🐾 Paws, Progress & Patience 🐾

Your Puppy's First 30 Days

Pacing Through the Milestones, Week by Week

Calm. Connection. Clarity.

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The First Month Sets the Mood

The first month with your puppy is absolutely crucial and more important than most people realize. What you do in that first month becomes your new normal.
Socialization isn't about getting them out and about as much as possible. It's about making sure every experience is positive. It's about gradually introducing them to new things, new surfaces, new sounds, new smells and new spaces. You have to do it at the right pace, with calm and composure. Your puppy will take cues from you. If you're rushing, then they'll be rushing too. Slow down. Watch how they're responding and adjust accordingly.
This isn't a checklist; it's not a scavenger hunt. It's a constant dialogue between your puppy and the world, and you're the one setting the spirit.
Your job this month is to stay absolutely calm. Don't push your puppy in any way. If they're frightened, just back off. Be their guide, not their pusher.

Equipment to Have Ready

- A collar, a harness, a treat pouch, and a leash. Make sure you can fit two fingers underneath the collar so it's not too tight.
- Every time you put the collar on, give a treat; same with the leash. Establish that positive association right from the outset.
- Keep a lot of high-value treats that are small, soft, and smelly. Tiny bits of chicken, bits of hot dog, or a good quality commercial treat will be fine. Don't use freeze-dried ones, as they're very high in fat and can upset their stomach.

Crate Training

Your puppy's crate is their own quiet space. When they feel good about it, they have a place to rest when the house gets busy or the day becomes too much. A crate isn't a punishment. It's somewhere your puppy can go to settle down and feel safe.
Most people just go through this phase. Those who take the time end up with dogs who use their crate for life.

Choosing a Crate

Two options really. The wire crates offer vastly superior visibility and airflow. Plastic crates are darker, cozier, more den-like. Some dogs will prefer one over the other. There's no right choice.
I'd recommend buying the size your dog will need as an adult. Start with a divider to reduce the space, then remove it as they grow. If you give them too much space at the beginning, they'll just end up using one end as a toilet.

Setting It Up

- Put it in a low-traffic area (quiet but not isolated); a corner of the bedroom is ideal for overnight.
- Throw in something that smells like you; a slightly worn T-shirt or a blanket you've used.
- If your puppy is a chewer, then skip the fluffy bed for now. A mat, a folded blanket or a folded towel is usually quite sufficient.
- Cover three sides with a blanket to make it feel more den-like. Leave the front open for airflow and easy access.

How to Introduce the Crate

Don't just throw your puppy in the crate, close the door and hope for the best. You need to build a good association first.

Days 1 to 2:
Toss some of the high-value treats into the crate and let the puppy go in and out on their own. The door stays open. It's all about making it into a fun little treat spot for them.

Days 2 to 3:
Start feeding the meals in the crate with the door open. Once they're comfortable going in, close the door while they're eating, then open it again when they've finished.

Days 3 to 4:
Start with the short door-closed periods (one to two minutes at a time) and gradually build from there as they stay relaxed. Don't rush it.

Day 4 and beyond:
Gradually build up to longer sessions. Always go at your puppy's pace. If they're whining during the introductions, then you've definitely gone too fast.

Overnight Sleep

The first few nights are going to be a bit of a struggle. Just expect that.

- Put the crate by your bed. Being near you is far more important than most people realize.

- Do a final potty trip before bed. Not optional.
- Plan on at least one night-time potty break in the first week or two. A tired handler who's planned ahead will beat a wide-awake handler who's cleaning out a crate at 2 a.m.
- White noise, a heartbeat toy, and a warm water bottle (wrapped in a towel) will all help.
- If they're crying at night, just wait about 60 seconds. If it's getting worse, then take them out for a quiet potty break (no play at all), and then put them back.

Don't put them in bed at 3 am to stop the crying. That habit is very hard to break.

Common Crate Mistakes

- Use it as a form of punishment? Absolutely not.
- Crating for too long.
- Let them out every time they cry.
- Don't skip the gradual introduction (the steps above are there for a reason).

The crate builds independence. A dog used to being on his own won't fuss when you walk out of the room. Start now to prevent separation issues later.

