



Welcome Home, Good Dog.

Your complete, science-backed guide to starting your new dog's life with trust, kindness, and positive reinforcement — right from day one.

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Ready to set your dog up for success?

Book your first session with Maryam today — personalized, force-free training tailored to your dog.

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1

Before they arrive

Preparation makes the transition smoother for everyone

A little preparation before your dog walks through the door goes a long way. Dogs thrive on predictability, and having their space ready reduces confusion and stress from the start.

Safe space setup

Choose a quiet area for their crate or bed — away from busy foot traffic. This becomes their retreat, not a punishment zone. Make it cozy with a soft blanket and a worn item of your clothing.

Supplies checklist

Collar + ID tag · properly-fitted harness · 6 ft leash
· crate · food & water bowls · age-appropriate food
· high-value treats · chew toys · puzzle feeders
and interactive food toys.

Dog-proofing

Get down to dog level and look for hazards: loose cords, toxic plants, accessible bins, small objects. Secure cabinets in the kitchen and bathroom. Fence or gate off areas that are off-limits for now.

Household rules — agreed in advance

Decide together: which rooms are accessible? On the sofa? The bed? All family members must apply the same rules consistently. Inconsistency is one of the biggest sources of confusion for dogs.

AVOID

Retractable leashes — they teach pulling, offer no control in emergencies, and can cause serious injuries. A standard 6 ft leash is always safer and more communicative.

2 The first 72 hours

Slow down, tune in, and let them decompress

The first three days are a critical period. Whether you've adopted from a shelter or brought home a puppy, your dog is processing enormous change. The best thing you can do is give them calm, space, and low-pressure positive experiences.

<p>DAY 1 Arrive & decompress</p> <p>Keep arrivals calm. Let them explore on their own terms. Avoid large gatherings or loud introductions. Let them sniff, rest, and orient themselves.</p>	<p>DAY 2 Gentle routine begins</p> <p>Start feeding times, short toilet trips outside, and brief positive name recognition. Keep sessions to 1–2 minutes. Watch their body language.</p>	<p>DAY 3 Building trust</p> <p>Introduce short, reward-based interactions. Let them approach you rather than the reverse. Celebrate small wins with calm praise and a treat.</p>	<p>WEEK 1–3 The 3-3-3 rule</p> <p>3 days to decompress, 3 weeks to learn your routine, 3 months to feel truly at home. Don't rush any phase.</p>
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SCIENCE NOTE

Research shows that dogs from shelters or rehoming situations experience elevated cortisol (stress hormone) for up to 72 hours after arrival. Quiet, low-stimulation environments help regulate their nervous system and set the stage for secure bonding.

3 Understanding your dog

Behaviour is communication — learn to listen

Dogs communicate constantly through body language. Learning to read their signals accurately is the foundation of a trusting relationship — and helps you respond before stress escalates.

Relaxed & happy signals

Loose, wiggly body · Soft eyes with no tension · Mouth slightly open, relaxed · Tail wag at mid-height (varies by breed) · Approaching with gentle curiosity · Playful bow (front down, rear up).

The calming signals ladder

Norwegian ethologist Turid Rugaas identified over 30 "calming signals" dogs use to de-escalate stress — turning the head away, sniffing the ground, blinking slowly, yawning, approaching in a curve. When you see these, your dog is telling you something feels like too much. Create distance, remove pressure, and give them a moment to settle.

Stress & discomfort signals

Yawning or lip-licking (not near food) · Panting when not hot · Looking away / whale eye (showing whites) · Low or tucked tail · Stiff slow movements · Excessive shedding · Refusing food.

KEY INSIGHT

Growling is communication, not defiance. Never punish a growl — it's your dog's way of saying "I'm uncomfortable." Punishing growling removes a warning signal and increases the risk of biting without warning.

4 Positive reinforcement basics

The science of how dogs learn

Positive reinforcement is not just a philosophy — it's the training method with the strongest evidence base. It works by adding something the dog values immediately after a desired behavior, making that behavior more likely to happen again.

