**2020 Challenges with Raising Your New Puppy**

*By Nannette Newbury*

Puppy ownership in this day and age comes with new challenges that most of us have never had to deal with. Times change and nothing could be truer in the raising of your new puppy. Your two biggest challenges are going to be your veterinarian and your obedience trainer. The biggest change? YOU are going to have to be a STRONG and INFORMED ADVOCATE for your new puppy.

**VETERNARIAN MEDICINE**

The days of the “Mom & Pop” veterinarian clinic is gone. Veterinarian medicine is suffering from the same ills as human medicine. It is now BIG business owned by corporate entities answerable to their boards and shareholders. Many of these clinics have imposed “quotas” on their staff to produce so many procedures a month.

I have experienced horror stories from well-meaning guilt-driven pet owners who have been offered non-essential surgeries, and guilted into doing expensive procedures with little or no hope of any positive outcome. Then these vets will insist that you must be on heartworm medication, flea and tick medication, worming medication…the list is almost never-ending.

They will also insist that you must spay-neuter your pet before six months of age, no discussion. This in spite over numerous overwhelming recent studies (peer-reviewed and several conducted by UC Davis Vet School) telling us that early-spay neuter surgery is directly linked to early onset cancers, aggression and behavioral issues, torn ACL’s and hip dysplasia. As someone who started in vet school, believe me I am not anti-vet, but when you have overwhelming evidence that performing an early spay neuter could have lifelong ill-health consequences for your pet and vets are ignoring these studies…well there are no words.

Keep in mind that vets maybe take one class on reproduction and nutrition. So who do you think is more qualified to counsel you on the rearing, raising and feeding of your new puppy? A vet? Not likely.

And the most egregious behavior of all by veterinarians? Anytime a purebred dog comes into their practice and is ill or diagnosed with a disease, they blame the breeder. I hope that this is one practice that gets attention immediately. Someday soon some deep-pockets owner is going to sue a veterinarian for “creating” the auto-immune disorder that their dog has developed…and WIN.

How do you find a sane and rational vet these days?

* Avoid any large corporate entities such as Banfield or VCA (Veterinary Clinics of America).
* Interview a new and/or your current vet. Ask them, “At what age do you recommend that I spay/neuter my new puppy?” If they respond, “Six months of age or earlier” then run, don’t walk to a new vet. They are patently lying to you and ignoring current research study results.
* Ask the vet their recommended puppy vaccination schedule. If they are still promoting annual vaccinations, or promoting 7-way combination vacations or the leptospirosis or bordatella vaccines, find a new vet.
* My recommended vaccine schedule is offered by Dr. Ronald Schultz, a world-renowned expert in canine immunology. He has been trying to talk sense into the veterinarian medicine community for over 40 years about his research on the efficacy and longevity of vaccines.
* Basically, your puppy should receive a vaccine of Parvovirus and Distemper virus ONLY. These are the accepted core vaccines. Start at 10 weeks and give every four weeks for three times (10 weeks, 14 weeks and 18 weeks). Th one last vaccine which will be given when maternal antibodies have dissipated is GOOD FOR THE LIFE OF THE DOG! You can check every three to five years by doing a blood titer antibody test. If the dog shows us low on one, you vaccinate as needed. This still might be overkill as their also what is called cellular immunity that we cannot test for.
* The past regime was to vaccinate early and often…this can have negative life-long ill-health effects on your puppy.

**OBEDIENCE TRAINING**

Long ago there was one standard of obedience training…it was referred to as the “herk and jerk” method. While effective it was not appropriate on all breeds. The point here is that each breed of dog responds to differing styles of obedience training. Many breeds require endless repetition to learn. The Australian Shepherd is not one of those! You ask an Aussie to repeat a command more than three times and I guarantee that they will start offering you all kinds of different behaviors to try and please you because they cannot figure out why you keep asking…they got it right the first time!

Recently a popular training methodology call “positive only” training has emerged. The premise that a dog will respond much better when no pain or consequences for poor behavior is involved. Sounds good, right? None of us wants to hurt a dog, or apply undue pain or stress…ever. However, there is a breakdown in the “positive only” model, that will have lifelong consequences for your dog.

There are some dog behaviors that are entirely unacceptable, even downright dangerous or life threatening. As an example, a dog lunging on leash to bite/maim a toddler. How does “positive only” handle this behavior? They disengage the dog (i.e., break eye contact) with the dog and child, turn the dog away from the child and then reward the dog with a treat and their voice. WTH? Anyone with a brain knows that in dog language that is one good “atta boy.” The dog has just been rewarded for his unacceptable behavior towards a child.

Keep in mind that the sign of a great correction is that the dog never exhibits the behavior again…anything else is just nagging.

As you can imagine, for serious and egregious behaviors the school of positive only training has caused many dogs to become rehabilitatable and many have ended up euthanized. This is directly from my personal experience and the numbers are devastating.

The Australian Shepherd is a dog that is highly intelligent; we have already touched on their not needing endless repetitions for training. They also require strong leadership. Keep in mind I said “leadership,” not dominance. They thrive on boundaries, schedule and consistency

So how do you find a great obedience class? Well first off, most puppy socialization, puppy kindergarten classes are fine. And you should plan on attending one when your pup is between 10 and 16 weeks of age. However, when it comes to formal obedience classes you must interview prospective individuals and companies.

* Get training recommendations from your breeder, your veterinarian, or Aussie owners.
* Make sure that they are “sane and rational” dog trainers that DO NOT practice positive-only training.
* Most of the AKC-recognized kennel clubs have talented and qualified trainers and offer obedience classes on a regular basis.
* Ask if they have ever worked with Australian Shepherds before. If they have, ask them how they modify their training for this breed.
* Do not start obedience classes prior to six months of age. Your puppy’s brain is not sufficiently developed enough to retain this level of training.
* Plan on attending a minimum of one year of obedience classes with your Australian Shepherd. This is not for the dog, they are brilliant; it is for YOU! In a professional and safe environment you will be able to handle the most challenging of puppy-to-adult behaviors and nip bad behavior in the bud immediately.
* Do NOT hire a trainer or behaviorist for private lessons. Your Aussie needs to be in public, around other dogs. Hiring a trainer to train your dog and then returning them to you is unwise. First of all you have a breed that is devoted to you, a Velcro dog. And you want to send them away during this growth and bonding period? No thanks. Then the dog/puppy returns home “fully trained,” only YOU do not know how to do what they did or maintain what they taught your dog.
* Avoid big-box pet store obedience classes. The employee/trainers make minimum wage and take a short course from the home office on obedience training. This is not the expertise or experience that will ensure a high success rate for you and your puppy.

While my tone and message might appear harsh, I consider them direct. Your puppy is not the being to “experiment” with. The mistakes you make with this puppy in terms of health and training can have negative lifelong consequences.