



Training Puppies

TRAINING GUIDE • PRINTABLE EDITION

Puppy Training Schedule by Age

8 Weeks to 12 Months

What to work on as your puppy grows, from the first weeks at home through adolescence, with a link to the guide for each skill.

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Edition of October 2026. Guidance drawn from American Kennel Club, Blue Cross, Merck Veterinary Manual, RSPCA and VCA Animal Hospitals, with every source listed at the end.



Inside this plan

PART 1	The plan at a glance
PART 2	8 to 12 weeks: settling in
PART 3	3 to 6 months: building skills
PART 4	6 to 12 months: adolescence
PART 5	Watch, adjust and ask
WORKSHEETS	Checklist, practice log, questions for the veterinarian
SOURCES	Sources

Short answer

Start gentle, reward-based training as soon as your puppy comes home, usually at about 8 weeks.^{[1][2][3]} In the first weeks, focus on a daily routine, house training, crate time and calm, positive experiences, with simple cues such as sit and come. Then add down, stay, leash skills and short spells alone, and expect setbacks in adolescence, when patience and practice matter most.^{[1][4][5][6]} The ages are a guide, not deadlines: every puppy develops differently.^{[1][7]}

This guide fits you if you want a simple plan for what to teach, and when, during your puppy's first year.

Look elsewhere if you need step-by-step help with one skill or problem (each stage links to the guide for it), or your puppy has a health or serious behavior concern. Ask your veterinarian about vaccinations and when your puppy is ready for classes and public places.^{[4][8]}

These guides focus on puppy training and behavior management. They are not a substitute for veterinary care. See your veterinarian for health questions (nutrition, vaccines, illness) and medical concerns.

The plan at a glance

How to use this schedule

Sources describe what usually happens at each age, but they also say that milestones vary with the individual puppy, the breed and your surroundings.^{[1][5][7]} Use the ages as a map: if your puppy needs more time at one stage, stay there.

Every stage uses the same method. Reward the behavior you want, and don't punish: VCA, Blue Cross and the RSPCA all say punishment can increase fear and anxiety and make behavior worse.^{[4][5][6]}

Keep sessions short and frequent. VCA advises short sessions several times a day,^[2] and the AKC suggests five to ten minutes, always ending on a positive note.^[3]

The schedule at a glance

The age bands follow VCA's schedule and the AKC's timeline. Where they differ, the sections below show both.^{[1][4]}

About 8 to 10 weeks

FOCUS: a daily routine, house training and crate time; name, sit and come; gentle handling and calm, positive first experiences; redirecting play biting to toys.^{[1][4][8]}

GUIDES: [Potty Training](#), [Crate Training](#), [Socialization](#), [Biting & Chewing](#), [Feeding Schedule](#)

About 10 to 12 weeks

FOCUS: down; sitting and waiting before meals; the leash and harness indoors; everyday noises; meeting many kinds of people.^{[1][4]}

GUIDES: [Basic Obedience](#), [Socialization](#)

About 3 to 4 months

FOCUS: stay and leave it; walking nicely beside you at home; structured play such as fetch; puppy classes when your veterinarian agrees.^{[4][8]}

GUIDES: [Basic Obedience](#), [Leash Training](#)

About 4 to 6 months

FOCUS: practicing cues in new places, short walks, coming when called, short spells alone, polite play while teething, and steady progress with house training.^{[1][4][7]}

GUIDES: [Leash Training](#), [Recall Training](#), [Separation Anxiety](#), [Jumping](#)

About 6 to 12 months

FOCUS: adolescence. Keep practicing with better rewards, add distractions gradually, use a long line for recall if needed, and give plenty of play and enrichment.^{[4][5][6][9]}

GUIDES: [Barking](#), [Jumping](#), [Basic Obedience](#)

8 to 12 weeks: settling in

Start the day your puppy comes home

Most puppies go to their new home at about 7 to 8 weeks.^{[7][8]} Training can start straight away,^{[1][2][3]} and VCA notes that waiting until 6 months, as was once common, is a poor time to begin.^[2]

Routine, house training and the crate

House training comes first.^{[4][8]} Take your puppy out first thing in the morning, last thing at night, and after meals, naps and play, and praise them when they go in the right place.^{[8][10]} A predictable daily schedule, with naps and some time in a crate or pen, helps a puppy know what to expect and learn to be alone when necessary.^{[4][10]} The [Puppy Potty Training](#) and [Puppy Crate Training](#) guides cover both step by step, and [Puppy Feeding Schedule](#) covers meal times, which are part of the same routine.

