

Puppy Basics Adopter/Foster Handout 2025

Tips for Socialization, House Training, Crate Training, Mouthing/Biting, Chewing, Jumping

Socialization, Handling, Grooming

Socializing and exposing your puppy to everyday sights and sounds is extremely important. A puppy that leads a secluded life may grow up to be a fearful adult dog. It's tricky because you don't want to expose your young puppy to other dogs and areas that carry diseases before they are fully vaccinated. There are, however, things you can do to help your puppy before and after they've completed their series of vaccinations which typically happens around **5 months of age**.

Meeting People. Ask friends/family to meet your new puppy. If your puppy seems shy/timid around new people, give your friend some treats and ask them to drop the treats on the ground for the puppy to eat. They can gradually work toward offering treats from their hands, but take it slow if the puppy seems nervous about the new person. Never let anyone force their attention on your puppy as this only heightens their fear of strangers. Once your puppy is fully vaccinated you can start to take him/her out to public places that don't have a lot of dog traffic, such as a walk in your neighborhood. *Keep your puppy away from places like dog parks, pet stores, and other popular dog places until they are fully vaccinated as these locations put your puppy at higher risk of contracting a contagious disease.* If your puppy seems extremely timid around new people please let us know so we can help you with further training tips.

Handling/Grooming. Get your puppy used to human handling. Touch their feet, ears, tail, etc. Pick them up. Brush them with a dog brush. Getting your puppy comfortable with this type of handling will help tremendously when it's time to go to the vet or have their nails trimmed. If your puppy seems nervous about this type of handling, have some treats on hand and feed your puppy treats while handling them so they associate the handling with good things. You can smear a thin layer of peanut butter on a bully stick or something similar and handle your puppy while he/she is licking the peanut butter. This peanut butter trick also can work during bath time.

*****Special Note for APA! Fosters: If you are fostering a puppy please take note of additional restrictions regarding socialization, specifically with regard to meeting other dogs (below). Please refer to the [Dog Foster Handbook](#) and this [Key Dos and Don'ts of Being an APA! Foster Parent](#) for clarification about rules and restrictions with your foster dog.*****

Meeting Dogs. Dog-dog socialization is important! Before your puppy is fully vaccinated you are somewhat limited where you can bring your puppy (no dog parks!). As an alternative, once your puppy is at least 4 months old, you can ask a friend to bring over their dog-social dog for a play date. Make sure your friend's dog is puppy-friendly as not all dogs enjoy the company of puppies. You do not want your puppy to have a negative experience with other dogs so be very mindful about his/her first experiences with other dogs and always supervise the interactions. For adopted puppies who are fully vaccinated, puppy classes that include puppy free-play are great because they are supervised as well as offer a more sanitary place for puppies to play (this is a very different environment than a dog park).

Introducing New Sights/Sounds. Expose your puppy to different sounds and objects both within your home and outside. You may have to start at low levels or from a distance. Using treats just as you did with new people is helpful. If your puppy seems fearful of sounds like thunder, you can use an app on your phone to play the sound while you adjust the volume. Always start at a level where your puppy shows zero fear and only work very gradually at increasing the volume/distance. If your puppy starts to show fear,

back off the volume, give him/her lots of treats then try again later. This may be a slow acclimation process but it's worth it. When your puppy is old enough, bring treats along and walk him/her past a playground where children are having fun. You don't need to let a bunch of children pet your puppy if he/she seems fearful, but get your puppy used to the sounds of children playing, trucks passing, garbage trucks working, etc.

If your puppy is struggling with any of these socialization/handling exercises please let us know so we can work with you on a plan specific to your puppy.

House/Potty Training

Puppies can start house training at about 3 months of age but it will likely take a couple of months before they are reliably giving you signals that they need to go outside to potty. If your puppy is already close to 6 months and has been living in the shelter they are just starting potty-training and, just like a younger pup, it could take a couple of months. There are some key points to keep in mind during this process that are almost universally applicable:

Holding It. Every dog has a time limit. Puppies under six months are typically unable to hold it in for more than a few hours. Prepare for this! Come home during your lunch break, hire a dog sitter or walker to come once or twice a day while you're at work, or enroll your puppy in daycare.

Crate Training. Puppies generally don't want to eliminate next to their food or their bed. The rest of your home is "fair game". This is where crate-training your puppy can come in really handy. If you don't want to use a crate, find an alternative way to confine your puppy (a small bathroom with a baby gate in the doorway so they can see out but not get out can work well). When you are not home, when you are asleep, or when you can't be watching over your puppy, put him in his crate or confined area. (See section on Crate Training, below.)