The reward must matter to them

Every dog has a hierarchy of rewards. For most dogs: training treats > kibble > verbal praise. Find out what your dog finds most reinforcing and save the best stuff for the most important lessons.

Rate of reinforcement

In early learning, reward every successful repetition. As fluency builds, gradually vary the schedule. Intermittent reinforcement actually strengthens behavior over time — just like a slot machine.

Timing is everything

Rewards must arrive within a few seconds of the behavior. Dogs live in the present. A delayed treat reinforces whatever they're doing at the moment of delivery. Use a marker word ("yes!") or clicker then reward with a treat.

Keep sessions short

5 minutes is often plenty, especially for puppies or anxious dogs. End on a success. A tired, frustrated dog doesn't learn well. Three short sessions a day outperform one long one.

DO

- ✓ Reward the behavior you want to see more of
- ✓ Use your marker word the instant the behavior happens
- ✓ Vary rewards to keep engagement high
- ✓ Train when your dog is calm and alert
- ✓ Set them up to succeed — start in low-distraction environments

DON'T

- ✗ Repeat cues when the dog doesn't respond (creates background noise)
- ✗ Train when dog is over-tired or over-stimulated
- ✗ Lure without fading the lure — dog only responds when they see food
- ✗ Move too fast through difficulty levels
- ✗ Punish failed attempts — this shuts down learning entirely

FORCE-FREE MEANS NO...

Choke chains, prong collars, shock/e-collars, alpha rolls, scruffing, yelling, or any method designed to create pain, fear, or startle responses. Beyond being ethically unnecessary, these methods are associated with increased aggression, anxiety, and learned helplessness in dogs (Ziv, 2017; Herron et al., 2009).

Want to see positive reinforcement in action?

Join a Pawsitive Manners group class or book a one-to-one session. Call (650) 353-0588 or visit www.PawsitiveManners.com to see current class schedules.

5 Crate & space training

Creating a safe haven, never a punishment

A crate is one of the most valuable tools for a new dog when introduced correctly. It gives your dog a quiet, predictable space of their own. The crate can become a place of genuine comfort and security if introduced correctly. However, the crate is not appropriate for all dogs and can cause more harm than good. Reach out if this is a concern.

Sizing

Large enough to stand up, turn around, and lie fully stretched. Not so large that one end becomes a toilet. If using a large crate for a puppy, use a divider to make it smaller as they grow.

Duration building

Build duration in small steps: 5 seconds → 30 seconds → 2 minutes → 10 minutes. Never increase by more than the dog can handle comfortably. Chews and food puzzles help build positive associations with crate time.

Introduction process

Start with the door open. Toss treats in without asking the dog to go in. Progress to feeding food puzzles near, then inside the crate. Only close the door once they're entering happily and voluntarily — never force.

What to never do

Never use the crate as punishment. Never leave a dog crated longer than their bladder can hold (approx. 1 hour per month of age for puppies). Never ignore prolonged distress vocalisation — this signals the crate needs more positive pairing.

BABY GATES & X-PENS

Exercise pens ("x-pens") are a brilliant alternative or complement to crating. They give more space but still limit access to the rest of the home — helpful for toilet training and keeping puppies out of trouble while you can't supervise closely.

6 House training

Patience, prevention, and consistency

House training is not about teaching dogs that toileting is wrong — it's about teaching them *where* to go. Accidents indoors are not defiance; they're missed opportunities to reinforce the right location.

- Take your dog outside frequently: first thing in the morning, after meals, after naps, after play, and before bed. Puppies need a trip every 1–2 hours initially.
- Take them to the same spot each time — the familiar scent cues them to go. Use a calm cue word like "go potty" just as they begin eliminating.
- Reward calmly and immediately after they finish — not while they're going. A treat plus soft praise is ideal.
- Supervise indoors at all times when not crated. Tether them to you on a leash if needed. Watch for circling, sniffing the floor, or squatting.
- If an accident happens: clean thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner (removes scent completely). Don't use bleach — ammonia in bleach smells like urine to dogs.
- Never punish accidents, especially after the fact. Dogs cannot connect a punishment to something that happened more than a few seconds ago. It only creates anxiety around toileting.

