pup's natural desire to seek out small, dark and safe spots to inhabit. This is a huge benefit for both of you, for housetraining purposes, car or plane travel, or overnight stays with friends, family or at a pet-friendly hotel.

If you're anti-crate training, try keeping an open mind. Talk to dog-loving friends who've crate-trained their pups. Chances are they'll tell you their dog seeks out her crate on her own for naps, at bedtime and whenever she just wants some time to herself.

5. **They don't teach obedience through positive behavior reinforcement** — Behavior problems are the No. 1 reason dogs are relinquished to animal shelters, the No. 1 reason they don't find new forever homes, and as a result, the No. 1 reason dogs are euthanized. From the day you bring your puppy or adult dog home, you should begin teaching her commands such as come, sit, stay and down.

A puppy should begin formal training at 8 weeks, and if you adopt an adult dog that has received no obedience training, you should enroll her in a class right away. If your pup is too young to go to class, then enroll in a puppy playgroup. It's also good idea to take your dog through a refresher obedience course every few years, or when you need help with the inevitable behavioral hiccup that crops up as she ages.

If you want a balanced, well-mannered dog, the way to achieve this is with positive reinforcement behavior training, not punishment-based training. A growing number of studies show that positive reinforcement training of our furry companions is much more effective than training that involves dominance and punishment.

Some studies even conclude that punishment-based training actually creates additional problem behaviors, which is certainly an outcome no one wants. Positive reinforcement training is based on the theory that rewarding your dog for desired behavior will encourage more of that behavior.

Sources and References