

Spy Kids

Socialization, Play and Training Sessions

By Nancy Gyes

I have a newfound respect for dog breeders. Raising a litter took total commitment and a huge portion of my time each day. Nail clipping, clicker training, cuddle time, potty walks, handling, toy play, one-on-one time, multiple walks every day around the property, socializing with guests, car rides, staring at them for hours, discussing structure and personality with trainer friends, and on the list goes.

The pups are eight weeks old now. They follow me around the yard like a little pack, one often grabbing at my pant leg, while others cavort, explore, and wrestle.

Jim has picked his puppy and tomorrow the other pups will go to their new homes, new lives, and excited owners. I know now that I didn't take enough photos or videos or record enough details about their personalities. But my time is up.

Jim chose Sweep. He wagged his tail a lot, seemed totally coordinated by six weeks of age, and has a nice mixture of drive, attentiveness, and brains. As he grew up it became apparent that he was a bundle of energy combined with dexterity, curiosity, and playfulness.

Evaluating Structure

Structure in a litter of pups is evaluated by using standard guidelines for both good conformation and movement, and not just by comparing individuals in the litter. The best-structured pup in the litter may still be a pup that is not built well for agility.

We are lucky to have local experts available and renowned puppy-structure authority Pat Hastings (co-author of the "Puppy Puzzle") to evaluate Jim's puppy just two days short of eight weeks of age. Common thought is that pups within a few days of eight weeks old show strong similarity to the structure they will have as adults, but this is not necessarily true before seven or after eight-and-a-half weeks old. Opinions on structure can be highly subjective, since what might appeal to one person might raise the eyebrows of another. I learned that overall structural balance is more important than a great front or a great rear that does not match the other end of the dog in angulation and length. The mysteries of structure slowly faded while watching Pat's capable and gentle hands carefully examining each pup. She heartily approved our choice of Sweep, for which we consider ourselves extremely lucky, and we had an engrossing and educational day spent with her looking at our pups.



Training the Litter, Weeks 5 through 7

When the pups were four weeks old they had their first meal from a bowl, and that's where I left our story a month ago. Within a few days I started using the clicker as I set their communal food bowl on the floor. As they were eating they heard clicking. Eventually that turned into clicking and tossing a handful of kibble to them on a blanket, and then I separated them for individual clicker/food association sessions that lasted about one minute each. I used their kibble for almost all training, but also introduced tiny pieces of cooked meat. I did some training with the litter as a whole, like clicking when they all jumped on the Bosu ball and feeding them all at the same time on top of the ball, or clicking when they jumped into the big round dog bed and

feeding them in the bed. For a couple of meals each day, they only received food from my hand, from the bed, or in a big low cardboard box they liked to jump into.

I was uncertain if the clicker meant anything to them, however, until I took them out for one-on-one time starting at five-and-a-half weeks. I tried unsuccessfully to take one pup out of the pen and train a few feet from the pen. The working puppy ignored his counterparts, but the pups left behind screamed incessantly while I clicked and treated an individual. At that point I knew without a doubt they understood the nature of the game.

I began working on a different behavior for each pup but realized quickly it would be

hard to keep track of each pup's progress and who was doing which trick. I settled on teaching them all the same behaviors: hand target and respond to your name. I knew it likely they would get new names from their owners, but I wanted to teach them each how to respond to an individual verbal cue, so I did not really care whether these were names for life.

When the pups went home at seven-and-a-half weeks they were familiar with the following:

Click: Sound of the click and association with food

"Pup, Pup" (group recall): As I handed cookies to the pups, I said each pup's name when he got his treat

Name: I called each pup's name and clicked when he turned his head in acknowledgement; he got the treat after running to me

Restrained recalls: Jim held or corralled one, two, or even three pups; I knelt down, then called and rewarded each pup with no movement on my part

Hand target: No cue word, just the visual cue. Your hand is held with open palm next to your knee, and you mark/treat when the puppy hits your hand with his nose. Be sure to give rewards close to the target hand and next to your leg.

