



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Safe puppy activities

Providing puppies with the opportunity to exercise is a very vital aspect of their care. Aside from providing various health benefits, exercising may also provide a good opportunity for your puppy to socialise with other puppies and dogs which is essential for their behavioural development. It's important to remember that, although most puppies have lots of energy, their bodies are not fully developed and not ready for exercise that causes sharp or repetitious impact during the first year.

What are growth plates?

Growth plates are soft areas of young bone that grow and add length to the bones of a growing puppy. Once the puppy's growth is complete, the growth plates become hard with calcium and other minerals and which indicates the end of significant bone growth. The soft, young growth plates are weak areas in the puppy's bone and can easily be damaged. In certain breeds of dog, these growth plates can take up to 18 months to harden.

Exercise

Overly taxing the muscles can put a lot of pressure on developing joints and bones, as well as increase injury risk to soft growth plates. It is often hard to prevent or even stop the full on puppy runs and launches off the sofas and beds, however, controlled natural play and exercise is important.

Avoid running or jogging long distances with your puppy. In fact some experts advise to not run or jog with your puppy until they are fully grown or 18 months of age. Spend some time slowly building fitness and muscles in your puppy before doing any type of endurance exercise. Short periods e.g. 5-10 minutes of walking or play with your puppy is a good way to start and build up from there.

Exercise guidelines for puppies:

Up to 4 months:

Playing with soft toys in a contained area such as a fenced yard

Puppy class

Short walks on soft terrain (e.g. yard, safe environment)

4-8 months:

Longer walks on soft terrain (e.g. 10-15 minutes once fully vaccinated)

Playing with soft toys

Swimming and playing with toys in water



Vaccinations

Taking your puppy out to experience different sights, sounds and activities is an important part of the socialisation process. Safety is still important though, so ensure your puppy is fully vaccinated before allowing them to walk through unfamiliar areas. Check with your veterinarian.



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Stairs

Negotiating stairs for puppies can be challenging and also dangerous. We advise puppy owners to carry their puppies up and down stairs for at least the first 6 months, but this depends a lot on the breed and size of a puppy. At some stage, puppies do need to learn how to negotiate stairs, but in a safe and controlled way. This would involve a hand on the puppy's collar or harness to lead them and of course lots of yummy treats to reward the puppy. Try leading up the stairs first. Going down stairs can be difficult as a puppy's sense of depth and perception may not be fully developed.

Once the puppy is good at being led up and down the stairs, try a lead just to make sure the puppy doesn't go too fast. Do not allow free access to stairs until the puppy is fully grown. This will depend on breed and size and may be up to 18 months.

Jumping on and off furniture

Again, jumping and particularly jumping off furniture can increase the risk of injury to a puppy. Lift your puppy (see info sheet Lifting your puppy), or assist your puppy down off furniture with a support hand on their chest and some yummy treats as an incentive. If you don't want your puppy lying on furniture, teach your puppy where you would like it to lay, e.g. on a mat, bed or crate. (Refer to info sheets on mat training and crate training).

Jumping on and of cars and utes

It is important for puppies to be lifted in and out of cars and Utes. Ensure puppies are appropriately harnessed, tethered or crated in vehicles. (Refer to info sheet Lifting your puppy)

Agility equipment at dog parks

It has become very popular for councils to provide fun play equipment for dogs at public dog parks. Although this can be a great way to spend time with your dog, be aware that young puppies will not have the coordination or balance to negotiate such obstacles. Avoid equipment which is high off the ground and use a lead for added safety. Some obstacles such as tunnels may be a more appropriate experience for young puppies. All equipment should be taken slowly.

We encourage puppy owners to teach their puppies how to safely negotiate agility equipment and other obstacles in our training classes. Contact the RSPCA Animal training Centre for class times and dates.

In conclusion, having a puppy is a most rewarding, fun and challenging experience. We all aim to teach our puppies to grow up to be social, happy and fun family members and companions. So be sensible, make sure your puppy is safe and avoids unwanted injuries and you avoid unwanted vet bills.