Establish a Schedule. Setting up a schedule your puppy can rely on will help him learn faster. Take your puppy out first thing in the morning, within 20 minutes of eating/drinking, after an indoor play session with you, as soon as they wake from a nap, and right before bed. More/frequent outings during the day will help your puppy hold it longer at night, however you should expect to get up in the middle of the night as most puppies cannot hold it all night long.

Productive Outings. Give your puppy plenty of time to potty by staying with them outside for at least 15 mins, if necessary. Give your pup lots of praise and treats every time they potty outside. Make them think it's the best thing they have ever done! If you've been outside with your puppy for 15 mins and they don't potty but it's been 2 hours since their last time peeing, return inside but put your puppy in their crate (or confined area) for 10 minutes, then take them outside again. Repeat the outside/crate process until they have pottied outside, at which time they can have supervised time outside the crate with you (a double reward).

Reward Only! It's vital to successful housetraining that you NEVER scold your pup for going potty inside, even—especially—when you catch them in the act. More often than not, the dog won't understand that you are scolding them for going inside. They are more likely to think you are scolding them for going at all, and as a result they will want to hide from you to do their business. Instead your focus should be on praising and treating every time the pup goes outside. If your pup is learning for the first time or is struggling with learning outside from in, you can amp up the reward by "jackpotting" even a little outdoor tinkle with a BUNCH of treats and praise (or toys, or whatever your pup thinks is a great reward).

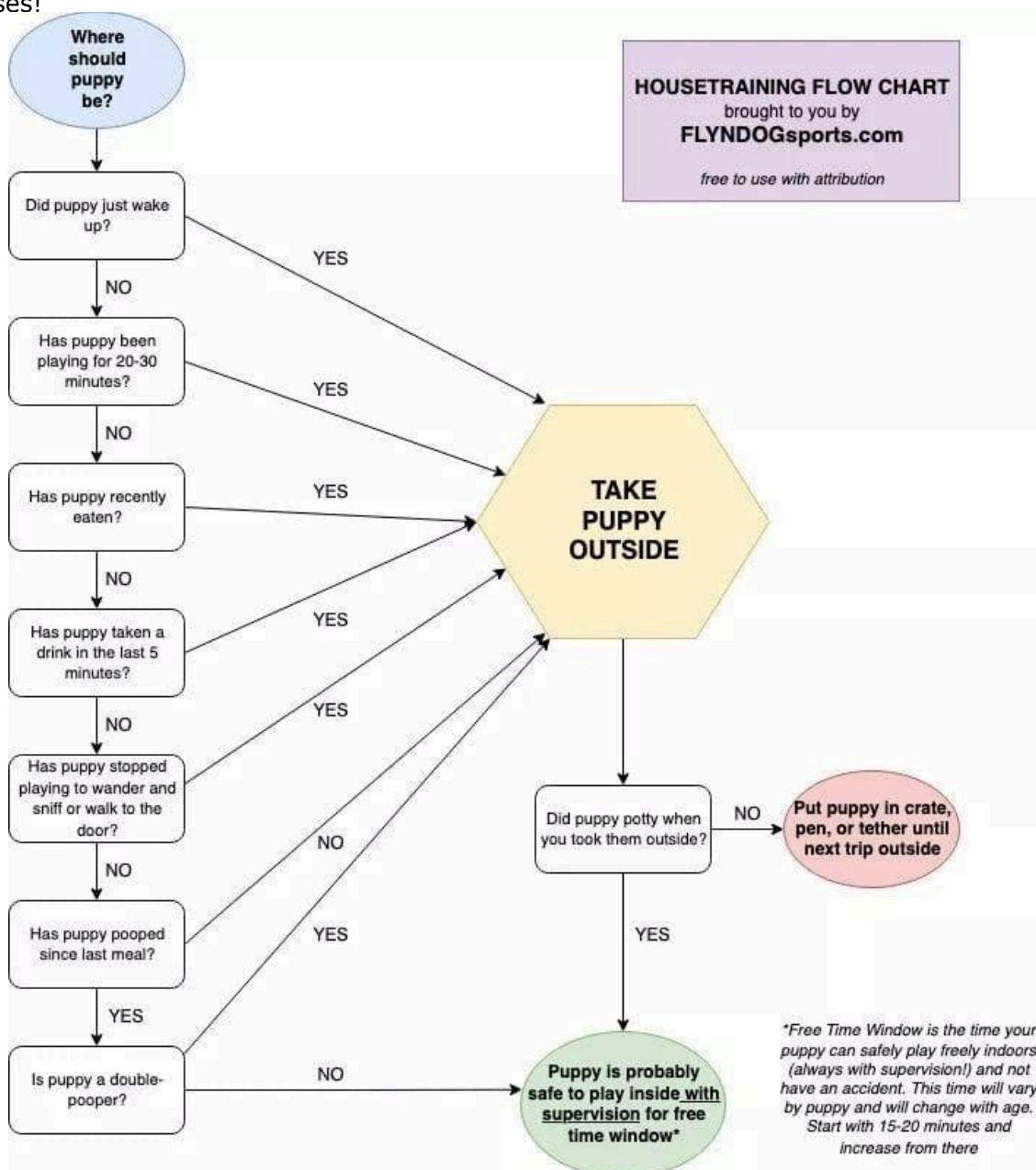
Prevention & Redirection. While in the process of housetraining, make sure you have eyes on your pup at all times. Keep a lightweight leash attached to their collar (what we call a "drag leash") so that, the second