4 Foundation Skills to Start on Day One

You're not teaching party tricks. You're building a shared vocabulary that you're going to use for the rest of your lives.
Most people don't start training their puppy until they think it's old enough. In reality, the first days at home teach your puppy what feels safe. That’s where training really begins. The issue isn't whether or not you're going to train them. The issue is whether you're being deliberate about what they're learning.

Contact a positive reinforcement trainer in your area and get your puppy into some socialization classes. Good behavior grows from a dog who feels safe. Once you've finished puppy class, there's always more you can do (manners, agility, rally, barn hunting, nose work etc).

Keep the sessions at 2-3 minutes. A few times a day. Finish before they're tired. Always finish on success.

1. Name Recognition

This is the very basis of it. Their name should be: look at me, something good is on the way.

- Just say their name once in a bright tone. As soon as they look at you, note it and treat.

- Don't repeat their name if they don't get back to you. Just say it once then make yourself interesting.
- Don't use their name when you're cross with them. Only ever use it to refer to the good stuff.

Practice it throughout the day at meals, on the walk, at the quiet moments etc. It adds up very quickly.

2. Eye Contact

This is when your puppy is connecting with you on their own. A puppy who does that naturally is a puppy you can actually work with.

Have your treats ready. As soon as they make eye contact, say yes and reward. Progress from a glance to a few seconds.

Start in a calm, low-distraction environment, then gradually introduce small distractions so they learn that checking in with you is always worth it, no matter what's going on.

3. Sit

Look for opportunities all day to practice the sit cue with your puppy. You can ask for a sit before putting down their food bowl, before opening the door, before clipping on their lead. They're all simple ways of incorporating training into your day.

But you don't need to ask for the sit every single time. Puppies have their moments just like we do. They'll be excited, they'll be tired, they'll be having a go at it, and they'll be off focus, and that's all right.

We want training to be a good experience, not something your puppy has to go through to get their breakfast, their dinner, or to go out. Keep it relaxed, reward the effort, and most of all, have fun. If they're having a bit of a struggle, that's perfectly fine. You can always go at it again later.

4. Place

Teaching your puppy to go to a mat or bed gives them a nice place to settle and relax. Why not start by rewarding your puppy for even showing interest in the mat? As they get more comfortable, you can encourage them to step onto it and lie down.
The aim isn't to get your puppy to stay in one place for long periods of time. It's to teach them that their mat is a safe, comfortable, and relaxing place where good things happen.

How to make that happen:

- Use a mat, a cot, or a folded blanket/towel. Reward any interaction at all (sniffing it, stepping on it etc).
- Build to four paws on the mat, then add duration (time), then add distance.

- Use it at dinner time when the guests are arriving, at open doors, or when you're sitting at the desk working.

A few rules for all foundation skills: One cue, then wait patiently. Don't repeat it, as that kills the cue.

Practice in short sessions. Stop before they check out. Finish on success.

Be consistent.

Start in a low-distraction environment (your kitchen is perfect), then work your way through to other rooms, then the backyard, the driveway, and out into the world. If you hit a bump, go back to where they're successful.

Week by Week

Week 1—Decompress and Connect

Your pup has just left their familiar surroundings. Give them time to settle.

- Keep the environment as calm as possible. I know it's exciting to introduce your puppy to friends and neighbours, but please keep visitors, outings, and stimulation to a minimum.
- Introduce your home slowly. You don't need to do every room on day one.
- Start your routine now. Use the same feeding times, potty spots, and schedule.
- Let them rest. Puppies sleep 16 to 18 hours a day, and that's when the learning sticks.

Put a leash on your puppy inside the house and keep them with you. That way, you know where they are, can minimize accidents, and keep them out of trouble. A pen with toys is another option if you're at home and need to be away. Crate them when you're leaving and at night.
What are you building this week? Safety. Trust. A foundation they can come back to.

Week 2—Gentle Exposure

Always aim to make each new experience positive. If your puppy is scared or unsettled, then simply calmly remove them from it. When they're looking to you for reassurance, just be calm and reassuring. They'll pick up on that.
Just start introducing the new items one at a time, absolutely no rush at all. Let your dog come to you at their own pace. Never force, never pull, never scold.

