

Early Training - 3 to 5 Months

Medium and large breed puppies from three-five months old are physically big enough to knock you down and chew up items you care about, but not quite old enough to understand that they shouldn't do those things.

Recently a young man came to see me with his 5-month-old Weimeraner puppy. "He doesn't listen to me at all. He gets so excited when he sees me that I can't even get a leash on him. He ignores me when I say 'no,' and dashes around like he's possessed. Do you think he's stupid?" he asked. "No," I replied, "I think he sounds perfectly normal."

This is the age when you must learn to balance the behaviors you can train with those that you should manage. You will continue to train your puppy to walk on a leash, come when called, and stay where he's put, but must realize that he is still a puppy, and will make many errors. You will simply manage his overexcitement when you have just come home after a long absence, when your guests arrive, or when he's feeling energetic and can't quite contain himself. He's not old enough to have the self-control needed in those situations.

Learning Good Behavior On A Leash

Your goal is to have your puppy learn that the leash is not on him to restrain him, but simply to keep him safe. You want a puppy that stands on a loose leash, and that looks at you when you speak or when you give a tug on the leash. You have reached an age where your puppy is ready to learn these things.

Stand with your puppy, holding the leash at a length that allows him to stand quietly beside you without getting tangled in it.



Cat holds the leash at a length that gives Robin plenty of slack to stand quietly, but not so much that it gets tangled under his feet.

Imagine a circle around you with a radius equal to the length of the leash. When your puppy tries to pull out of the circle, give a quick tug on the leash toward you. He may turn to look at you as if he is surprised by what happened. If he does not, reach down and poke him.



Robin is pulling on the leash and Cat can't get his attention with a tug, so she reaches down and gets his attention by poking him.

Another puppy would nip or paw at him to get his attention and you are simply mimicking that behavior. When you have his attention, praise him and give him a treat.

If your puppy can stand on a loose leash, it's time to try to get him to walk with you on a loose leash. Tell your puppy Let's go, and start walking. When he runs to the end of the leash, stop and give the leash a quick tug.



Cat gives Cinda a quick tug as she runs to the end of the leash.

You may find it most effective to back up a few steps. If your puppy is startled enough to look at you, praise him for giving you his attention and offer him a treat.

It's perfectly okay to stop and let your puppy sniff and investigate his surroundings. You can walk along slowly, giving him a chance to explore, much like you would take a walk with a young child. When you are ready to continue walking, repeat the command, Let's go, and, if necessary, give a gentle tug to get your puppy moving.

It will be tempting to walk your puppy on a retractable leash. Your soft side will want to give your puppy more room to run and explore than a short 4- to 6-foot leash will allow. The problem with this is that when your puppy is on a retractable leash, he always has the sensation that the leash is tight. You may be inadvertently teaching him that it is okay to pull you.

If you want to give your puppy more freedom, use a long line. This will enable your puppy to wander farther from you and explore, and it will also give you the opportunity you need to teach him to come!

Learning To Come: The Beginning

Begin by taking your puppy out in the yard on a leash or rope that is 15-to 20-feet long. When he wanders away from you, say his name and the command, Come. If he does not come, tug the leash toward you, and then back up until he catches up with you.



Cat practices come with Cinda on a 20-foot rope.

Do not reach for him, as this will cause him to jump away from you after coming near. You may need to kneel down to encourage him to come all the way to you. Inevitably, your puppy will see something that interests him and run toward it to investigate. Before he gets to the end of the rope, say his name and "Come." If he is attentive, and turns toward you, he will avoid the collar correction. However, if he is inattentive, and does not come, he will receive a tug on his collar when he gets to the end of the rope. When this occurs, encourage him to come back to you.

Soon, you will be able to walk your puppy toward another person, dog, or toy. He will begin to stay close to you as he realizes that running off may have the negative consequences of a tug. This is the first step toward gaining off-leash control. A puppy that starts to choose to stay close to you, even though he does not feel pressure from a leash, can eventually learn to stay close to you when not on leash. You are still several months from achieving that goal, but you are headed in the right direction.



Cinda sees another puppy across the yard and decides to stay close to Cat instead of going for a visit.

Learning to Stay

Puppy owners are always anxious to teach their puppies to stay. However, teaching your puppy to remain in a sit or down position for any length of time is probably going to be quite frustrating. What is easier to achieve is to teach your puppy to stay on his bed. This allows the puppy the freedom of standing, sitting or lying down, and the only rule you have to enforce is that he cannot leave the area of the bed.

Teaching "Place"

First, a bed or platform needs to be selected. The more obvious the edges are to the puppy, the easier it is to learn. Starting with a place that is a few inches off the floor or that has a raised border is easiest because once the dog steps on the place, it is very clear to him when he steps off.