they start to go, you can lightly clap your hands to interrupt them (don't yell or frighten your pup) then quickly pick up the end of the leash and walk them outside. Remain neutral until they're outside, and as soon as they start to finish their business out there you can reward! If you are preoccupied with other tasks while inside, limit their access to your home. Use a crate or exercise pen to keep them from wandering around unsupervised.

Clean up Accidents. Dogs tend to want to potty where they smell themselves or other dogs so it's important to thoroughly clean up any accidents. Use an enzyme-based cleaner to completely eliminate the smell. Simple Solution and Nature's Miracle are 2 such brands. [This link](#) provides some useful information on cleaning urine odors and stains.

A note about pee-pads. Pee pads can work against your efforts of teaching your puppy NOT to potty inside. However, sometimes it's necessary to use these pads. If you do, keep them to a confined area (like in their exercise pen) or place them near the door to help with the transition once you are ready to eliminate the use of pee pads.

If you're having difficulty with excessive urination or bowel movements, contact your vet to rule out possible medical causes!



Crate Training

Successful crate training opens up a lot of options for you and your dog, both within obedience and behavior training as well as life in general. A dog properly acclimated to the crate is going to be far less stressed during travel, boarding, or overnight stays at the vet. Crating can prevent destructive chewing and assist in potty training. The structure provided by crating can also reduce minor separation anxiety. The most fundamental and vital thing to remember about crate training is **the crate is never a punishment**. The crate needs to be a comfortable and pleasant space for your dog. Some puppies accept the crate in no time at all however some puppies are a bit more fearful in the crate and need a slower acclimation process. Here's how to achieve that:

The Crate. Choose a crate that is big enough for your pup to stand up and easily turn around. Puppies in the process of house-training should not have much more room than that. If you want to purchase a larger crate to accommodate your growing puppy, use a divider until they have grown into the larger crate. Some crates come with a wire divider-panel, or you can stuff an inexpensive large pillow/cushion in the back of the crate while your puppy is still small, then remove it when they grow. Plastic and metal wire crates each have their pros and cons, but the choice largely comes down to preference (either the dog's or the human's). Some dogs like the closed-in plastic crates while others do better with more visibility in wire crates. Go with what works best for you and your pup!

Introducing the Crate. Encourage your puppy to investigate the crate. Toss treats or a favorite toy in to begin the positive association. Work on this until your puppy goes in and out of the crate without displaying any nervous body language. This could take a few minutes or several days. Make the crate as cozy and comfortable as possible for your puppy with a blanket or towel and some chew toys. Include something with your scent on it like an old, unwashed t-shirt or pillowcase.

Location. Generally speaking, the crate should be placed in a high traffic area of the home, or where the pup is used to spending time (most likely around you or other people in the home). At night you may want to move the crate into your bedroom and possibly right next to your bed so your puppy can hear your breathing and/or see you at night. If your puppy whines in the crate at night and you know they don't have to potty, try to ignore them or at least wait for a moment of quiet before attending to them. Of course, if it's potty time take them out right away, let them potty outside and then put them right back into the crate. Do not allow play time in the middle of the night.