- Sounds: TV, vacuum, rain, music. Start very low and work up. Let them hear the world from within first.
- Surfaces: grass, gravel, hardwood, carpet, asphalt and cement. Let them go at their own pace.

- People: one or two calm visitors. A mixture of people from all walks of life really, one in uniform, one in a hat. Nothing much at all, no crowds, no fuss.
- Objects: umbrellas, hats, bags, bicycles, shopping carts, wheelchairs, lawn mowers, walkers. Let them sniff.
- Environments: cities, parks, suburban and rural areas. Short and calm.

Watch their body language. The ideal state is relaxed curiosity. If they freeze, shake, whine, or tuck their tail, then they're stressed. Just stay calm and quietly remove them from the situation. Meet your puppy where they are.

Week 3—Intentional Socialization

Now you can expand - but do it deliberately. It's all about quality not quantity.

- Other dogs: choose calm, vaccinated dogs. Avoid dog parks.
- New environments: parking lots, restaurants, outdoor patios, pet-friendly stores. Short trips.
- Handling: ears, paws, mouth, and collar. Abundant treats. Make it a routine, not a battle.
- Children: calm, supervised, and structured. Not a free-for-all.

Your job is to read your puppy. If they're scared, the best thing to do is to back off. If they're shutting down, then you've gone too far.

Week 4—Real-Life Integration

This week is all about confidence. You're not doing anything new at all. You're just giving them the opportunity to practice.

- Just keep repeating environments you've already seen. Familiarity breeds confidence.
- Add in a bit of mild distraction to the foundational skills. Can they sit when someone walks by? Treat them well when they do.
- Short leash walks (not for the exercise, but for the experience of being out in the world with you).
- Car rides: initially they go absolutely nowhere. Just get in the car and practice that. Then do short trips around the local area. Gradually build up the distance over time. Always crate your puppy in the car.

A word on vaccination windows: you don't need to wait until your puppy is fully vaccinated to start socializing. The risk of behavioural damage from isolation is often far greater than the risk of disease in the right (i.e. appropriate, low risk) environment. Use clean, low-traffic areas. You may need to carry your puppy. Look into puppy socialization classes with a certified positive reinforcement trainer. Talk to your vet about what makes sense in your area.

7 Common Mistakes New Puppy Owners Make

Most puppy problems aren't the puppy's fault. They're the result of well-intentioned people doing what they think is right in the moment and actually teaching the wrong lesson.

1. Too Much Freedom Too Soon

A pup doesn't need the whole house on day one. An indoor leash, a crate, or an exercise pen are all viable options for containing them, allowing you to monitor them and address issues as they arise rather than having to track them down. As you can see, they can cope with a few more accidents, a bit less chewing, and calmer behavior, and you can gradually start to open up the space. Too much space too soon can overwhelm a puppy. Add freedom a little at a time.

2. Comforting Fear Instead of Redirecting It

When your puppy is frightened, it’s okay to comfort them. You can’t make fear worse by being kind. What helps most is staying calm yourself. Speak softly, keep your body calm, give them some distance from the scary thing, and let them come to you. Your steady presence tells them they’re safe.
Pick a quiet spot a little way back from the action. Let your puppy just look. When they sniff or loosen up, mark with a “yes” and hand them a treat. That’s it. Nobody has to say hello to anything today.

3. Inconsistent Rules

On the couch today, not on the couch tomorrow. You can jump and shout at them when they're little; you can correct them when they're big. That just doesn't work. The behaviour gets worse.
Decide on the rules before the puppy comes home. Put them in writing. Make sure everyone in the house is on the same page. You've got to be a team.

4. Waiting to Train

Waiting until six months really means six months of your puppy figuring out what works for them. They're learning whether you're teaching them or not.
Start on day one. Keep it simple and small. A quick sit before meals. A treat when they come and check in with you. Call them and reward them even if you're in the house. Those little things add up very quickly. You can also take them to a puppy socialization class.

