

Guidelines for puppy classes

Puppy Preschool outline

The following guidelines for Puppy Preschool have been developed predominantly from material provided by Dr. Kersti Seksel but other puppy class structures have also been included.

Puppy Preschool classes help your client's puppies develop social skills, be reinforced for acceptable behavior, and learn verbal cues in a safe and controlled environment.

There are many topics that could be covered but realistically they cannot all be taught in 4 or 5 hours of attending Puppy Preschool classes.

It is advisable that just 4–6 (maximum) topics are covered in each class. This will prevent running over time and puppies becoming too tired, and give a greater opportunity for owners to absorb and learn what they are being told.

Ideally the first class is run without puppies being present so that owners can focus on the topics covered rather than be distracted by the puppies. The following four classes can then cover other topics and give practical demonstrations. Each week the class generally involves some training, guidance on canine health issues, and discussion of normal puppy behaviors, and how to prevent these behaviors becoming problems in the home. For more details, see Figure 4.6 or visit www.hillspuppyschool.com.au.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Introductions and class rules	Come on cue	Drop on cue	Stay on cue
Training guidelines and use of rewards	Look on cue	Walking on a loose lead	Crate training
Mat training and settling techniques	Vaccinations	Fleas, ticks, heartworms	Oral care
Sit on cue	Handling techniques	Destructive, unruly, barking	Neutering
House (toilet) training	Grooming	Supervised play	Review
Exercise (mental and physical) Meeting puppy's needs	Nutrition	Review sit, look, come on cue	Graduation

The Puppy Preschool program is specifically designed for puppies between the ages of 8 and 16 weeks. It helps develop their social skills, reinforces acceptable behaviors, and teaches them verbal and visual cues. Additionally puppy owners learn about canines, their behavior, and how to manage them. Classes should be run in a safe, secure, and controlled environment for all those involved.

Age requirements

Puppy Preschool is designed for dogs between the ages of 8 and 16 weeks. Although the socialization period of dogs starts at around 3 weeks of age, puppies less than 8 weeks of age should still be with their mother and littermates. It is not recommended having puppies older than 14 weeks commence Puppy Preschool classes as they have reached the end of their primary socialization period. When beginning the program puppies should ideally be between 8 and 12 weeks old. Older puppies should attend juvenile classes which can also be run at the veterinary hospital or by the local trainer. [Authors' note: Exceptions can sometimes be made for slightly older, small-breed dogs with a friendly, nonreactive temperament.]

Although a small breed such as a Jack (Parson) Russell terrier at 18 weeks may be similar in size to a 10-week-old beagle, there can be problems if they are in the same class. It may seem harmless, but the 18-week-old Jack Russell terrier may be more physically and psychologically advanced than the 10-week-old beagle and so will interact quite differently.

Size requirements

Puppies of different breeds should be in the same class. Conducting separate small-breed and large-breed classes sets unrealistic expectations for the puppies as in the real world they will interact with other dogs that may be bigger or smaller than they are. However, when play is incorporated into the session, puppies of similar sizes should be chosen to interact.

Number of puppies

Puppy Preschool classes should ideally have no more than six puppies in each class. Having more puppies in a class can make it more difficult to manage and can lead to a significant increase in vocalization which is distracting and disruptive and can interfere with learning. Adaptil collars or a diffuser in puppy classes can reduce fear and reactivity and may enhance the socialization process.^{1,2}

Number of people

While the whole family should be encouraged to attend, it is not desirable to have children under 5 years of age participate. If they do, each should be accompanied by two adults, one for the child and one for the puppy. For example, a class of 6 puppies with 2 adults and 1 child per puppy makes up a class size of 18 people plus 6 puppies.

Number of instructors

It is recommended that there are two instructors per Puppy Preschool class for several reasons. One instructor can continue with the classes while the other might be assisting a particular puppy. It is also an ideal way for new people to gain Puppy Preschool instructing experience and it is easier to manage the class attendees.

Space requirements

The space available will help determine the number of puppies you can realistically have attend. Every person should be able to sit comfortably on a chair and the puppies should all have a mat to lie on.

¹Graham D, Bailey G, Mills DS. The effect of temporary exposure to synthetic dog appeasing pheromone (DAP) on levels of arousal in puppy classes. *J Vet Behav* 2007;2:90.

²Denenberg S, Landsberg GM. Effect of dog-appeasing pheromones on anxiety and fear in puppies during training its effects on long term socialization. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2008;233:1874–82.