

How to Play & Explore Feelings Good and Bad: Topic Puppy/Dog Care

By Maureen Ross, MA



We live in an age where talk is abundant. We are overwhelmed with chat rooms, internet, cell phones, text messaging and choices (including on line puppy sales and non-profit rescues).

I see a lot of families in group and in private coaching. As a counselor / mediator / life coach, I've been in situations where communication was little to none. Hopefully, when I meet families who have a new puppy, some planning has already taken place. It can be a challenge when everyone wants to participate. Oftentimes, while families are squabbling about who is going to do what with the pup, the puppy has peed and then the next stressful event occurs with everyone blaming everyone else, sometimes even the pup.

There is a better way! Regardless of how your puppy and/or adopted dog joined your family, this living being is going through a transition from being in one environment to another. The following is "one" way to engage the family in sharing puppy/dog time and care, while respecting feelings that oftentimes come unglued when everyone wants to be with PUPPY.

Families get to engage in a new way, like a dance or game, rather than get all stressed after a day of already full-activities. Family conflict can be minimized with these few little changes.

Set aside a "sacred" and relatively "stress-free" time and place. Dinner is a good option. Set the time. For example, 6:30pm. Set some "age-appropriate" guidelines for those joining dinner. People (working moms, dads, teenagers) should have a few moments to decompress from the day's activities. During this time, there should be no TV, cells, iPods, computers or other distractions.

Guessing that you already have a puppy/dog, they should be in a crate or confined area after being fed and taken out for some quality time, de-pooping-peeing and a bit of exercise.

Check the family scheduling chart you have on the frig door. Whose turn is it to walk, feed and put the puppy in a relaxing, safe confinement area?

Designate a moderator/leader. This can be a rotating role. Each member of the family can get a turn. Small children will need some gentle guidance, just like puppies.

Set a Time Limit with Respectful, Flexible Boundaries. Clarify that each person gets 2 or 3-minutes. Let's face it, people want to eat and get on with other stuff, so keeping this short and sweet gives everyone a chance to share.

Round 1: Review the bad stuff first. The moderator (whoever is assigned Paw-Wow leader) asks each person at the table "What happened that was "bad" or "not feel fair" for you today while caring for the puppy (or other situation)?"

Everybody gets a chance to share, no matter how young. Everyone has the option to have a "silent" evening. Some days, we simply do not feel like talking. However, if there are issues that the "parents/role models" are aware of ... gently encourage participation.

Respect each answer. You can respond to another person's reply, but without putting it down. No giggling or making light of someone's thoughts. No bullying, whining or name calling.

Round 2: End with the good stuff. The moderator asks each person, "What happened that was "good" for you today?" Everyone gets a chance to reply if they want too.

You get the picture. Have fun with this. You can expand this to other family issues. It's a great way of connecting with each other at the end of a day and/or at least a few times a week. It's especially good to create a learning environment that respects ages, family members and the pup. It sets boundaries on how we communicate with each other ... respectfully. This is a family transition AND it a transition for the dog too.

Everyone wants to be appreciated, receive some quality attention, affection and acceptance without scrutiny. Everyone in the family wants to have equal and/or shared (supervised with children under 12) time with the puppy. You may find that this little routine will resolve more than puppy peeing and/or chewing issues.

Enjoy the Journey!