REALISTIC TIMELINE

Most puppies achieve reliable house training by 4–6 months. Older dogs from homes may settle in 1–2 weeks. Rescues from kennels may take longer, as they've learned it's acceptable to toilet in their sleeping area. All of these timelines are completely normal.

7 Essential early skills

The behaviors that matter most in the first weeks

Rather than drilling a long list of cues, focus on a handful of foundational behaviors that make life genuinely safer and easier. Build these with short, positive sessions.

Name recognition

Say their name once in a bright, cheerful voice. The instant they look at you, mark ("yes!") and treat. Never use their name to scold. The name should always predict good things happening.

Sit

Hold a treat at their nose, slowly move it back over their head. As their nose goes up, their bottom goes down. Mark and reward the moment their rear touches the floor. Once reliable, add the verbal cue just before the behavior.

Settle on a mat

Toss treats onto a mat for your dog to find. Over time, reward duration of lying calmly. This behavior is invaluable: cafés, vet waiting rooms, guests at dinner. A dog who can settle anywhere is a joy to live with.

Recall ("come")

The most important safety cue. Start in a small space. Crouch down, open body language, exciting voice. When they arrive, jackpot reward. Never call your dog to do something they dislike — go get them instead.

Loose-leash walking

Reward your dog for choosing to walk beside you. When tension appears in the leash, stop or change direction — never pull back. Every step with a loose leash is an opportunity to reward.

Leave it / drop it

Hold a treat in a closed fist. When they stop pawing and look at you — mark and reward with the other hand. "Drop it" is taught with trade-ups: give me that sock, here's a piece of food. Never chase —always trade.

THE 3 DS OF TRAINING

Always add Distance, Duration, and Distraction separately and gradually. If your dog can sit for 10 seconds in your kitchen, they cannot yet sit at a park with other dogs. Drop back to easy wins in new environments and rebuild from there — this is not regression, it's science.

Let's practice these skills together.

Pawsitive Manners has the perfect solution for you and your dog to help you build these foundations with expert guidance and the added challenge of real-world distractions — in a safe, supportive environment.

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8 Socialization

Quality over quantity, always at their pace

Socialization is the process of helping your dog learn that the world is safe — not teaching them to like everything, but to feel neutral or positive about the wide variety of things, people, animals, sounds, and surfaces they'll encounter in life.

CRITICAL WINDOW

The primary socialization window for puppies closes at approximately 12–16 weeks. Don't wait for full vaccination to begin careful, low-risk socialization (vet-carried, puppy classes with health-checked dogs, friends' vaccinated dogs). The window where new experiences are most easily accepted without fear is narrow.

What "good socialization" looks like

Exposure at a distance the dog finds comfortable. Watch their body language. If they're happy and engaged, you can move closer. If they're hesitant, stay where they are and let them observe while pairing with treats.

Novel experiences to introduce

Different surfaces (grass, gravel, grates, wet ground)
 · Umbrellas, hats, children · Traffic sounds ·
 Bicycles, scooters, skateboards · Vacuum cleaners,
 washing machines · Different sizes and breeds of
 dogs.

What socialization is NOT

Flooding — forcing a scared dog to face their fear. Throwing them into a dog park. Making them "say hello" to every stranger. These approaches erode trust and can create lasting fear or reactivity.

Older dogs can be socialized too

Progress may be slower and more careful, but adult dogs absolutely can learn that previously scary things are safe. Book a session with me (virtually or in person) if your dog shows fear or reactivity around specific triggers.

9 Preventing common issues

Management first, training second

Most problem behaviors are either normal dog behavior in the wrong context, or a dog meeting an unmet need. Prevention through management is always easier than addressing a well-practiced behavior later.

Mouthing & puppy biting

Normal, not aggression. Redirect onto appropriate chews immediately. If play gets too intense, calmly end the interaction. Teach bite inhibition by letting pups play, and ending play when pressure gets too high.