Follow: As a group or individual and get rewarded by your leg

They would also jump into or on top of any kind of bed, low box, or balance toy I went anywhere near. So the cue to play "all pups jump into the box" was just to stand near the box. To end the game I would upend the box, or move away from the area and ignore them jumping in and out.

The pups wore buckle collars from the time they were four weeks old, and occasionally dragged a little light leash around the yard when we were with them. But they did not really have any leash training. At eight-and-a-half weeks old Sweep took just a few sessions with the leash to teach him to stay with us while attached to the leash and to move forward with us. Leash training was made easier because the pups had already learned that it was rewarding to follow Jim and me. We used the same words and rewards we used to teach Sweep to follow us off leash. He was rewarded with a game of tug, or we did hand targeting, but now he wore a leash attached to the collar.



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G O T Y O U R C L I C K E R ?

If you are not familiar with clicker training you will want to learn the basics before you start following along with the skill training I will be describing to you this year. You do not actually need to use a clicker; you can use a marker word like "yes" or a perfectly timed one-syllable praise word like "yeah," but you need some way to communicate to your pup that the behavior he performed was one that you would like to see him repeat. If you reward your pup for doing a behavior, he is more likely to repeat it.



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But without the perfect timing of a marker that distinguishes a small piece of a behavior, it will not be as easy to train the behavior. To read about clicker training on line and read hundreds of articles from clicker training experts, go to www.clickersolutions.com/articles/index.htm.

Priorities for Weeks 8 through 12

Socializing and animal husbandry are the two most important subjects to address this month. You can never get this valuable time back during which you need to expose your dog to the outside world, not just his own environment. Unsocialized pups might never reach their full potential in any aspect of life. The second most important way to spend your time is on the husbandry of keeping your dog. Crate and potty training, handling, grooming, and walking on a leash should be at the top of the list.

Crate training: Teach your pup to willingly run into his cage by rewarding him every time he chooses to get in. Practice "in and outs" by rewarding the pup for getting in, staying in, waiting till the door opens, and then for running out on a release word. Repeat often, *not* just when you need to confine the pup.

Grooming: Brush your pup daily using a soft brush and many rewards, even if you have a smooth-coated dog. Getting your dog used to standing still for grooming on a table or bench will make your life much easier.

Nails: Plan on clipping once a week for life. Get your dog used to a small, battery-operated Dremel tool by turning the motor on a few times a day, holding it close to your pup's body, and treating him. In a short while you should be able to use the Dremel to do your pup's nails. In the meantime, use regular dog nail clippers.

Potty on leash: Give your relief command after the dog starts to potty, then reward immediately. Never leave your dog for even a moment unattended or unwatched in the house this month.

Handling: Count every toe, check ears and teeth, testicles, tail area, and so on every day in a session of gentle handling with lots of calm words and cookie rewards.

The rest of our training priorities are as follows in order of importance after the above.

1. Playing tug and retrieve
2. Name recognition and the recall that follows
3. Release word
4. Hand targeting
5. Down
6. Sit

Congratulations MACH Aubrey's Jump for Joy (Riley) and Karen Schelling



Karen Schelling 2016

From: Allison and Andy Miele and Aubrey's Springers; Clyde and Mardi Closson and Rosie, Olivia, Daphne and Sassy; Bob Falk and Bear; Ann Schwink and MacMan, Duncan, Ben, Jimi, Smedley, Tracy & Blackie; Gen Deletiere and Celine, Ellie & Nemo; Darryl Warren and Dixie; Cherie Fisher and Turbo, Sherman & Wind Up!; Shiela Strohmeier and Rascal; Patrick Strohmeier and Yankee; Laurie Bakay and Astor & Jenny; Jay Bakay and Tina; Donna Ellis and Sooty & Gracie; Joanne Haas and Timely; Nancy Spada and Xena & Briar; Elaine Berkoff and Nan & Maggie; Janie Harris, Bailey and Booker; and, of course, with love, Kevin and Matty.