VCA gives a rough guide to how often puppies need to go out: about every 2 to 3 hours at 10 to 12 weeks, every 3 to 4 hours at 3 to 4 months, and about every 4 hours at 4 months.^[4]

Calm first experiences

The first few months are when puppies most readily accept new people, animals and situations, so safe, positive experiences now matter most.^{[1][4][8][11]} Sources describe this sensitive period differently: VCA gives about 7 to 14 weeks,^[11] the AKC says it ends by about 16 weeks,^[1] and the Merck Veterinary Manual stresses 2 to 4 months.^[8] Keep introducing new things gently after it, too.^{[4][7]}

Keep each experience safe and positive, let your puppy set the pace, and avoid frightening or painful experiences.^{[4][7]}^[11] The [Puppy Socialization](#) guide explains how.

NOTE

Some puppies become warier of new things in these weeks. The AKC describes a fear period at about 8 to 12 weeks, when it is especially important to avoid frightening experiences,^[7] and VCA notes that after about 3 months fear responses may start to outweigh sociability.^[4] If your puppy is frightened, make things easier rather than pushing on.^{[7][11]} The [Puppy Fear Periods](#) guide explains how to help.

First cues and gentle play

Name recognition, sit and come can start now, using rewards.^{[1][4]} VCA adds down at 10 to 12 weeks.^[4] A simple first habit is asking your puppy to sit before meals and before play.^{[1][4]} Discourage play biting by stopping play and redirecting your puppy to something they may chew.^{[1][4]} See [Puppy Basic Obedience](#) and [Puppy Biting & Chewing](#).

3 to 6 months: building skills

Puppy classes

Sources differ on when classes can start. VCA, following the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, says socialization classes can start as early as 7 to 8 weeks, with at least one set of vaccines and a first deworming at least 7 days before the first class.^[4] The Merck Veterinary Manual says some classes accept vaccinated puppies from 8 weeks,^[8] and the AKC describes about 16 weeks as a good time to sign up.^[7] The common ground: choose a reward-based class that requires vaccination, and ask your veterinarian when your puppy is ready.^{[4][8]}

CAUTION

VCA advises avoiding dog parks and places that can't be cleaned until your puppy's vaccine series is complete.

^[4] Puppies are vaccinated every few weeks until about 4 months old,^[8] so ask your veterinarian before you plan outings.

Down, stay and leave it

From about 3 months, VCA suggests adding stay and leave it, and practicing walking nicely beside you at home, in the driveway or on the sidewalk before short walks.^[4] By about 6 months, the AKC says puppies should be working on sit, coming when called, polite play and basic impulse control.^[1]

The leash and short walks

Introduce the leash and harness indoors first; VCA says it is not yet time for long walks at 10 to 12 weeks.^[4] Growing puppies shouldn't overdo exercise: Blue Cross warns against doing more than their bodies can manage, and VCA advises getting classes that involve a lot of exercise approved by your veterinarian.^{[4][5]} The [Puppy Leash Training](#) guide shows how to build up.

Time alone

Teach your puppy to be comfortable alone for short periods, in a crate or another safe, enclosed space.^{[1][2]} If they will be alone for longer than they can hold their bladder, set up a pen with a place to relieve themselves, or arrange for someone to take them out.^{[2][10]} The [Puppy Separation Anxiety](#) guide covers building alone time gradually.

Coming when called

Make recall a game. The AKC quotes a trainer who says that early on, the important thing is that your puppy loves coming to you.^[1] Once vaccines are complete, VCA suggests practicing cues outside the home: on walks, at the park and in pet-friendly places.^[4] The [Puppy Recall Training](#) guide covers it step by step.

