

Creating a Strong Bond With Your Puppy

As a multiple dog owner it will be your decision if you want your new puppy to bond more closely with you or the other dogs in the family. As a successful competitor, I want a dog that desires my companionship and attention more than any other animal or person. I want a dog that literally watches my every movement looking for clues as to what we are going to do next. I have accomplished this bonding process by allowing my puppy only limited access to my adult dogs and by trying to be the most exciting person in her life. Generally, I will allow my puppy only supervised visits with my dogs, perhaps two or three times per week for ten minutes. It is very important that the adult dogs are social and do not damage the puppy's temperament by attacking or bullying. No contact at all is better than contact that results in harm.

I do socialize my puppy with other puppies as much as possible. Again, this is supervised and can be accomplished by attending puppy kindergarten or contacting friends with puppies. I do not recommend doing formalized puppy obedience at a young age unless it is totally noncompulsive. I also do not allow my puppy contact with unknown adult dogs regardless of their owner's assurance that the dog is social. Too many owners of dog aggressive dogs are in total denial. One attack can have disastrous consequences on your puppy's temperament and further interactions with other dogs. A particularly aggressive dog could permanently disfigure or even kill your puppy.

I confine my puppy in a safe area during the majority of the day such as a backyard, kennel run, kennel crate, or deck. When I release the puppy from this area, I am always very exciting and enthusiastic. I bring a toy or treats and act delighted to have the puppy jump on me. I pet and praise and create intense amounts of verbal and physical interaction. I then may play chase, attention or retrieve games. It is important that it is only you and the puppy and that this interaction is the highlight of the puppy's day.

Take your puppy for walks, off leash if possible, in the park or woods. If her attention lags, quickly run and hide behind a tree. When she finds you, reward her with praise and a treat. The next time you hide, she should find you more rapidly. Eventually she will always keep an eye on you so that you don't escape.



Teach your puppy to do play retrieves of a ball or bone. When the puppy returns with the toy, either trade him a treat for the object or throw another toy in the opposite direction after he drops the first one. Do not create conflict by trying to take her toy with no reward. Doing this will cause your puppy to stop retrieving and to start teasing you with the toy and playing keep away.

Play tug of war with your puppy but never get in her face and growl at her. If she growls during play, reduce the level of the fight you are giving her so that she does not need to growl. Never allow your puppy to bite you in anger. This is very important. A puppy allowed to do this becomes a dangerous adult that does not understand her place in the world. Do whatever is necessary to correct this behavior but do not go overboard and damage the puppy's temperament.

Whenever my puppy steals socks or other off-limits items, I make her bring them to me and I trade her for food. If she drops it en route, I make her return to pick it up and then I say, "trade" and make the exchange. I put the object in front of her face and say, "this is a phooey." Then I put the forbidden object away and that is the end of it. I never chase my puppy for stealing things or hit her. As the puppy becomes an adult, she will lose interest in these items because she did not receive negative attention and reinforcement for the undesirable behaviors.

My dogs are house dogs. However, time in the house is time spent with me, not the pack. Dogs are rotated in and out and look forward to spending time with me, not visiting the other dogs. My dogs will calmly and quietly stay outside or lay in a crate while another dog is in the house spending time with me.

When the puppy is at least one year old, I will allow her to spend more time with my dogs. However, if I have a competition dog in either obedience or Schutzhund, I continue to allow the dog very limited exposure to my other dogs for the duration of her competitive career.