Feeding Time. Food is an excellent training aid. Even if your dog isn't highly food motivated, you can still use this basic necessity to your advantage. Start feeding your puppy in the crate. Try placing the food bowl at the back of the crate but leave the crate door open. Let your puppy enter/exit at his will. If your puppy is showing too much fear of the crate then begin by setting the bowl in front of the crate. Over the next several days (or longer, depending on the dog's comfort level) *gradually* move the bowl further into the crate. Let your puppy eat a few meals in the crate and then work on closing the crate door when he is fully in the crate and seems relaxed. Once they've reached this point, you can begin closing the door while they're eating. At first, open the door once they've finished. As you progress, start taking a pause between their last bite and opening the gate. Lengthen this pause over several mealtimes until they can stay in the crate calmly for up to ten minutes after eating. If at any point they begin to bark or cry or paw at the gate, DO NOT open the gate until they have stopped. Otherwise they will think complaining makes the gate open!

Adding Time. Start crating your puppy outside of mealtimes. In the beginning, they should be able to see you while in the crate. Toss some treats or a toy in the crate and start giving a name to the act of going into the crate (such as "crate" or "kennel"). Wait a minute or two (walk across the room, pick up toys, sit on the couch—this doesn't have to be while you are standing right in front of the crate, so long as your pup can see you) and then let them out. Do this multiple times throughout the day and slowly increase the amount of time. Once they can relax quietly in the crate for up to thirty minutes (this could take several days) start

leaving the room. Once you've worked up to at least thirty minutes of calm, quiet crate time with no one in the room, you can start leaving the home for short periods of time with your pup crated.

Departures & Arrivals. No matter how much we want to coo over our pups when we leave and how we want to match their excitement when we come home, it's important we keep our comings and goings calm and low-key. You want to reinforce the idea that your being gone was no big deal. When you do let your dog out of the crate, make sure they don't have a chance to shove past your hand the second the gate is unlatched. Block the exit with your body and the gate until you give a release cue (e.g. "free").

Exercise. Puppies have lots of energy but they also sleep a lot. Give your puppy plenty of exercise *before* they go in the crate, this will help them relax/sleep while in the crate. Along with physical exercise, you can give your puppy something to chew on (and work their mouths) like a Kong lined with some peanut butter or pumpkin puree. Careful that you don't give your puppy too much to eat if you're going to be gone for a long time as you don't want your puppy to have to potty in his crate.

Crate Options. Ideally, we don't want to crate a dog for longer than they're used to. Realistically, many of us have full time jobs away from home and still want to prevent destructive behaviors and potty messes all over the place. There are ways to work around this reality without ruining our progress with the crate. You can keep your pup in a bathroom or laundry room where they can't get into anything that might hurt them. Using a baby gate in the doorway allows the puppy to see out but not get out. Give them some old towels or blankets to sleep on, but make sure things like trash cans and toilet paper are out of reach. Another option is to buy a plastic playpen or metal exercise pen to keep them contained in a specific area of the house. (Click [this link](#) for an example of an "x-pen").

Chewing

Dogs interact with the world with their mouths. They don't have hands and opposable thumbs like us. Using their mouths is how they eat, play, explore, pick things up, etc. Not only is chewing natural for dogs, but it has health benefits as well (so long as they're chewing the right things). Then how do we make sure they don't chew what they shouldn't?

Management. Your dog can't chew on what it can't reach. Keep shoes, kids' toys, remotes, and other curious and chewable items out of your dog's reach. For items you can't put away, like furniture or baseboards, try a product called Bitter Apple spray, which you can find in most pet stores.

If you need to cook dinner, make a phone call, or get involved in some other task that takes your attention away from your dog, have a dog-proof area. This can be a penned-off area or even the dog's crate. It's not a punishment, so make sure your dog has plenty of positive things to keep them occupied. (One of the many benefits of crate training is to prevent destructive behaviors like chewing). You can also tether your puppy to you by clipping on his leash and hooking it to your waist, so you can keep an eye on your puppy.

Redirect. We want to teach our puppies what they ARE allowed to chew on, not just the don'ts. If you catch your dog chewing on something they shouldn't, interrupt them with a neutral (non-praise, but also non-punishment) noise that gets their attention. A mild "eh eh" or "no" or a light clap of your hands work well. Offer them an appropriate toy or chew instead as a means of redirecting the chewing behavior. While your dog is in the process of learning these dos and don'ts, offer lots of praise any time your dog picks up something they are allowed to chew.