It's a Springer thing!

Sweep plays tug and retrieves, knows his name as a recall, and can hand target. He understands his release word and understands that it ends a position behavior like sit or down, or to come out of his cage, but he does not necessarily know these behaviors outside of our home and agility yard or with any big distractions. Your pup's ability to play and train with you anywhere is directly associated with how much time you spend rewarding those behaviors in many different locations, taking into account your dog's nature in stimulating or distracting environments.

Eat, Play, Come, Stay: Anytime, Anywhere

My mantra with my dogs is that I want them to be able to "eat, play, come, stay" anytime, anywhere. That is also my own minimal guideline for when I might introduce real agility equipment later on to my dog. My goal is to achieve those four skills anytime and anywhere. I always try to keep those priorities in mind when raising a pup, as well as training my adult dogs. Eating might seem to take an unusual precedence on my list, because most dogs love to eat, but for a high-drive dog that likes to play, eating might be a very low priority. I hope that play, come, and stay have obvious importance to you.

Socializing

I am not overly concerned about Sweep getting a disease while he is out seeing the world. He has had his first vaccine this week, and he is also protected by his mother's antibodies. He will be taken to places where we believe that the dogs (or their droppings) he might encounter are healthy. He will also visit places he is unlikely to encounter dogs, like strip-mall businesses, the hardware store, grocery store parking lot, and so on. We want to expose him to lots of people, vehicles, and activities.



COURTESY OF KATHLEEN ALLES

Before you hit the road with your puppy, however, you should have introduced him successfully to the rewards of both toys and treats. Be sure to work with your puppy slightly below his threshold for distraction or fear. If you walk into a scary or stimulating area with your pup and he will not play or take food, move farther away from that area until you find a place where your pup is not stressed or overly distracted, so that he will interact with you in a confident way.

TEACH YOUR PUP TO



COURTESY OF KATHLEEN ALLES

recall rewarded close to leg



follow, reward close to leg



Your own agility class is probably not a great place to take your puppy unless your food and toy drive is in place. Walking into your class to show off your pup, or trying to run an agility drill while leaving your pup to scream in a cage is so counterproductive that I can't say enough about how important it is not to let that happen. Don't let your puppy's excitement level while watching an activity exceed your ability to get him to interact with you. Start small and build your dog's tolerance and acceptance of surrounding commotion while he still can take direction and reward from you. At no time should your pup be left alone in a highly stimulating or stressful environment without you beside him to monitor

his behavior, reward correct responses, or to adjust his location should he not be able to tolerate the atmosphere.

Playing with Other Dogs

It is not important that your puppy play with other dogs but it is important that your dog can interact with socially acceptable canine behaviors when meeting other dogs. Next month we will address this subject further. This month, let your pup meet other family dogs while both are on leash and your puppy cannot terrorize your adult dogs or others he comes in contact with. Keep play between your pup and other house dogs to a minimum. While you are learning how to be the most important being in your pups'

life; you would rather he not know how much fun it is to chase the cat, or learn how to race up and down the halls of your home with his new housemates.

Verbal Cues

Write down all the words which you intend to use with your dog, as well as their meaning. Don't teach verbal cues (commands) until you are sure which ones you will use and you have defined exactly what behavior you expect to have your dog do quickly when he hears them. Here are some other guidelines to consider:

- Don't use one word for two different behaviors.
- Don't mix up words that have different meanings (like using "sit-down" and "sit" to both mean sit).
- The words should all sound different from one another.
- The words should not sound at all like your dog's name.

