

Together is Better: Family-Driven Puppy Training

Award-winning dog behaviourist Karen Boyce, Wales' most sought-after puppy trainer, shares her insights on navigating the thrilling yet often overwhelming journey of bringing a new puppy into the family home.

When deciding on a new puppy everybody dreams of how it will bring fun and joy to the house, and to the family. The adults think of long walks along the canal and a dog asleep by their feet in some dog-friendly coffee house or drinking establishment. Teenagers think of cuteness and cuddles and exponential chances of awesome Facebook and Instagram photos. The younger members are just thinking "YES"!

But having the dog of your dreams is not something that can be guaranteed. It takes time and effort, and forward planning.

Some owners can be meticulous planners whilst others seem to fly by the seat of their pants.

So where would be the right place to start? All of the dog trainers I know as peers and friends say the same thing, that you need to agree as a whole family what are your top priorities. The adults in the house would probably like an obedient dog walking nice on it's lead and coming back when let off to run about. The teenagers will be asking for a dog that doesn't jump up on expensive clothes and doesn't disappear under the bed with the Nike trainers! Younger members want to be able to play with the pup; to the point where it's little eyes glaze over.

To make the plan a lot easier it's time to admit each family members' weaknesses. The adults may disagree on where the pup is allowed to settle; on the furniture, or not on the furniture, or first nights in the kitchen or by the bed. Teenagers may not notice the pup needs to go out and then poor pup is in trouble for soiling in the house. The youngest children may not be careful with food, their toys or items a pup might find attractive plus may arouse a pup so much that it is bound to get into trouble for mouthing and biting.

Have a family planning meeting and ensure everyone understands the possible problems they themselves could be the source of, and for which the pup might get the blame.

So, as a family exercise write out the plan, including the priorities, and stick them on the fridge door; actually, stick them on the bathroom door and above everyone's beds lest they lose sight of the end goals!

Pick the family members for the right jobs and stick to it. Often a pup is purchased, and every one offers to exercise and feed the pup as a bargaining chip for getting it. But over time Mum or Dad may find themselves doing everything. Do not let this happen. Drag out the plan frequently and wave it at all concerned.

The other area of complete family participation is in the training. Pups are pretty much blank canvasses when they arrive and as visual thinkers, the family needs to guide every interaction and situation until a good habit is instilled. The whole family also needs to be primed for bad behaviours rearing up their head; stopping an unwanted behaviour before it becomes deep-seated must be a priority for all, even the youngest.

Having the whole family commit to a weekly trip to the local village hall for a course of puppy lessons should also be another priority. Expert advice, a training plan to stick to with like-minded owners and the chance for your pup to shine are all part of the plan. And, as an added bonus,

children, in particular, may be more receptive to being told by the “dog trainer” on how to handle and behave around the pup.

When booking a dog-trainer you can trust, ask for recommendations from other owners. Asking in the local park from an owner with an obedient dog, or even asking for a recommendation on Facebook are both sensible ways to proceed. Vets often have leaflets and business cards to hand out to owners who enquire about local puppy classes.

And never lose sight of the whole point of this family plan is to have fun with your dog, whilst at the same time creating a happy and obedient dog.

Planning to raise a pup together as a family is more fun, and more effective. Two heads are better than one for sure; so long as everyone is singing off the same hymn sheet. Enjoy your new pup!



“So, if long walks and doggy holidays are important to you, then off-lead practice and crate training should definitely make your top three priorities.” (Picture courtesy of Alun-Lloyd Photography)



“A decision needs to be made and kept to by the whole family. E.G. Puppy on the furniture or not!” (Picture courtesy of Kate Merriman)

Karen Boyce is the owner of Beastly Thoughts Professional Dog Services, the biggest puppy training organisation in Wales.

Karen is the Puppy School Tutor for North Shropshire and North East Wales, and also Regional Manager for North Shropshire and Wrexham. Puppy School classes are part of the Beastly Thoughts Advanced Puppy Path that offers a range of training experiences for all pups six months and under.

Karen is the winner of the Animal Star Awards Behaviourist/Trainer of the Year 2019. Karen is regularly featured in local papers and radio, and has a Pets column every month in her local town magazine; Love Wrexham.

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