Tell your dog Place and guide him on to it with your leash. You don't care whether he stands, sits or lies down, so it is not necessary to give him any other command. Step away from your puppy, holding the leash as shown in the photograph below.



Cat is holding the leash properly, but needs to give Cinda a little more slack to allow her to make the mistake of stepping off the bed. The bed is made of a PVC frame and an easily cleaned, lightweight sling.

When he steps off the place, step toward him, tell him he's wrong, No, and repeat Place as you use your leash to return him to the bed.



Cinda steps off the bed and
Cat uses her leash to stop her.

Remember, your puppy is a problem solver. Just because you keep him from coming off the bed in one direction does not mean he won't try to get off the bed in another direction. Start circling the place, stopping your puppy every time he attempts to get off. Soon he will understand where his boundaries are.

You will also need a command that lets your puppy know when it is alright to get off his bed. A simple release command, like OK, is perfect.

When your puppy will happily stay on his bed while you are near him, it's time to teach him to stay there even if you walk away. Begin by tying your puppy so that if he tries to follow you, the rope will stop him. Don't tie him to the bed, as you don't want him to drag the bed across the floor.



The rope is tied to the fence and is not so short that Cinda can't make the mistake of getting off the bed, but it will stop her before she gets too far. Then, Cat can come back to her and put her back on the bed.

When your puppy gets off the bed, tell him he's made a mistake by saying No, then go to him and put him back on the bed while you repeat the command, Place. There is no need to scream at him; a quiet, no will do. It probably won't be long before he realizes that the bed is more comfortable than being stopped by the rope.

Do not be unreasonable in the length of time that you expect your puppy to stay on the bed. Start with very short sessions, and give your puppy a toy or bone to play with while he rests on his bed. It won't be long before you can have him remain on his bed while you eat a meal.

Hints For Sanity During A Difficult Period

Although a 3-to 5-month-old puppy is capable of learning a lot of commands, he is still a puppy and his antics will drive you crazy if you let them.

Very busy, active puppies will often start running through the house, jumping on and off furniture and creating chaos. If you frequently find yourself in a position of trying to catch your puppy, let him drag a leash in the house so that catching him becomes possible. If you are afraid that he will chew on the leash, use a piece of rope. It's cheap, and if he chews it off, you can replace it with another.

Puppies go through stages, just like young children. It would not be uncommon for your puppy to go through a fearful period at this age. If your puppy seems to have become shy or withdrawn, maintain a very matter-of-fact attitude. Approach the object that he seems timid about with confidence. Avoid soothing him, as he will think you are praising him for his shy behavior. Instead, have an attitude that implies he should get over it and be brave!

It is common for a puppy at this stage to become housebroken. However, don't yet let your guard down. Even though he may not soil the house, he is still very capable of being destructive in other ways. Continue to use your crate or a pen to confine him when you are away.

Most recently my husband and I raised a Labrador Retriever puppy. Just short of his 6-month-old birthday, we started letting him sleep loose at night. He had grown accustomed to his bed, and was

happy to be in the bedroom with us at night. However, he was over a year old before we trusted him to be loose in the house while we were away. There was no reason to have to come home to an unwanted mess because he had chewed a piece of furniture or shredded a magazine.

As your puppy grows, he may begin to put his front feet on your tables and counter tops. Tell him Off and if he fails to comply, simply touch his back foot with your foot. Feeling as if his foot is trapped will cause him to jump down.

At this age, it is very tempting to begin to put your puppy out in your yard by himself for exercise. When he's tired of being out alone, he may start to bark at the door to be let in. Be careful about responding to him. There may be a time when you want him to stay in the yard while you entertain or clean, and having a puppy who barks incessantly at the door, determined that you will soon come, is very annoying. Instead, let him inside when you are ready, sometimes before he barks and sometimes after he's barked a few times and then quit.

Throwing something for your puppy to retrieve is a great way to exercise him, as well as tire him out when he's feeling exuberant. If you are having trouble getting him to bring the object back to you, let him drag his long line while you play. If he does not come, or tries to play keep-away, simply pick up the long line, tell him to come, and give a tug on the rope. Praise him for coming, even if he arrives without the object.

If your puppy is willing to come to you with the object, resist the temptation to grab for the object as soon as he arrives. Let him hold it for a few seconds and praise him for coming. Then, gently take it from him and throw it again. This way he will realize that the game will not end if he gets close to you and you don't intend to steal his prize!

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as well as to Janine and Marty Fiorito for lending us Cinda and Robin.*

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This series of articles is written by Connie Cleveland of founder of [Dog Trainers Workshop](#) located in South Carolina. Connie is a frequent contributor to Front and Finish and Golden Retriever News. Connie has generously given PSLRA permission to use her articles on our website.

Thank you Connie!