Food Reinforcement

I use my dog's kibble (Caribou Creek Gold) as food reinforcement with a bit of cooked meat thrown in for interest. Sweep's daily allotment of food (about

one cup) goes in a plastic bag in the morning. It is either all kibble or 80% kibble, and no more than 20% other goodies. Additionally I have small containers of kibble in the areas we train and by the door we go out to potty. Don't get caught without training treats in your pockets! Don't let your pup grow up on junk food. This portion is what we use all day to train. There are about 150 little kibbles in 1/3 cup of food. That allows us to do a lot of crate, target, recall, potty, and position training sessions, and still put a tiny amount of kibble in his food bowl when we put him in the crate for a nap. My pups train for most of their food. They would be fat if I didn't. (Did I mention to keep your pup as lean as possible?) If I don't have time to train (and that does happen plenty of times), then the pup gets a regular meal in his bowl. As he gets older he will get most of his food in the bowl since I don't have time to use each one of those hundreds of kibbles for behavior training.

Toy Training

As often as possible get down on the floor with your pup for tugging, retrieving, and general play sessions. I always play with a toy that both my dog and I can hold at the same time, or that has a handle. Don't use a ball at this point because when you do retrieves you want to be able to play tug with the retrieve object. Lastly, make sure to use an appropriately sized toy for your dog; he should be able to get his mouth around it and drag the toy back to you.

Use the principle of EMT during these sessions:

Engage your dog mentally before you start; don't show your pup the toy until you have him excited to be with you. Say silly words, tickle him gently, push

Follow the Leader



follow



follow and reward

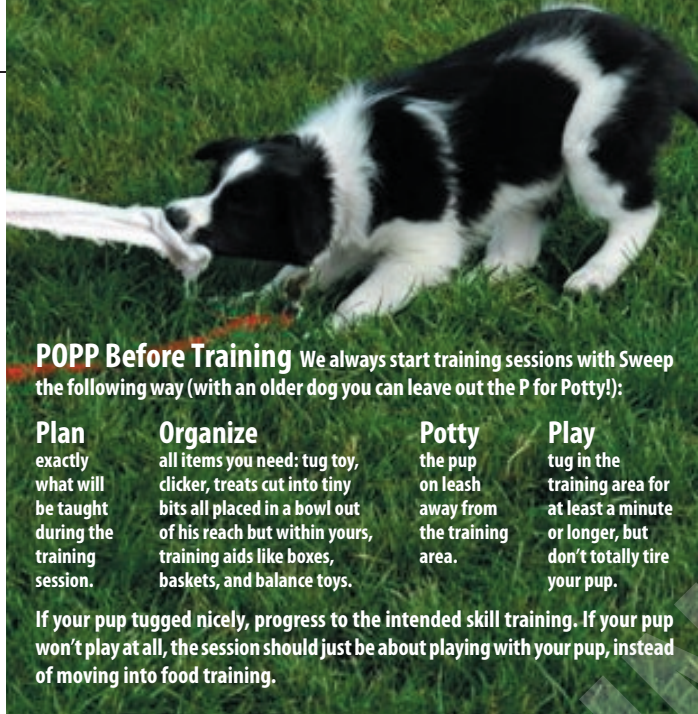
him around till they *almost* bite your hand, then get out the toy.

Move the toy by dragging it on the ground just in front of his nose, but don't push it into the pup's face. Tease him with it, and when he begins to chase the toy from side to side, allow him to sink his teeth in and get a good hold.

Tug with your puppy only as much as he is willing to pull the toy away from you in return. Follow your pup's lead; let him drag you around the room. Pretend to let him win the tug game, especially if he is a reluctant tugger. Once your pup loves to tug, you can drag him around gently with the toy.

Progress to doing a couple of short retrieves with the toy. The pup should be on leash (or alternatively, the toy should be on leash) when retrieving so that you can guide him back to you with the leash. If the toy does not have a long handle, attach your leash to it so that you can throw it a few feet away, and gently drag it back again. Be quiet when your pup first picks up the toy, as often he will drop it if you are too animated while he retrieves. That should change as your dog does more reliable retrieves. Don't ever throw out a toy and let your dog wander off. Figure out how you can encourage your pup to return and continue to play with you.

