

## **Cesar Milan -- Start Your Puppy Off Right**

**For your puppy to grow into a healthy, balanced dog, you must demonstrate leadership from day one.**

New puppy owners often make the mistake of endlessly worrying about finding the right puppy treats or bed. They spend little or no time worrying about how or what they will teach their new puppy.

Yes, a puppy needs nutritious food and a safe, warm place to live. But another equally powerful and important biological necessity is the need for a strong pack leader to serve as the dominant source of alpha energy in their lives.

Puppies are naturally hard-wired to follow a pack leader. A pack leader is, by definition, strong, stable and consistent; traits many new puppy owners forget around their dogs. I have had clients who are strong leaders in their jobs, but, when they come home, they turn to mush with their dogs. Then they come to me, puzzled as to why their dog won't behave.

Puppies sense our confidence levels and will take control if they perceive us as weak. When dogs or puppies take control, bad behaviors, such as excessive barking, leash-pulling, or anxiety, will develop.

The most important thing you can do is to become your puppy's pack leader. This role doesn't begin when your dog is six months old or when he's bad. For your puppy to grow into a healthy, balanced dog, you must demonstrate leadership from day one.

**Here are some important points to remember in your role as pack leader:**

When getting a new pet, make sure to set aside time every day to provide mental exercise by maintaining rules, boundaries and limitations. When these needs are met, the affection you give to your dog will be channeled as a reward.

Create a schedule that includes a daily 45-minute power-walk in the morning. This is critical for your dog's health, both physical and mental.

Enlist your whole family in the process of bringing a new dog home. Discuss what their responsibilities will be before the puppy arrives.

Make sure you find a breed that fits your lifestyle. For example, more active breeds, like hunting and herding dogs, require more physical exercise to stay physically and mentally content.

Always walk out the door ahead of your dog when leaving the house. This will show your dog who is in the leadership role.

On walks, make sure that your dog is not in front of you, pulling you down the street. Instead, keep your dog to your side or behind you. This will also demonstrate to your dog that you are the alpha figure.

Give the puppy something to do before you share food, water, toys or affection. This way the dog earns his treat. For example, have your puppy perform the Sit or Down command.

Set aside a budget for unexpected circumstances, like medical bills and training classes. A healthy, well-trained dog makes a wonderful pet.

A puppy will be set up to fail if his new family doesn't learn these lessons before he arrives. Remember, puppies don't crave a fancy treat or bed; they need you to become their stable pack leader to demonstrate love in a way they understand.