

Charyn's 10 Golden Puppy Rules

1. No free love

It sounds harsh, but this is one of the most important elements to establishing the proper relationship with your pup. They will learn that you are the boss and the source of all things wonderful and that doing things you like will get them treats, toys, pats, snuggles, praise and all things good. Your puppy will be much more secure in your home – their new pack – as a result. Puppies that do not live in an environment that has a good hierarchical structure with well-defined leadership become insecure and tend to have more behavioral problems. Keep in mind it is not uncommon for very young puppies in training to get all of their feeding through the training process rather than at regular meal times. Like human babies, puppies can not eat much at any one time, and a full puppy who is disinterested in food will not be as motivated to do as you ask.

2. Remember they are babies

Just like human babies, they have short attention spans – much shorter than adult dogs. Instead of trying to train your puppy for an hour, train for 5 minutes a session as many times a day as you can. Incorporating training into your daily routine is always a plus. For example, before our dogs are permitted to go outside we have them all sit at the door using the command "sit". We then give the command "wait" when we open the door and do not permit them to move until we have stepped through the door and then say "OK". Find your own ways to incorporate training into your daily routine and it will no longer seem like a chore. In addition, this will allow for more consistency on a day-to-day basis.

3. Tiny puppies = tiny bladders

Teaching pups they should go outside is one thing. Getting them to a point where they can recognize, and control that urge to eliminate is an entirely different story. I don't truly trust any dog until they are well over a year old, but most are holding their waste pretty consistently by about four or five months. Even so, a quick rule of thumb is that you should not make your pup wait more than one hour for every month of their age between trips outside to eliminate - i.e., a 3 month old pup should be taken out at least every three hours – waiting longer is unfair to your pup and every accident sets your training process back. Overnight may be an exception as this varies among puppies. Many will be ok for as long as six hours while they sleep. In addition, don't forget to take treats outside and give LOTS of praise for a job well done!

4. Dogs must ask permission

Our rule is that everything in the house belongs to people... everything. Dogs may not touch anything unless they are given permission, and that includes their food. I use the term "leave it" with my hand in a stop motion to keep the pup out of the bowl. Once she calms down and looks to me, I tell her ok and she may take the food. Handle her and her food while she is eating to help deter the development of food aggression. If she growls or shows other aggressive behavior, take the food away (do not make a fuss - just a stern 'no' and remove). Come back in fifteen minutes and do the whole process again. Be prepared for this to take some time as it goes against a dog's natural instinct to let someone near their food – as always, this varies by puppy. On occasions where the pup shows a great deal of difficulty with handling and food, I have hand fed all food during the first 3-5 weeks after the pup arrives.

5. People stuff stays people stuff

No bed, no couch, no people food, no people things to play with (socks, etc). It is important to remember that your dog is not a person. Treating a puppy as if they are an equal will confuse them and create insecurity. They need to be very clear on their place in the pack to develop into confident, secure dogs. You can, in time, invite your dog up at your discretion as a reward, but keep the time limited and be sure that you control when the dog is to get off (I use the command "off"). Using old socks as toys sets the pup up for failure as puppies are not able to discern a 'toy sock' from an 'off-limits sock' - ditto for shoes, papers, books, etc.

6. Jumping is not ok!

Puppies jump. They are small - everyone else is big. Therefore, they try to reach their people by jumping. This is all well and cute until the puppy gets big and starts knocking people down! By that time your puppy has learned that jumping is ok and the habit will be much harder to break. As I am all about using praise/reward reinforcement instead of harsh correction, here are some tips that have worked for me. They may take a little longer, but I believe the result will be a more positive relationship with your dog this way. The first is to always firmly hold the puppy's collar so that all four paws are on the floor when she is being petted. She will eventually realize that good things happen with all four paws down and will choose to stay down as a result. As she gets older, when she goes to jump on you, lift your leg so that the jumping dog runs into a knee. Dogs don't quite like that, but you are letting the natural consequences of their actions teach them the lesson instead of having to use sharp correction.

