

MASTIFF MANNERS & MALFUNCTIONS

by Jeanne Cook

QUESTION: My puppies are going to their new families soon. What can I suggest for them to do at home with their young puppies to build a confident personality?

ANSWER: There are a lot of things they can do with a young pup. Also, I should briefly mention the importance of doing a lot of new and different things for the pups before they go to new homes. Breeders should use their imaginations to find safe things of all different sizes, shapes, etc. to put in the litter box with the pups. The more they experience at a young age, the fewer adjustment problems they will have later. You can use baby toys, plastic milk containers, beach balls, to name just a few. You can do some things on the list below. They also need different surfaces in the litter box to get used to new footings. Though it sometimes seems preferable to keep the litter box in the basement or some other secluded spot, after the pups are a couple of weeks old, it should be located in the kitchen or somewhere around the household noise and activity. They should not be kept in deep seclusion. Pups should also be taken away from littermates occasionally for individual attention, exploration, etc. to gain confidence on their own.

The new owners should keep the pup in the middle of the family activity (the more activity the better). The pup will find out what is usual. When they are not able to watch him or supervise the children with him, put him in his crate. Let him sleep in his crate in the kids' room, not with other dogs. Teach the children they never wrestle, chase or tease. Seek out unusual noises, places, many people (friends and strangers). Use your imagination. Just as you would acquaint a baby or young child, he needs to investigate. This is not to "scare the daylights" out of him, but to show him that noises, strange people and things won't necessarily harm him. This builds confidence. If he is unsure of something, act nonchalant. Do not baby him when he is scared. When something is scaring him, keep repeating the situation (at a safe distance, then work your way closer) until he learns nothing bad will happen. Do not allow him to retreat. Remember, he is watching your reaction. Show him how you want him to react. Praise him only when he is reacting the way you wish. Tell him "No" when he is in the act of doing something wrong or showing undesired behavior. THESE ARE GRADUAL PROCESSES BUILT ON SUCCESSES. YOU WILL, OF COURSE, USE CAUTION AND COMMON SENSE WITH THE FOLLOWING LIST:

Get him used to:

- stepping over cords, hoses, objects.
- going up, over, under, around and through things
- close examination of his face, paws, ears, teeth,
body, baths, toenail cutting, brushing, etc.
- rides in a wagon, on a skateboard

stepping over him, rubbing him with your feet
people clapping hands, jumping jacks (motions)
kids (yours and others) running, yelling, on skates, etc.
getting in and out of cars, crates, runs
halloween noisemakers, whistles, cap guns, skateboards
chairs falling over, trash cans banging, cabinet doors banging
basement stairs (all kinds, especially open)
sprinklers, garden hoses, wheelchairs, baby strollers
fans, kitchen fans, bathroom fans, honking bicycle, car horns
tricycles, bicycles, lawn mowers, weed eaters, mirrors,
electric shavers, clippers, hair dryers, cameras, crutches,
baby gaits, ladders, broom, vaccuum, washing machine, dryer
walking through an old tire
water (in the forms of kids' swimming pools, coming from the
hose, sprinkler, etc.)
walking over different surfaces (grates, tile, wood,
concrete, mud, gravel, carpet, metal, mats, grass, rocks,
plastic, artificial turf door mats)
drag tree branches, tin cans tied to a rope, fishing waders,
shovels, rakes
dropping things around him (pans, shoes, pillows, books)
musical instruments (harmonica, piano, flute, drum, etc.)
balloons (don't let them pop in his mouth)
lawn chairs
give him a dogfood bag to walk in
make tunnels out of things in the backyard, make ramps, bridges
make a maze for him to find you
play with him with a flashlight in the dark
show him blinking Christmas tree lights in the dark
invite neighbor kids over to play with him
play with sturdy bucket
kids' kit with electric buzzers, bells
put in a crate by tool bench when using power tools
playing the radio, t.v.
build very low obstacles for him to go over and increase their
size as he grows
play hide and seek (he finds you)
play follow the leader (by the way, you're the leader)