

Puppy Preschool Class Description

The Puppy Preschool Class is designed to help socialize puppies and begin training at an early age. Dogs should be approximately 8 weeks to 18 weeks old in this class. Generally, we take about 10-12 puppies per class. We always have one instructor and three assistants in puppy class. My classes focus on clicker training for teaching behaviors such as sit, down, leave-it and come.

The reality is that more puppies are euthanized for temperament issues – that could have been avoided with proper socialization – than die of Parvo every year. While it's critical to keep our puppies safe and out of parks, beaches and open places until their shots are finished, I feel that a well-run, safe puppy kindergarten class is a priority in every puppy and puppy owner's life. We do take every precaution to make sure the puppies are safe. The floor of the indoor training center is sanitized before the puppies enter. A separate potty yard is supplied where only puppies are allowed. All clients are asked to bring on-going shot records (as most puppies are still in the process of receiving shots). And clients are asked to carry puppies from the parking lot into the disinfected building.

The class is broken up into several segments: Socialization with people, socialization with other puppies or adult dogs; introduction to objects; opportunities to do something new which helps build confidence; instruction on basic training; bite inhibition; and, of course, good manners.

The puppies get to meet each of the people in the class (socialization with men, women, and children). We either have people move around or the puppies may be passed around a circle meeting each person in the class. Sometimes shy puppies stay with their families, and people come over to visit with them until, at some point in the class, they may be confident enough to be passed to other people away from their families.

The puppies also get to participate in a short play period with other puppies. The play period is well supervised, and we're always on the look out for a puppy that may be "bullying" others or puppies becoming too aroused. Puppies are divided into several groups (usually 3 to 4 puppies per group) with the smaller, younger and more timid puppies starting together. The more enthusiastic and larger dogs are placed together. Occasionally, just two puppies are put together in an X-Pen or separate area to play. The point is we would like each puppy to have a positive interaction with another puppy and, hopefully, more than one other puppy. Sometimes, by the 6th week of class, all puppies can play together. More often, they are still divided into groups. This depends on the temperament of the puppies attending class. When the puppies return to their people, they get to play tug or otherwise interact with their person. During the class, we also have visits from about three good-natured adult dogs. In this case, dogs are usually kept on leash.

We introduce puppies to items they may encounter in their lives and need to get used to such as hats, glasses, vacuums, and also let them experience doing something new like a tunnel or wobble board.

In the instruction part of the class, we begin teaching basic behaviors such as sit, down, leave-it, come, stay, walk on a leash and touch (hand targeting). We also discuss at length housetraining and crate training. In addition, we talk about how to work with preventing puppy behaviors that most of us don't want, such as jumping up, barking, digging, and chewing. We talk about how important management is at this age. We also discuss how to begin teaching the puppies self-control. Another hot topic is puppy "mouthing" and how

to instill good bite inhibition (a light bite if a dog does bite) in our puppies from an early age.

I often tell my clients that if they can make it to only one class because of time or financial considerations, the puppy preschool is the most important. As I continue to work with shelter dogs and private behavior consultations, I think what a different world this would be if each and every puppy owner took their puppy to a positive, safe puppy class. It is a class that is very important for the puppy's socialization and also extremely important for the puppy's person to get off on the right foot in training and raising their puppy.