

# The importance of puppy school for you and your puppy

## **What's so important about puppy class?**

Puppies commonly leave their mother and littermates to live in their new home at around eight weeks of age. This is a very impressionable time in their development. What happens in the next few weeks plays a very big part in whether a puppy grows up to be a confident relaxed dog who either:

1. is comfortable around both adults and children as well as other dogs who is a joy to be around; or
2. grows up to be a fearful dog who barks at people approaching the house, at other dogs, strange sounds, who has to be locked away when people come to visit.

Puppy class is where owners can get professional advice to help resolve emerging problem behaviours before they become bigger problems. A good puppy class covers a mix of theory and practice, and provides essential exercises to undertake between classes.

## **Can't I teach my dog general obedience when they're older?**

Yes dogs can learn 'sit', 'drop', 'stand', or 'come' at any age. But that's not the focus of puppy class. Good puppy classes focus on helping puppies through their critical development period to become friendly relaxed and confident dogs.

## **What if I've had dogs before – do I still need to enrol in puppy class?**

Yes, it's still advised. Behavioural science has developed significantly over the years. It's important to keep up to date and ensure that you receive the most current advice.

## **Where should puppy classes take place?**

A vet clinic is a great place for puppy class. They're clean safe environments for puppies who haven't completed their vaccinations. It's also a great way for them to learn to have fun in a vet clinic environment. And it's important that the person running the class is qualified and experienced in the field of dog behaviour with puppies and dog behaviour generally.



## **At what age should puppies start class?**

Eight weeks is good age, ten weeks is still ok, but fourteen weeks is almost too late to start puppy class. Puppy socialisation must be a high priority in the first few weeks.

## **But I was told not to start any training until my puppy is 16 weeks old**

Unfortunately poor / out-dated advice is common when it comes to dog behaviour. Waiting until 16 weeks of age, means a dog will be too old for puppy class and will have missed critical development opportunities that may be difficult if not impossible to recover from.

## **But my puppy already seems confident and comfortable with other dogs and people**

Sure, most puppies seem confident and comfortable in many situations at an early age. Behavioural issues resulting from inadequate socialisation usually only become apparent after five or six months of age when they are much harder to manage and harder to resolve.

**My dog missed out on class when he was a pup – is there anything that can be done to help his behaviour issues?**

Yes, with appropriate professional help, but it's much harder, it may take much longer and potentially may never be fully resolved.

**Can four, weekly one-hour classes really make that much difference to my puppy?**

Yes absolutely, but you need to put in an effort outside class too. Time in class is very valuable and provides an opportunity for you to learn the latest thinking in dog behaviour and for your puppy to meet other dogs and people as well as prevent or solve undesirable behaviours. You will also be doing lots of work with your puppy in between classes so it's one hour per week in class and then there are lots of exercises for you to do while you spend time enjoying life with your puppy.

**Some of the topics covered in puppy class:**

- Critical socialisation activities to start doing immediately
- Reward-based training fundamentals
- The problem with 'NO!' (there's a much more effective way)
- Motivation in training – the effective use of rewards
- Things you should never do to your dog (but many people still do)
- Nipping - teaching your puppy effective bite inhibition
- Guarding of food, toys or other objects
- Body handling, massage, relaxation
- Safety around children, other puppies and older dogs
- How much time should your dog spend outside the house (vs inside with the family)?
- Toilet training
- Preventing and dealing with undesirable behaviours
- Basic obedience skills (introduction)
- Loose leash walking
- Nutrition, recognising high-quality vs poor-quality dog food
- Making meal times much more fun and interactive
- Dental health
- Toxic foods, poisonous plants and other safety hazards around the home
- Toys, games
- Desexing and maintaining your dog's ongoing health
- Requirements of responsible pet ownership
- Recommended equipment, and equipment to avoid
- Understanding canine body language
- Safety for everyone, preventing dog bites
- Dog parks – benefits and risks
- Mental and physical enrichment requirements for dogs
- Grooming essentials
- Recognising and dealing with fear and anxiety issues
- Transporting your dog safely
- Dog behaviour myth busting
- Next steps after completing puppy class



If you require any further information on puppy school or would like to make a booking, please don't hesitate to come into the clinic or phone us on (03) 9850 5046 and our friendly staff will be more than happy to assist you.