Preventing Common Behavior Problems in Puppies

Everyone knows how much fun puppies can be! But sometimes we forget how much work they can be too! Puppies grow into adult dogs, and some puppies grow into adult dogs with troublesome behavior problems. Thankfully even the most severe behavior problems can be easily prevented in puppyhood.

1. **Leash Aggression:** Many dogs grow up to become leash reactive, leash aggressive or serious leash pullers! Here are two great tips for preventing any leash related problems:
   a. **Teach good leash manners!** All leash problems can be avoided if we teach puppies to walk nicely on a loose leash early. Don’t let your puppy learn to pull you wherever they want to go. If your puppy starts pulling, root yourself in place! Then get their attention, call them to you and change directions, rewarding them for their attention and their loose leash!
   b. **On Leash on By!** Leash issues stem from allowing dogs to sporadically greet or be greeted while leashed. Put a predictable rule structure in place early by never having your puppy greet or be greeted while on leash. Teaching your dog that greetings with people or dogs occur only off leash allows them to focus on you while leash walking, instead of worrying about or trying to go see that passing dog or person!

2. **Jumping on People:**
   a. **Four on The Floor:** To prevent jumping, teach your puppy good things happen when all four feet are on the floor. If your puppy jumps on you, turn around and ignore him and turn back around and reward with treats or attention when his paws are back on the ground! The most important part of preventing unwanted jumping is to make sure jumping is NEVER rewarded. If sometimes your puppy gets food, toys or attention for jumping, even occasionally, he is going to continue to jump. Make sure everyone meeting your puppy has been told to completely withdraw attention and turn away if they jump.
   b. **Default Sit:** Teach your puppy that the way to get attention, toys or food is by offering a default sit. Use your puppy’s meal as a training tool, walk up to your puppy with the food, if your puppy jumps on you, simply turn around and walk away. Repeat this pattern until your puppy stops jumping up, and instead offers a sit (this will take between 3-5 tries) then reward your puppy with a few kibbles and repeat. You can do this using a tug toy also, only playing with your puppy when they offer a sit. By not scolding or asking for a sit, your puppy will learn that sitting automatically is always the fastest way to get what they want, always! If, after several tries your puppy does not sit, ask for a sit once, and reward. Then go back to approaching and not asking for the behavior, the single prompt will teach your puppy what you want.

3. **Resource Guarding:** Becoming aggressive when approached by a person while in possession of something valued, typically food, chew bones or toys is called resource guarding. To prevent resource guarding, regularly practice the tips below and your puppy will be eager for you to approach them, no matter what they have!
   a. **Food Bowl Bonus:** While your puppy is eating, walk over and add some tasty treats to the bowl of kibble.
   b. **Trade-Ups:** When your puppy is chewing on a chew-bone, approach and offer them to trade for an even tastier item such as a peanut butter stuffed Kong.
   c. **“Stolen” Item Prevention:** If your puppy takes something out of the trash or starts chewing on a household item and you rush over and snatch it away, they will quickly learn to growl to protect their
“treasure.” Practice good prevention to keep these items out of reach of your puppy. When your puppy does get into something he shouldn’t, offer a trade-up instead of taking it away by force.

d. Chew Toy Sharing: Sit on the floor with your puppy and hold onto a chew bone or Kong for them while they snack. They will appreciate the help, and associate hands near their chew items as a great thing! Even better, stroke your puppy’s head, neck and paws while they snack!

4. Destructive Chewing:
   a. Prevention, Prevention, Prevention: It is important enough to say three times! Make sure to keep puppies in an area where they won’t be able to get any unwanted chewing items. Use baby gates, play-pens and elevated storage, such as high shelves, to accomplish this. Keep puppies out of “hot-zone” rooms with lots of tempting items. Prevent your puppy from getting things they shouldn’t, if they repeatedly chew on inappropriate items, they will think they are chew toys! It is our job to teach them what is for chewing and what is not.
   b. Good Chewing Habits: Make sure to teach your puppy early what things ARE appropriate for chewing, and provide them with ample things to chew on. Puppies HAVE to chew, so make sure you have a wide variety of chew items, including many “stuffable” chew toys such as Kongs and hollow bones available at all times. Stuff these items well so your puppy will be interested in them. Have chew bones stashed away, if your puppy gets aholt of something he shouldn’t, trade up for a chew toy instead.

5. Separation Anxiety:
   a. Low-Key Come and Go: Long drawn out and hyped up exits and entrances cause anxiety. Make leaving and coming home no big deal to your dog, by being calm and quiet. Say goodbye and hello calmly, without creating an emotional tornado for your pup.
   b. Prevent Boredom: When leaving your puppy alone for a while, take care to prevent boredom by leaving plenty of appropriate chew items, stuffed chew toys or food puzzles to give your puppy something to do in your absence, and keep those brains and jaws busy instead of worrying.
   c. Crate Train: Done properly, crate training a dog will provide them with a safe and secure place they enjoy spending time in. A good crate will also prevent them from chewing inappropriately or having accidents in the house. Crate training, or play-pen training is a necessity for young puppies who are still house training but will also help to prevent the puppy from being anxious when left alone.
   d. Teach Independence: Many people take time off from work or adjust their schedules when they bring home a new puppy, to allow them to have more time at home initially with their new family member. This aids in the process of house-training and chew-toy training, but if not handled properly it can also contribute to separation anxiety. If you spend the first week or two with your puppy, and then suddenly go back to work and leave your puppy home alone for a few hours at a time, this sudden transition will be understandably scary. When you bring your puppy home, take some time to crate or play-pen train them, and start practicing by leaving them alone, with ample chew toys and an empty bladder, for short periods of time in their crates or play pens. This process will help your puppy learn to be comfortable spending some time alone and will prevent anxiety.

6. Body Handling Fear/Aggression: Take time to get your new puppy comfortable and happy about all types of body handling! Make sure your puppy is having fun during these exercises, if you scare your puppy they will be fearful or
aggressive of handling in the future. If at any point your puppy seems scared or unhappy by a particular thing, take time to go through it slowly, with lots of treats and praise. If your puppy is still fearful, seek the advice of a professional trainer or fear-free veterinarian to help you.

a. Take a little time every day to handle your puppy, while giving treats or kibble to keep them fun. Look in your puppy’s ears, lift their lip to check their teeth, handle all of their legs and paws, and tap each toe nail with your finger. After handling each body part, feed a treat or piece of kibble.

b. Practice gently restraining your puppy every day, to teach them to be relaxed with hugs and restraint in the future. Pick your puppy up in your arms and gently “hug” them, hold them gently in different positions. If your puppy begins to squirm, continue to hold them gently until they relax, before putting them down. Never put your puppy down when they are squirming, or they will learn to squirm more! If your puppy seems nervous about this process, have someone else feed kibble or treats while they are held to keep it positive.