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Training for Pet Owners

YOU'VE FINALLY BROUGHT HOME the puppy or kitten you've been waiting for. You have toys, beds crates, foods, and everything they need ready. Yet when your adorable 8-week-old puppy or kitten does their business in the house, chews your favorite pair of shoes, or snaps or scratches at family or friends, you wonder what to do next. The most common canine problems are aggression and destructive behavior; feline issues are house soiling and aggression. Most of these behaviors are not the fault of the dog or cat. Rather, something went wrong on the human side of the equation. Here are tips to help.

TIPS FOR RAISING A GREAT CAT

- Try to get your kitten when it's between 4 and 6 weeks old. At this age, kittens better respond to physical touch and it is a great time for them to bond with people.
- Give your kitten as much physical contact as they will allow. But at the first sign of wanting to get away, let them go!
- Don't use your hands as play toys for the kitten. This includes under the cover hand movements encouraging the kitten to pounce. They can easily smell your scent through the cloth.

Later in life that scent could become their favorite target.

- Give your kitten plenty of play time. Visit www.cattoylist.com for a list of cat toys.
- Keep the litter box clean. To some cats this means cleaning the box daily. A dirty box is the number one reason why a kitty will find another place to urinate and defecate.
- Respect that some cats have an innate dislike of being touched by people and might not enjoy "cuddling." Cats will often give a little "leave me alone" bite if a person presses this issue.
- Leave the cat carrier out with the door open in an elevated location where your cat can sit and survey his territory. Being comfortable with the carrier facilitates going to the veterinarian in the carrier.

TIPS FOR RAISING A GREAT DOG

- Try to obtain your puppy between their 6th and 8th week of age. Before this time they need to be with their littermates to learn dog to dog social skills. At the 6-8 weeks time they are ready to interact with their new owners.
- Be aware of the fear periods that puppies have. The first occurs between 8 and 10 weeks of age.

During this time puppies are very sensitive to traumatic experiences. A single scary event can have lifelong effects. They can retain fear of a person, dog, or object. During this period handle with care! Another fear period occurs in some dogs between 7 and 11 months of age.

- Socialize, socialize, socialize! Puppies must have many varied experiences with all ages of people, bikes, skateboards, wheelchairs, hats, and winter clothing. They must see as many different parts of their world as they can during the socialization period so they can accept these things as safe and part of their normal world. The period of socialization ends for the puppy at 16-18 weeks of age. After this age, their instinct is to be leery and fearful of new things as a means of self-preservation.
 - Take your puppy to Puppy Kindergarten. "Taking a puppy to puppy class is the single best thing an owner can do to their dog in its entire life" says Dr. Andrew Luescher, a canine behavior expert.
 - Crate train your puppy. The wolf has a den in the ground where it raises its young so the dog has a natural instinct for its own "house". The crate will help with house training and learning independence.
 - Avoid punishment. It is never necessary to physically punish the puppy. Physical punishment may have devastating effects during the fear periods and cause puppies to become fearful of their owners.
 - Teach the puppy to "sit". All 8-week-old puppies can learn this command. Hold a treat to the nose and lure the head back and up. The rear end automatically goes down. Make them "sit" for attention, "sit" for food, "sit" for toys.
- The benefits of owning pets are enormous and the worry that your pet could develop behavioral issues should not deter you from owning a dog or cat. Owning a great pet comes down to proper training on the owner's part. Learn how to become a wonderful owner and your pet will follow suit. U

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