Destructive chewing

Chewing is a need, not a choice. Provide appropriate outlets: Kongs stuffed and frozen, chew toys. Manage access to furniture when you can't supervise. Redirect, don't punish.

Reactivity & barking

Often fear-based. Avoid punishment — it increases stress and the underlying emotion. Work at a distance where your dog can see the trigger without reacting. Pair the sight of the trigger with something wonderful (counter-conditioning).

Jumping up

Dogs jump for attention. Attention — even negative — reinforces it. Turn away, arms crossed, completely ignore the jumping. Reward the instant all four paws hit the floor. Ask guests to do the same.

Separation anxiety

Begin practicing very short absences from day one. Leave the room for 5 seconds. Come back calm. Gradually build. Avoid emotional hellos and goodbyes. If your dog shows significant distress, contact me right away.

Resource guarding

Never take things away for no reason to "teach them." Instead: trade for something better, never loom over a dog eating, teach that human approach near food means good things happen. Book a consultation with me if guarding is significant.

THE MANAGEMENT MINDSET

Every time a dog practices an unwanted behavior, it gets easier for them to do it again. Management — baby gates, crates, leashes, x-pens — prevents practice while training is underway. It is not failing. It is smart strategy.

Noticing any of these behaviors in your dog?

You don't have to figure it out alone. Maryam specializes in helping dogs and their families navigate exactly these challenges — gently, effectively, and without force.

Get in touch: (650) 353-0588 or Maryam@PawsitiveManners.com

10 Health & wellbeing

Physical health directly affects behavior

A dog in pain or poor health cannot learn effectively and may display behavior changes that look like "disobedience." Always rule out medical causes for sudden behavior changes, and ensure your dog's basic physical and psychological needs are met daily.

Veterinary care

Register with a vet promptly. Schedule a full health check within the first week. Discuss vaccination schedule, parasite prevention, microchipping (if not already done), and neutering — ideally after growth plates close, particularly for larger breeds.

Exercise — right-sized

Puppies need short, gentle play — avoid forced repetitive exercise on growing joints. A rough guide: 5 minutes per month of age, twice daily for walks. Sniff-heavy walks ("decompression walks") are more tiring than fast-paced ones.

Sleep

Adult dogs sleep 12–14 hours a day. Puppies sleep up to 18–20 hours. Adequate rest is essential for emotional regulation and learning. Don't disturb a sleeping dog, especially children — teach this from day one.

Nutrition

Feed a complete, life-stage appropriate diet. Transition slowly from the previous food (over 7–10 days) to avoid digestive upset. Puzzle feeders and snuffle mats make mealtimes mentally enriching as well as nutritious.

Mental enrichment

A bored dog finds their own entertainment — usually something you won't enjoy. Provide: scatter feeding in grass, Kongs and lick mats, training sessions, sniff walks, appropriate play. Mental exercise can be more tiring than physical.

Grooming & handling

Pair all handling with treats from the beginning — paws, ears, mouth, body. This builds tolerance for grooming and vet examinations. Short, positive sessions prevent the development of handling anxiety. Never restrain a struggling dog; go slower.

KNOW WHEN TO GET HELP

A qualified, force-free trainer or behavior consultant is worth consulting early — not just when things go wrong. If a trainer uses the words "dominance," "alpha," or "pack leader," or recommends aversive tools, seek someone else.

Our approach is grounded in: Applied Behavior Analysis · Classical & Operant Conditioning · Fear Free Principles · Ethology & Canine Cognition Research · LIMA (Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive)

You and Your Dog Are A Team.

Great training starts with an experienced and qualified trainer. Maryam is here to support you and your dog every step of the way — from day one through to a lifetime of good manners.

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Pawsitive Manners Dog Training

This guide reflects current best practices in reward-based, science-backed dog training. Every dog is an individual — if you have specific concerns about your dog's behaviour or welfare, please reach out to Maryam directly. You've got this.

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