

PVC Puppy Chronicles -- Life With A New Puppy

This is a rabbit trail off the #pvcpuppychronicles about 8 Labrador Retriever puppies in the Delta x Arlo 2021 litter. You can read the rest of the series by going to The Pet Vet Corner Facebook page and searching for the hashtag.

I kept one of the puppies for an extra 3 weeks because his new owners were moving. He left for his new home recently, and I thought I would talk briefly about things that are important to do with 8-16ish week old puppies after you bring them home.

1) Socialization. This means the puppy GOES PLACES and the puppy SEES THINGS. It means you protect your puppy from anything bad happening to him while he gets to experience the world.

Socialization does NOT mean:

- Your puppy gets to greet or gets greeted by every dog you see.
- Your puppy is greeted by every person you see.
- Your puppy is forced to endure petting, sniffing, handling, etc by dozens of strange people/dogs s/he is not comfortable around.
- Your puppy goes to dog parks.

Remember: much of that fearful behavior that no one likes is actually genetic. It is really difficult to make a fearful, nervous dog into something that looks stable. If you're starting with the well bred, confident, relaxed pup, you still need socialization but you can get away with less socialization. If you're starting with the skittish, wide-eyed pup who already wants to bark and/or hide at 8 weeks of age -- you're going to need all the socialization and all the training help you can get!

Things this puppy did while he was with me:

- 9 weeks - trip to Idaho to see my mom while I ran an agility trial
- 10 weeks - trip to a hunt test in NE Colorado
- 11 weeks - trip to a dog show in Estes Park CO, followed by a trip to western Colorado to a Lab breeder's house, followed by a trip back across CO, sleeping in the truck with me (it's dumb to get a hotel when you're traveling with 4 dogs and 3 need to be in crates overnight), went through Rocky Mountain National Park and got his picture taken at 12,000 feet, and then back to Wyoming.

Within that, there was lots of crate time (put pup in, close the door, leave on the trip, he'll figure it out -- and he did), lots of driving, lots of meeting new people (he would run up to all of them to say hi; he's actually going to be a pup that needs to be limited on how many people he is allowed to meet so he doesn't become rude and bratty with age), and meeting a few socially appropriate, age matched dogs. Two 6 month old pups at the hunt test from a breeder friend of mine, four Lab pups from 8 to 12 weeks of age at the dog show he played with in the xpen, my mom's two adult dogs and one 9 month old puppy in Idaho, and of course the four adult dogs I currently have at home.

He was on leash maybe twice during this time. I prefer to teach pups to follow and be with me voluntarily, but of course when I'm at a competition I can't have the pup running free. This is a really confident, stable puppy so he didn't really "need" everything that we did. It wasn't practical to leave him at home, so I brought him along for everything.

2) Training. This means you purposely set aside 5 or 10 minutes each day to work on teaching the puppy something with a specific goal.

If you have a Malinois, you need to do 10 minute sessions on repeat for 12 hours every day. (lol) For most of our other breeds, 5 minutes once or twice a day is plenty for a puppy. They have the attention span of a goldfish.

There's an infinite number of places where you can get advice on how to cohabitate with your dog and not do anything to make him/her unhappy with you. That isn't training. I don't know what it is, and I don't know why anyone would want it. Apparently, training is becoming a lost art.

Training is taking an imperfect dog and molding it into your vision of the perfect dog. Training is taking that puppy that jumps, nips, plays keep away and steals your shoes, does back flips on the end of the leash and then walks himself, or is apprehensive in new situations -- and developing that into a well behaved canine citizen who walks quietly on a loose leash, waits to greet people until given permission, tolerates the occasional unwanted dog or human in his space without growling or biting, doesn't jump, bark, bite (in fun or otherwise), comes when called, and is wonderful to live with. Good dogs don't happen by accident. They take work. A lot of work!

Puppies need feedback. Yes that's ok to do, no don't touch that. Yes I like that behavior, here's a treat. No, be gentle with your teeth. If you start training them young, it requires much milder feedback and corrections. I'm constantly giving puppies feedback while I train, and preventing them from doing things I don't like, without it being obvious to anyone on the outside. Now, if you let the puppy do whatever it wants for 18 months and then try to set expectations, that "feedback" has to be much more extreme to get a change in behavior.

"As little pressure as possible, as much as necessary."

Socialization and training are both key to developing the dog of your dreams, after you've started with a well bred puppy. The first year of your puppy's life will set the stage for the next 10 or 14 years of his/her life. Put in the work early, and it will pay huge dividends later for you.

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