

Mind your manners tethering

It is interesting how one training problem can actually be related to another. For example, last week a puppy parent commented that were having a little difficulty with house training. The pup could hold it but occasionally would have accidents. No one wants to battle house soiling, so I pressed for more details. As we discussed the whole scenario of accidents, it turns out the puppy was highly active, getting into trouble and would then eliminate. Wisely, the family did not want to use the crate for a punishment or isolation area and was not sure what to do. All the highly active "naughty" play that is typical for a pup was difficult to find a solution for. Getting the history of what a puppy is doing wrong is extremely important to help that family get on the right track, and that puppy to learn good manners in a positive way.

Typically in a scenario like this I would suggest a baby gate to keep the puppy in the room you are in. What is difficult is that many homes now have a large open floor plan so a baby gate won't work. There are some pet gate models that expand up to 72" wide, but that may not solve the problem in some homes. So how does one keep a puppy out of trouble?

The answer is a tether. A tether is a leash or two joined to give a puppy about 10 feet to play, chew on toys, and a bed to rest on. Tie the tether to the leg of a strong chair, table or put a screw eye in the wall for attachment. The tether is enforcing that this puppy has to stay in the area the owner is in, and prevents the pup from chewing on cords, furniture or going to an accident area. Even if the puppy is not happy on the tether, they will settle down and accept it after they see they are not going to be released. Now when the puppy is settled, praise the puppy and give an occasional treat. This teaches the puppy to settle down on the bed when you are not able to play with them. When you can play and give them attention, they are off the tether and played with continuously for at least 15 minutes to wear them out. Off the tether means fun, games and activity ; on the tether means quiet time. The crate can also be used for quiet time, but if your puppy is in the crate for more than 10 hours a day, they need to have more time in other areas of the home.

Some people may think a tether looks mean or that the pup will think they are being punished. When you give a reward like a food toy when they are tethered, the effect is the opposite. The tether means good things are coming and the pup wants to stay put to get them. Do not release your pup from the tether if they are barking or pulling unless you are suspicious that they need to go out. If so, take them directly outside and praise them. If they have not eliminated, do not take them off the tether. Otherwise they will learn to bark to get off the tether!

I still need to use the tether on Bella our family dog who will be 3 soon. She gets a wild hair to start pulling things off the shelf when she wants to have extra attention. She will come to the tether (yes a little reluctantly)when I call her and get content on her bed with a stuffed Kong. For her it is almost as if she needs to be tethered to settle herself. She is a very active dog and it is hard for her to self settle at times. The tether is her friend, and she knows it. She gets to lay close by as I am working on the computer, or enjoying TV time with my family. She is still loved and now knows she cannot just demand attention all the time.

So use a tether to teach good manners and calm settling. It is a great alternative to constant crating, especially if you have a large open floor plan. Make it happy with a nice bed to lay on and some rewarding toy or treat. Use this technique as your pet grows up to remind them of good settling manners.

For more information on pet behavior and positive handling go to www.drsallyjfoote.com