7. You control the leash - the leash does not control you

If a puppy is pulling, you should confidently, and without fanfare, turn around and start moving in the opposite direction. Yes, you may end up with a tumbleweed puppy at the end of the leash, but she'll figure it out. (You do this on grass at first

to prevent any knocks to the puppy's head). Keep walking and turn left, then right, then turn around again... you get the picture. Eventually, the puppy will determine that she had better remember to watch you or she will be suddenly, and unexpectedly, jerked in an opposite direction. It is just as important for you to talk to your puppy while you walk. Squeak a toy. Pay attention to her. Give treats when she stays near you. If you are more interesting than the trees, grass, leaves, rocks, ants, etc, then she will stay by you and she will watch you. Praise praise praise for close walking and good attention. (Moreover, remember to keep training sessions short – remember rule #2?) When you are done with your training session you can finish with a release or free command that lets the puppy know that she can go back to being a silly puppy. For example, I use “ok” to let the puppy know she is done with a task such as a sit, and I use “All done” to let her know that we are done with training and she can do her own thing.

8. Chewing can be controlled

It is no secret that puppies chew on everything. They use their mouths to explore their world! Your job is to provide enough suitable material for chewing. Kong toys are great, as are a variety of bones, rope chews, dog-approved stuffy animals (the Kong stuffies are expensive but well worth it as they can stand up to the abuse), etc. You can keep three or four out and then have a basket that is put away filled with other toys. If the puppy gets bored, replace the old boring toys with some from the basket – use them as a reward for a nice sit, down, or if she came to you immediately when you called. This way there is always something "new" for the puppy. Should she get into something she should not, provide a stern no, followed by handing her a permissible toy. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. She needs to know what is ok to chew on and this is the perfect teaching moment.

And the last two are the most important rules of all:

9. Do not let your puppy out of your sight

They can, and often do, get into trouble. A chewed piece of furniture or book is the least of your worries. Puppies will chew electrical cords, eat anything, (including plants that may be poisonous and any other random substance) get themselves stuck in or under things, or get tangled up in the aforementioned cords. Any one of these things can be a lethal mistake for your puppy. Just as you wouldn't let a crawling one-year old out of your sight, don't let your puppy out of your sight either. At night and when you are away, keeping your pup in her crate is best. If you are not going to, or for some reason are unable to use a crate for a period when you will not be able to watch the puppy, make sure you have a puppy proof room to keep her in. Working on recalls (“come”) will help you keep the puppy close. One technique is to have a friend hold your puppy while you walk a short distance away and then call the puppy to come to you. Have the friend release the puppy when the puppy starts to bark and wiggle in an effort to get to you. Keep calling the puppy in a happy excited voice and when the puppy gets to you give her a food or toy reward and tons of praise. ALWAYS give a lot of praise whenever the puppy comes to you when you call her and NEVER use the recall command to call the puppy to you for a correction or to be crated – this will make the puppy afraid to come! In those instances you should go to your puppy.

10. Socialize, socialize, and socialize

Have her meet different people, dogs, & animals - all ages, shapes, colors, etc. The more variety you encounter, the better. Take her to different places where there are different sights and sounds, and see as many different things as you can. Have her walk on all different surfaces while you are out. The more you can

expose her to now the better. I cannot emphasize this enough. Humans: Try to meet at least thirty or forty people a week if you can - more is better.

Have people come over as well as take her. Make sure she sees that people come and go. Reward her generously for all happy positive reactions to people, but if she is feeling timid, do not push her or correct her and do NOT allow anyone else to force himself or herself on her if you feel that she is afraid of them. There are always the people that think that they are Dr. Doolittle. Let them practice on someone else's dog. Try to find opportunities to have them socialize with other dogs. Puppies need dog interaction and socialization to develop normally; however, you want to be careful to not put your puppy in a situation with untrained or undisciplined dogs or dogs with an unknown health status. For example, you will generally not know the health status of dogs at dog parks. Your puppy will not be safe playing with these dogs until she is older as she will not have all of her immunizations until she is several months old. Dog owners, however, often know other dog owners so see if you can set up play dates for your dogs.

... Bonus ...

I did not list enroll in training classes as one of my top ten, but I certainly considered it. If you are able to, I HIGHLY recommend finding an All-Breed club or other training facility. It is helpful to gather once a week with other owners and discuss how things are going, what is working, and what is not. Trainers at these facilities have a wealth of knowledge to share. It is also a fantastic way to build that special bond with your dog while providing many wonderful socialization experiences in a controlled environment.