

How to Puppy-Proof a Home

BACKGROUND

Puppies are a fun new addition to any home, but they can also bring a level of frustration to any family. Puppies love to explore, chew, and play. This is part of their charm, but some things need to be kept off limits for their benefit. Therefore, as a puppy's caretaker, it is your responsibility to adapt things around your home to minimize risks of injury to your pup ("puppy-proof" the home). In doing so, you can also minimize the chance that your puppy will damage or destroy your valuable possessions.

GETTING STARTED

Equipment/materials that may be useful:

- Puppy crate
- Toys
- Puppy bed
- Food and water dishes
- Childproofing materials
- Chew toys for dogs
- Baby gates

The most important point when dealing with a puppy that has caused a problem (such as damaging something valuable or urinating or defecating in the home) is to resist the urge to punish. Puppies simply don't understand that a loud voice or a physical punishment after the fact means they were not supposed to do something that felt natural to them at the time. No amount of scolding or striking an animal conveys the link between punishment and a "bad deed." Puppies treated this way learn to hide from the person doing the punishing (which then is sometimes misinterpreted by the person as "He/she knows that was a wrong thing to do," and the cycle of misunderstanding is perpetuated). The puppy can become more confused about why someone is scolding them and may develop behavioral problems in addition to not understanding right from wrong.

Instead, help puppies to understand which behaviors are rewarded, and reward and praise all desired and good behaviors. For this to work you need to meet the puppy's needs given his or her age, activity, and development stage.

PROCEDURE

Everything is new to puppies. They do not know what is good or bad for them, what may hurt them (electrical cords, poisonous plants, etc.) or that they are destroying an expensive piece of furniture, clothing, or other valuable human possession.

The first step in preventing injuries and damage is to identify potential problems and remove them from their reach or block their access to them. Some very common sources of great harm to puppies that cause emergency room visits and fatalities are listed below. All of the following should be placed out of any puppy's reach or protected from the puppy by containment and constant oversight. In fact, there are parts of your home where your puppy should probably just not spend time be—the garage, the shed, or a storage basement are probably best kept off-limits.

High-risk items that can **harm puppies**:

- Electrical/extension cords and power strips
- House plants
- Household cleaning products and other chemicals
- Medications (veterinary or human). Check under dressers where items could have rolled and puppies can reach.
- BEWARE OF ANTIFREEZE. It is bright green and sweet and it kills dogs. Ethylene glycol is the most common component of

antifreeze and just 2 or 3 good licks of it by a puppy are enough to cause end-stage (fatal) kidney failure in 48 to 72 hours. Unused or spilled antifreeze should be brought to a hazardous waste disposal site.

Other items may not be as likely to cause harm, but they are common targets for chewing and destruction.

- Shoes
- Children's toys
- Clothing
- Books, magazines
- Remote controls
- Blankets
- Toilet paper
- Trash cans
- Candles
- Baking towels, cleaning rags
- Food on the counters

For all these items, keep them away when your puppy is not under your gaze. Closing doors, using baby gates, and placing items in cabinets or closets are preventive strategies that work!

Definitely Go to a Class!

Puppy training classes are excellent for teaching your pup social skills with humans and other dogs. Additionally, they can help you develop the relationship with your dog that will allow him or her to trust you to provide guidance about behaviors that are good and encouraged, and ones that are not. Look for a certified dog trainer who uses only positive techniques and is committed to training not involving fear, force, or pain. These high-quality trainers can provide a lot of information about how all animals learn, which can ensure your puppy has a wonderful life.

What Should I Give My Pup to Chew?

In addition to removing or protecting items puppies should not have, you must provide items they need. Puppies need things to chew, pull, and chase. There are now numerous, good quality, safe food and non-food toys for puppies. Kong makes a series of food toys in sizes and toughness to meet all dogs' needs, and these can go into the dishwasher or be hand-washed daily. All toys should be sufficiently large that dogs cannot swallow or choke on them, all should be monitored for use at first, and all should be discarded and replaced when damaged. You should reward your dog for playing with these toys by praising him or her. These toys can also be used when you need quiet time. A puppy can be placed in a crate, Xpen, or near his or her bed and given a food-stuffed toy for distraction and play that does or doesn't involve you, as you prefer.

As puppies grow, risks change. If you have a small or young pup, consider indoor gates for the tops and bottom of stairs so that the puppy cannot fall. Because it is more difficult to monitor an entire house than one room, for very young puppies you should ensure that they have access to only the room in which you are present so that they can be monitored. Judicious use of gates and doors helps. Use gates to prevent access to balconies and decks from which puppies might fall. Be sure their heads cannot get stuck in bannisters, gates, deck or balcony rails.

Want to Play?

Play at an appropriate level with your puppy. Always use toys. Toys should be much larger than the puppy's mouth (4x) or head (2x) so that they cannot mistake your hand for a toy. Do not lift puppies

off the ground with the toy – they may fall or be flung and injure themselves. Teach them to take and drop the toy and to trade it for a sit that is rewarded with a treat. This will keep them safe and develop a relationship where you are trusted.

Do not walk or play with dogs off-leash if there is any traffic, if there are unknown animals that could intrude, and if your dog doesn't have a perfect recall. This means puppies should be played with off-leash only in known, fenced areas.

Puppies Are Social: Leaving Them Alone Takes Thought

If you are going to leave your puppy alone, try to ensure that this is for periods that are regularly short until he or she is housetrained. Small puppies need to go out every hour to urinate, and even housetrained, young small-breed dogs need to go out every few hours, at least. All dogs routinely left alone for 4 hours or more a day experience stress. Daycare and pet sitting are good options for dogs that have to be left for more than brief periods.

If crate training is going to be part of housetraining your puppy or keeping him or her safe when you are not home, do it carefully. The American College of Veterinary Behaviorists has an excellent, free handout on crate training and whether this is the right decision for you (<http://www.dacvb.org/wp-content/uploads/Tip1-Crate-training.pdf>).



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