Pick up the toy and throw it again if the dog brings it to you and drops it. If he does not drop the toy, praise for returning to you, but keep your hands off the toy so that he does not try to hide his new possession from you by running off with the toy.



COURTESY OF KATHLEEN ALLES

POPP Before Training We always start training sessions with Sweep the following way (with an older dog you can leave out the P for Potty!):

Plan
exactly what will be taught during the training session.

Organize
all items you need: tug toy, clicker, treats cut into tiny bits all placed in a bowl out of his reach but within yours, training aids like boxes, baskets, and balance toys.

Potty
the pup on leash away from the training area.

Play
tug in the training area for at least a minute or longer, but don't totally tire your pup.

If your pup tugged nicely, progress to the intended skill training. If your pup won't play at all, the session should just be about playing with your pup, instead of moving into food training.

Skill Training

Before starting a skill training session, remember to complete the POPP steps—plan, organize, potty, play. The training session then goes in this order: play, then train, then play again. Playing comes first, training second, then play again to end the session or use the play to put a break between short training sessions.

Start your skill training session, like release training or hand targeting, and *do not deviate from your planned training session to reward other behaviors that your dog offers*. Do a couple of minutes of focused training. If you have been working on *Down* in previous sessions, but now you are trying to work on hand targeting and your pup keeps offering you these incredible downs, ignore them and stay on track with your hand targeting. You might not be marking and rewarding targeting quickly enough, and out of frustration your pup will try to earn treats another way.

Try teaching downs in one area of your home, and targeting in another for a few days to avoid confusion.

End with another short play session. Try not to stop unless your dog will play with you. Don't short change the play at the end of the session. It is important that your dog eventually is able to go quickly from food training back to interacting with you in toy play. Adjust the length of time of the toy/train/toy sessions on either end till you find the right balance for your dog. A very active pup might have a longer play session in the beginning to take the edge off. A less driven pup might have a shorter play session to start, as long as he is really playing. If you can't get the dog to tug, you may need to do many short tug and play sessions and lower your expectations for play by quitting play as soon as you see some progress beyond where you ended your last play session. You can also click and treat your pup for tugging as

well as for other skills. Don't get stressed if your pup won't play; you will telegraph your stress and put pressure on the pup, which will making engaging in play with your dog that much more difficult. Teach your dog to play in a comfortable safe environment before trying to play in other environments.

Troubleshooting

If your dog does not want to stop playing to do skill training with food, then start your sessions with food training, then play, then end with food training. Skip the middle part of play if the pup won't take food.

You may need to adjust on a weekly or even daily basis the order in which you train/play. If your pup says no play today, then focus more on play than food training. Also try to reward some of the behaviors you are teaching with your toy, or even other activities, instead of food. 🐾

TEACH

Your Puppy Everyday!

Toy play: Toys are our tools in agility. Introduce them early and often.

Exercise: Physical activities, including running, restrained recalls, and balance work.

Acclimate: Socialize your dog, to everyone and everything.

Confinement: Accustom your dog to being confined in a cage, ex-pen, or by perimeter training.

Handling: Use touch, grooming, holding, trimming nails, and teaching behaviors to acclimate your pup to handling, which will assist in grooming and physical examinations.



Nancy Gyes and her husband Jim Basic run Power Paws Agility in San Jose, California. She is the AKC World Team Coach for 2006 and has been on the AKC World Team seven times, four years with Scud and three with Riot. Nancy and Riot finished 1st in 2002 and 2nd in 2001 in Individual Agility classes at Worlds. Nancy also won the USDAA Nationals four years in a row, 1998 to 2001, with three different dogs, Scud, Riot, and Wicked. In 2001 and 2002, Nancy and Riot were the 24" jump height AKC National Champions. Scud retired in 2001 after winning the USDAA Veterans Championship. Contact Nancy at www.powerpawsagility.com, where you can also view other articles and videos.