

Pandemic Puppies

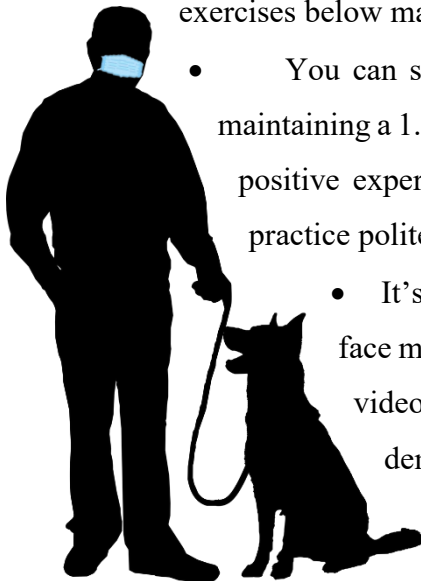


The coronavirus pandemic has meant many changes, including life for our furry friends. Here are some helpful hints if you are bringing up a puppy during this time.

Socialisation

Socialisation remains incredibly important for pups up to 12-14 weeks of age. During this period, the puppy needs to have fun and enjoyable experiences while in the presence of other dogs, people, cars, thunderstorms and so on. See the chapter on Socialisation in the Puppy Manual for more information. This can be more challenging during the pandemic.

- Remember, always follow the laws and guidelines of your local area. Some of the exercises below may not be possible at certain times, as these rules change.



- You can still socialise a dog to the presence of other humans whilst maintaining a 1.5m distance. Socialising doesn't require physical contact, just positive experiences while in a relaxed emotional state. If you'd like to practice polite greetings, use a lead longer than 1.5m.
- It's important that your puppy is familiar with people wearing face masks, so practice this at home with your puppy. The YouTube video '5 easy steps to get your dog used to face masks' demonstrates this well. Once your puppy is happy with you wearing a face mask, ask friends or family to do the same thing.

Sleeping and Resting

Puppies need to sleep at least 18 hours out of 24. While COVID is great for increasing the time our dogs receive companionship, we need to be mindful to give them a break! Make sure your puppy has a place to go where he knows he won't be disturbed by any other household members, including kids.

Alone time

Teaching your puppy to be comfortable being alone is essential. Dogs are socially obligate animals; they need company and will easily become anxious about separation if not taught that it's OK. Although you may be home more often at the moment, at some point your dog will need to be home alone. It's best to prepare your dog for this as gently as possible, so your puppy realises that being alone is nothing to worry about.

Crate training and Settle on a Mat

These are both great exercises to teach dogs to be comfortable in a place of their own. Once puppies are familiar with these exercises (details in the Puppy Manual) and are happy resting in their crate or mat, they can be used to increase independence, by gradually increasing the distance between you and the pup. For example:

Step 1: Teach your puppy to settle on the mat by your feet as per the Puppy Manual

Step 2: Move the mat a few metres away and teach the puppy that it still pays to lie quietly there. Long lasting chews work well to encourage calm and quiet behaviour.

Step 3: Once you know your puppy can rest and relax away from you in the same room, get him settled on his mat with a chew, and go and make a cup of tea (or a beverage of your choice!) in the next room. If he hops up to follow you, encourage him back to his mat. You may need to break down the length of time that you leave for – try just walking out of the room and return immediately the first few times.

Puppy-proof area

The puppy-proof area is where you are going to leave your puppy when you are gone for longer periods of time. To maximise your chances of success:

- Use the crate training guide to teach your puppy to be comfortable in the crate. The same techniques can be applied to the puppy-proof area. Keep the crate in the area (with the door open), so that your pup always has his comfortable, safe place available.

- Ensure the puppy-proof area is accessible all the time while you are present. Leave food and water in there, as well as treats and chews. It should be a place your puppy feels happy to go into.
- Leave the puppy in there at a time when she is calm and tired out. After a play session, meal and toilet break would be ideal. Give her a chew, or sprinkle some treats in a snuffle mat for her to find.
- Some puppies love to have a soft toy or warm (not hot) water bottle to snuggle with. Others prefer to rip them up, so it's best not to give them expensive ones!

At first, just leave to go into a different room, or just outside your home. You can set up a camera with a live view (or just a video call if you have two mobiles), out of reach of the puppy of course! What you want to see is the puppy notice you are gone, and not care. She might sniff about, finish the treats, wander around the pen, and settle and go to sleep. She may have a whimper or a bark to see if this brings you back. Watch and see whether she will settle on her own. Try to return while the puppy is resting and quiet. Return within 5 – 15 minutes the first few times. You can gradually build up to longer periods.

If at any point your puppy appears distressed (frantic scrabbling, whimpering or barking continuously, pacing back and forth without resting, panting), then you need to stop and let the puppy out. Seek further advice from a qualified, force-free trainer, or veterinarian. It is possible to desensitise puppies and dogs who develop separation anxiety, but it is also possible to make things worse by attempting to desensitise incorrectly on your own.

If you do teach your puppy to comfortable alone during the socialisation period, most puppies will learn to accept periods of 2 hours or so of alone time. An adult dog may be able to be left for 4 to 6 hours a day, depending on their temperament and on the availability of doggy toilet facilities. If you are regularly leaving your dog alone for longer periods each day, try coming home for lunch, or asking whether a friend, neighbour, or dog walker, could spend some time with your dog. Doggy companionship can also suffice, but please don't get two puppies at the same time, as this can lead to serious problems.



COVID-19 in dogs

Dogs are quite resistant to COVID-19. Although they can very rarely catch coronavirus from humans and test positive for COVID-19, it appears that it does not make them unwell, and they cannot transmit it to others. If you have COVID-19, it is a good idea to avoid sleeping in the same bed as your puppy, or any close face-to-face contact like hugging, kissing or licking (from either party).

You do not need to change the way that your dog interacts with other people. Catching COVID from touching your dog, even after an infected person touches him, is extremely unlikely. Transmission of COVID can occur from touching contaminated surfaces, but these are normally smooth surfaces, not fur. Continuing proper hand hygiene is important – always wash hands after patting dogs.

Dogs do not need to wear face masks. In fact, this is quite dangerous for a dog, as it limits their ability to breathe and regulate their temperature normally.

For up-to-date guidelines on COVID-19 in dogs, see

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>

or <https://www.ava.com.au/coronavirus/>