Teething and chewing

Permanent teeth come in during these months, so expect plenty of chewing and provide chew toys.^{[5][7]} Your puppy should be learning which things are toys, and that hands and clothes are not.^{[1][4]}

Fading the treats

If you have been consistent with food rewards, VCA says you can begin to reward with food less often, using praise and affection while still giving treats now and then.^[4]

6 to 12 months: adolescence

Adolescence usually starts somewhere between about 5 and 12 months and can last until 18 months to 2 years. Blue Cross says around 5 to 6 months; the RSPCA and VCA say between 6 and 12 months.^{[5][6][12]}

It is common for a young dog to seem less obedient, ignore cues they knew and come back less reliably.^{[5][6][9]} The RSPCA explains this as a dog finding it hard to control their impulses, not stubbornness or an attempt at dominance.^[6] Adolescence is also when some dogs are given up, but this phase passes.^{[6][9]}

Keep training, with better rewards

Keep practicing with positive reinforcement. VCA suggests rewarding more often, or with higher-value rewards,^[9] and Blue Cross says to be persistent and consistent with reward-based training.^[5]

Recall setbacks

A young dog may find the world more rewarding than coming back to you.^{[5][9]} If your dog stops returning when called, Blue Cross suggests a long line attached to a harness for freedom with safety, and going back to practicing recall where there are fewer distractions.^[5]

Energy, frustration and enrichment

Adolescent dogs need more activity: structured play, scent and searching games, and puzzles.^{[5][6][9]} Frustration can show as barking, jumping up, nipping or biting the leash.^{[6][9]} See [Puppy Barking](#) and [Puppy Jumping](#).

A second fear period

Some young dogs suddenly become afraid of things that never bothered them.^{[5][12]} Go back to gradual, positive exposure at your dog's pace, keep life predictable,^[5] and don't punish fearful behavior.^{[5][6]} See [Puppy Fear Periods](#).

Changes to check with your veterinarian

A young dog shouldn't lose house training; VCA advises a medical check if this happens.^[9] If nothing seems to help, the RSPCA says to have a vet rule out medical causes first, then ask for a referral to a behavior expert.^[6] Talk to your veterinarian about spaying or neutering, too: Blue Cross and VCA both treat it as a decision to make with them, and Blue Cross says it won't change behavior that isn't sexually motivated.^{[5][9]}

Toward adulthood

The Merck Veterinary Manual says most dogs reach adulthood at 9 to 12 months, while large and giant breeds can take almost 2 years,^[8] and the AKC says most dogs reach emotional maturity between 12 and 18 months.^[7] By the end of the first year, the AKC lists the basics to be making progress on: sit, down and stay with distractions, coming when called, loose-leash walking, and drop it and leave it.^[1]

Watch, adjust and ask

What not to do and when to ask a professional

Waiting until 6 months to start

CHECK Whether you are holding off training until your puppy is older.^[2]

TRY Start now with short, reward-based sessions.^{[1][2]}

Punishment, scruff shakes or rollovers

CHECK Whether you are telling your puppy off or correcting them physically.^{[2][6]}

TRY Teach what you want instead and reward it; these techniques can lead to fear and anxiety.^{[2][5][6]}

Treating the ages as deadlines

CHECK Whether you are comparing your puppy with a timeline rather than watching how they cope.^{[1][7]}

TRY Move at your puppy's pace; milestones vary.^{[1][5]}

Too much exercise too soon

CHECK Whether long or strenuous activity is more than a growing body can manage.^{[4][5]}

TRY Use short walks, play and brain games, and ask your veterinarian before high-exercise classes.^{[4][5]}

Putting every change down to “just a phase”

CHECK Whether you see guarding food or toys, unprovoked aggression, destructive behavior or excessive barking, pacing or whining.^[12]

TRY Talk to your veterinarian; VCA says these can call for medical or behavioral help.^{[6][12]}

WHEN TO ASK A PROFESSIONAL

Ask your veterinarian about vaccinations, readiness for classes and public places, exercise, spaying or neutering, and any sudden change in behavior or house training, because medical problems can affect behavior.

