

Week 8 – new home, and making your own personal Puppy Plan

In his first week with you, you are beginning to teach your puppy who his new family are, teaching him to learn to trust them, and begin to want to be with you. This should be a settling-in week.

First Tasks

1. Create your own personal Puppy Plan by thinking about what things may become a part of your dog's life (now or any time in the future). Using the examples below, use the Checklist feature to make a list of all the things that you think are likely to be part of your dog's life – babies, children, different people, other animals, livestock, car, bus and train journeys, pubs, friends' houses, dog shows, vets, traffic.... Everything you can think of that you want your puppy to accept as a normal part of his routine. For the next eight weeks he is still learning about who is part of his social group and who is not. Your job is to make sure he gets plenty of rewarding experiences with the people, animals and things that matter, and unrewarding experiences with those that are not, so he learns to ignore them.

Fill all those different things in on your personal Puppy Plan, and you are ready to go. You can make additions as you go along but try to think of as much as possible to start with.

The checklist is in two parts – one is the things you want your puppy to be friendly towards and interact with, play with and look on as being part of his social group (socialisation), and the other is the things you want your puppy to accept as normal, not worry about and so ignore and pay attention to you instead in their presence (habituation).

Examples of things you may want to include:

Socialisation

People – this should include as many of these as possible (as you want your dog to be friendly to everyone): adult women, adult men, men with beards, people with glasses, tall men, people of different ethnic origins, loud confident people, shy or timid people, people wearing hats, people carrying umbrellas, postmen, elderly people, disabled people, wheelchair users, teenagers, younger children, toddlers and babies. Your puppy should be rewarded and given treats and games etc by these people – or you can reward him for interacting with them positively.

Dogs (and your cats if they are confident and are happy with dogs) – this should include dogs, other puppies, dogs of all colours, shaggy dogs, dogs with flat faces, large dogs, small dogs (as you want your dog to be friendly with all other dogs). Reward your puppy for positive interactions with these. It can also include any household cats.

Habituation

Other animals – unknown cats or your own cats if they are shy, unfriendly or worried about dogs (as they would far prefer the puppy to ignore them!), horses, sheep, cows, other livestock, small furry animals (rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters etc) – or any other animals that will form part of his life or that he may encounter. In

these cases you want to be practising rewarding your puppy for ignoring them and listening to you when they are there, not interacting with them.

Places – these can include every room in the house, garden, car, quiet street, busy road, high street, friend's house, outside school, pub, place with slippery floor, park, outdoor market/car boot sale, railway station, trains, bus stops, vet's practice, party, farm, stables... wherever you and your dog may find yourselves in the future. You need to make sure he has happy experiences in these places, and so accepts them as part of his life and nothing unusual or scary. The more places you introduce him to, the more you are ensuring he will take new locations in his stride as going new places is nothing new for him.

Distractions – these can include cars, buses, trains, motorcycles, sirens, noisy machinery, vacuum cleaner... all the things you want to reward your puppy for being non-reactive to.

Others – cyclists, joggers, skateboarders, children running, people playing football, squirrels... again things you want to reward your puppy for ignoring (use a treat or a toy to distract him, and then reward him with the food or a game). Add anything else here that is going to be part of your own puppy's life.

Have a look at the Notes section to decide if your puppy needs extra attention on certain parts of his Puppy Plan, as well as checking if the breeder has passed on any information in their Puppy Plan that they handed over to you or if there is anything missing from your puppy's early education.

Now you have your very own tailor-made Puppy Plan, you are ready for the next few weeks.

If your puppy has come from somewhere that hasn't been practising the Puppy Plan, you can still follow the New Owner's part of the Plan – but don't expect too much from your puppy. Take things a little slower, making sure your puppy is happy and confident at all times – using high value treats or favourite toys to distract him from anything that seems to be worrying him, and then rewarding him for more appropriate behaviour. If you are concerned that your puppy is very fearful or nervous, consider seeing a behaviourist who specialises in puppies (your vet may be able to recommend someone) before this becomes too much of a problem.

1. Find a good puppy party or playgroup in your area run by either a reputable trainer, training group or your veterinary practice and go along and watch a session. Your puppy is still too young to join as he is unvaccinated and the immunity he has inherited from his mother is now weak, but he will need to socialise with lots of other dogs in the next few weeks if he is to grow up with good social skills. Make sure the class you watch is full of fun, rewards, and a chance for the puppies to play one on one, or in equally matched but very small groups, in a controlled way (not an off-lead free for all – which just teaches pushy puppies to be pushier and shy puppies to be even more fearful and avoid others!). A bad puppy playgroup will undo all your good work – and sadly there are plenty of bad ones out there. If you like what you see, sign your puppy up for as soon as his vaccination status allows him to mix with others. Also if you know of a well-behaved, calm older dog that you know is good with puppies, they are ideal to teach your new puppy how to behave around other dogs. Many puppy classes include these.
2. In the first couple of days, take your puppy to your vet for a check-up. Ask the vet or vet nurse to do nothing to your puppy except have a look at him, handle him gently – and give him treats. This is not the time for vaccinations etc (even if you have to come back in a couple of days' time for that) – you do not want your puppy's first visit to your vet to be anything other than positive! Your vet will thank you for this when your puppy is a large adult dog who likes the vet. This isn't just a health check – it is also a part of his socialisation. Use this time to talk about worming and also his vaccination schedule, as you want him to be out and about as soon as possible.

3. Your vet may offer an open door arrangement policy to their clients in order to encourage them to bring their puppies to the surgery during quieter times in order for the staff to make a fuss of them and for them to build positive associations. This can have a significant and life-long positive benefit on the dog's perception of veterinary care.
4. Remember your puppy is not vaccinated and so carry him and do NOT put him on the floor at the vets.
5. Make sure the puppy gets to meet the whole family – and have positive experiences with them so he learns to like and trust you all. That means everyone handles him gently, rewards him, plays with him – and begins to do some basic training with him (even just giving him a reward for coming to them or following them) so he learns to enjoy working for everyone. Download the Dogs Trust iPhone or iPad app You and Your Puppy, or look at www.youtube.com/dogstrusttraining to get an idea of how to start your puppy's training at home. Do not let anyone handle him roughly or play boisterous games with him – no matter how excited everyone is about the new arrival.
6. Make sure your puppy is used to wearing his collar and identity disc (the breeder should already have started this, so continue this by putting it on him when he has his mind on something else (like dinner!). Do not leave it on in a crate or puppy pen.
7. It is important that your puppy gets used to wearing his collar as the law states that any dog in a public place must wear a collar and tag with the name of the owner and the address clearly on it. A phone number is optional but advisable.