Exercise. There is an adage that "a tired dog is a good dog". Sometimes a dog chews for no other reason than they are bored (as one might chew on the cap of a pen in a dull meeting). It's important to make sure your dog has not only plenty of physical stimulation, but mental stimulation as well. Mental stimulation can

include training games (learning sit, down, shake, etc.), puzzle toys, or even a kong stuffed with tasty treats (peanut butter, pumpkin puree, and plain yogurt are a few ideas). When you've had enough play time with your puppy but he/she still has tons of energy, give them a puzzle toy that takes them 15 minutes to complete to help tire them out and give you some peace. Always monitor what you give your puppy to assure they aren't able to chew off and swallow pieces that may be a choking hazard or cause an obstruction. Here is a [link](#) to some puzzle toy ideas.

Mouthing/Play Biting

Puppies play with their mouths. If you've ever seen puppies play together, it's all mouth-on-mouth and biting each other's ears, paws, etc. Your puppy likely wants to play with you in just the same way. While it's understandable, those puppy teeth are sharp and it hurts! It's up to us humans to teach them that doing so is not acceptable when engaging with people. Here's how:

Redirect. As with chewing, you want to teach your dog what IS allowed. So always have toys nearby. When it comes to mild mouthing, simply engage them with a toy and continue playtime. You will probably have to repeat this several times even within the same stretch of playtime to help your dog understand. Be persistent and consistent.

Remove all attention. If your pup isn't responding after several attempts to redirect, and/or the mouthing/biting become more intense stop play and immediately walk away. Don't talk to them further and don't interact with them in any way. Simply remove yourself from them. To your pup, suddenly the game has stopped. With enough repetitions, they'll come to understand that being mouthy is what causes the fun to go away. Note: yelling or yelping when your puppy mouths/bites you may excite your puppy even more, the opposite of what you want.

Reward Positive Behavior. Remember that your puppy doesn't know what you want until you teach them. If you only correct the bad behavior they are left wondering what to do. Make sure you reward your puppy for grabbing a toy instead of your hand by praising and playing with him/her. If you've just left your puppy alone for mouthing on you and he/she follows you in a calm manner, take the time to reward this calm approach with praise and playtime. At first this may mean a lot of on/off of your attention but keep it up and your puppy will soon learn how to get what he wants (which is your attention). Note: ignoring is also a great tactic for attention-seeking barking, but be sure to reward when your pup is being quiet and calm.

Jumping Up

Puppy jumping is usually greeted with enthusiasm and affection but when your puppy grows up, it's no longer fun to have them jump on you or others. Now is the time to teach your puppy that it's not ok to jump on people.

Never reward any dog for jumping. In fact, we want to engage them as little as possible. Our natural inclination is to tell them "no" and push them away but even a stern "no" or "eh eh" is a form of attention and many dogs consider pushing them away to be a form of play so resist the urge to do that. Here are a few ways to effectively deter jumping behavior:

Teach an incompatible behavior. A dog can't jump if they're expected to do something that requires all four paws on the ground (what we call "four on the floor"). Teach your puppy to "sit". If your dog wants your attention, they must sit for it.

Remove all attention. The moment your puppy jumps on you turn your attention off of them and walk away. Again, this means not even scolding them. Stand up and either a) turn around and walk away, or b)

walk “through” (or past) them and keep walking. You puppy should only be getting your attention when they have all “four on the floor”.

Reward Positive Behavior. If your puppy approaches you without jumping up, be sure to reward that with praise and affection. If your puppy knows “sit”, give them that command and give tons of praise/affection for knowing how to “sit”. If your puppy starts to jump up, turn and walk away again. Your puppy may be a bit confused at first but they will soon figure out that the only way to get your attention is to have “four on the floor”. As with all puppy training, consistency is key so everyone in the family (and your friends) must follow this same training technique.

With enough repetition of these steps, your puppy will pick up on the pattern: “four on the floor” = attention; jumping = no attention. To puppies, it’s really that simple. As your dog begins to show an understanding and offers a sit in a situation where they would usually jump, lavish them with praise and other rewards.

Continued Support

Raising and teaching puppies takes patience and time plus some trial and error to figure out what works best for you and your pup. We encourage you to check out the flyer below if you would like personalized one-on-one training from a private trainer. The first week is free and includes an hour long virtual session plus you can text with your trainer throughout the day as questions arise. If you choose to [sign up for this service](#), after the one week free trial, you will receive a 10% discount and a donation will be made to APA! in honor of your pup!