5. Never Use the Crate as Punishment

If the crate only appears when they're in trouble, they'll hate it. Maintain it neutral at best, positive at worst. Feed some of the meals in the crate. Put them in before they're overtired and wild. Throw in a treat or two at random so it continues as a good place to be. You want it to be a bedroom really, not a time-out area. Always link the crate with something positive. Never use it as a punishment.

6. Not Enough Rest

An overtired puppy is essentially a toddler in a fur coat... bitey, wild, and not making great choices. A lot of puppy biting, zoomies, and frantic energy comes from one thing. Your puppy is overtired and needed a nap 30 minutes ago. Most puppies need around 18 to 20 hours of sleep a day. If things are getting wild, try a quiet space and a nap before you try more training.
Treat sleep as part of their training. If they've been up for about two hours, it's crate/pen time, regardless of their opinion! Calm, regular naps at this stage will save you a world of bother later on.

7. Skipping the Relationship

Training matters. I am not going to tell you it does not.

But good timing and technique don't get you through the hard days. Your relationship with your puppy is.

A puppy who does not feel safe with you will have a hard time learning, no matter how good your timing is.

Build the relationship first. The training gets easier from there.

Put time into the bond, not just the cues.

- Hand-feed some of the meals. Sit on the floor with them and just hang out.
- Let them follow you round the house.
- Throw a ball. Give them a chew toy.
- Keep a leash on them so that you'll always know where they are.
- Notice what they enjoy and go join them there.

Don’t just be the person who says “sit.” Be the person your puppy is happy to check in with.

You don't have to do it perfectly. Your puppy doesn't need you to be perfect. They just need you to be consistent, reasonably calm, and paying attention. That's what makes the biggest difference at this stage.

First Vet Visit

Your very first vet visit in terms of setting the tone (in a very real way) is going to be both a medical and a behavioural experience for your puppy. How your puppy experiences the vet's office at that first visit will have a huge bearing on how they feel about it for the rest of their lives. Go in with a plan and come out with clarity.

Before You Go

- Have your puppy fast lightly (a slightly empty stomach makes treats so much more motivating). Check with your vet first.
- Bring high-value treats (small, soft, smelly) and scatter them all over the place on the scale, on the exam table, etc.
- Bring all their records with you (vaccination history, deworming dates, etc.) and any paperwork you've got from the rescue or breeder.
- Stay cool on the way and when you get there. Your energy is contagious. Just go in as if it's absolutely no deal at all, because it really isn't.
- Practice beforehand. Get them used to you handling their paws, ears, and mouth at home this week. Make it a game.

What Will Happen

A typical first puppy exam includes:

- Weight and vitals
- A physical exam from nose to tail
- Review of vaccination history and arranging the next rounds
- Fecal test—bring a fresh sample in a sealed bag if you can
- Heartworm and parasite prevention discussion
- Microchip, if not already done

It's a massive amount of information in a very short space of time. Get it down in writing or get a printed summary.

Questions to Ask Your Vet

- Vaccines: What's in my puppy's vaccination program, and when are they as protected as they can reasonably be?
- Socialization: What sorts of places and situations are safe before the vaccines are finished?
- Nutrition: Is that food suitable, or would you suggest something different?
- Spay/Neuter: What age would you recommend, and can you walk me through your reasoning?
- Parasites: What flea, tick, and heartworm prevention would you recommend for our area?
- Behaviour: Are there any early behavior red flags that we should be on the lookout for at this age?

Making It a Positive Experience

Ask the staff to take it slowly. Most vets and techs will be happy to take their time with a puppy. Let your puppy sniff the room. Don't rush them onto the table. Treats on the floor, treats on the scale, treats everywhere.

If your puppy is overwhelmed at the vet, speak up. A good vet team will slow down and change how they handle your puppy. You're not only working toward a healthy puppy today. You're raising a dog who can walk into the vet's office calm for the next 15 years.

You are your puppy's advocate. If anything doesn't feel right about the pace, how they're handling it, or the recommendation itself, you're perfectly entitled to ask questions. A good vet will welcome that. When choosing a vet, I'd recommend interviewing them first.

You do not have to figure this out alone.

If you want direct guidance, contact me, and let's talk about what your puppy needs. thejunecollins.com | 561-827-7298 June Collins, ABCDT Certified Dog Trainer