^{[4][6][9]} If fear, aggression or guarding is intense or getting worse, ask your veterinarian for a referral to a qualified, reward-based behavior professional.^{[6][12]}

Print, tick off, keep on the fridge

My puppy's first-year checklist

Puppy's name _____

Date of birth _____

Came home on _____

Veterinarian _____

From "The schedule at a glance"	Started	Practicing	Notes
About 8 to 10 weeks			
A daily routine, house training and crate time			
Name, sit and come			
Gentle handling and calm, positive first experiences			
Redirecting play biting to toys			
About 10 to 12 weeks			
Down			
Sitting and waiting before meals			
The leash and harness indoors			
Everyday noises			
Meeting many kinds of people			
About 3 to 4 months			
Stay and leave it			
Walking nicely beside you at home			
Structured play such as fetch			
Puppy classes when your veterinarian agrees			
About 4 to 6 months			
Practicing cues in new places			
Short walks			
Coming when called			

From “The schedule at a glance”	Started	Practicing	Notes
Short spells alone			
Polite play while teething			
Steady progress with house training			
About 6 to 12 months			
Keep practicing with better rewards			
Add distractions gradually			
Use a long line for recall if needed			
Give plenty of play and enrichment			

One-week practice log

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
What we practiced							
Sessions (short and frequent)							
Where							
Ended on a success?							
New experiences							
Notes							

To ask my veterinarian

Topic	Date asked	What they said
Vaccinations		
Readiness for classes and public places		
Exercise		
Spaying or neutering		
Any sudden change in behavior or house training		

Where this guidance comes from

1. Puppy Training Timeline: Teaching Good Behavior

Before It's Too Late

akc.org/expert-advice/training/puppy-training-timeline-teaching-good-behavior-before-its-too-late/

American Kennel Club (AKC), Mary Kearl, with certified trainer Kate Naito; sponsored by Purina Pro Plan; updated 13 October 2026. Accessed 14 October 2026

2. Getting Your Puppy Started Off Right

vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/getting-your-puppy-started-off-right

VCA Animal Hospitals (no date shown on the page). Accessed 14 October 2026

3. Teach Your Puppy These 5 Basic Cues

akc.org/expert-advice/training/teach-your-puppy-these-5-basic-commands/

American Kennel Club (AKC), Paisley Lunchick, RVT, KPA-CTP; updated 9 January 2026. Accessed 14 October 2026

4. When should you start puppy classes? (Puppy Training Schedule)

vcahospitals.com/pediatric/puppy/behavior-training/when-to-start-puppy-training-classes

VCA Animal Hospitals (no date shown on the page). Accessed 14 October 2026

5. Adolescence in dogs

bluecross.org.uk/advice/dog/behaviour-and-training/adolescence-in-dogs

Blue Cross (UK animal welfare charity; no date shown on the page). Accessed 14 October 2026

6. Managing your puppy through adolescence

rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/health/adolescentpuppies
RSPCA (UK; no date shown on the page). Accessed 14 October 2026

7. A Puppy Growth Timeline: Transitions in Puppyhood

akc.org/expert-advice/training/puppy-growth-timeline-transitions-puppyhood/

American Kennel Club (AKC), Jan Reisen; updated 23 March 2026. Accessed 14 October 2026

8. Puppy Care

merckvetmanual.com/dog-owners/routine-care-of-dogs/puppy-care

Merck Veterinary Manual (pet owner version), Natalie Antinoff, DVM; last updated July 2025. Accessed 14 October 2026

9. The rebellious teenager year (Puppy Teenage Phase)

vcahospitals.com/pediatric/puppy/behavior-training/puppy-teenage-phase

VCA Animal Hospitals (no date shown on the page). Accessed 14 October 2026

10. Puppy Schedule: Daily Routine for New Puppies

akc.org/expert-advice/training/setting-schedules-and-developing-a-routine-for-your-new-puppy/

American Kennel Club (AKC), AKC Staff; updated 30 October 2025. Accessed 14 October 2026

11. Puppy Behavior and Training Basics

vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/puppy-behavior-and-training-training-basics

VCA Animal Hospitals (no date shown on the page). Accessed 14 October 2026

12. Normal vs. Abnormal Puppy Behavior

vcahospitals.com/pediatric/puppy/behavior-training/understanding-puppy-behavior

VCA Animal Hospitals (no date shown on the page). Accessed 14 October 2026



The full schedule, with a link to the guide for each skill, is free to read at training-puppies.com/guides/puppy-training-schedule.