

Puppy Questions: Spay or Neuter? Humping? Puppy Blues? and Much More

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG If you ever wanted to ask a professional dog trainer questions like “when should I spay my puppy?” and “how much exercise should my puppy get?” and “how do I combat this overwhelm I’m feeling about owning a puppy?” then this podcast episode is for you. Because recently, I put out on social media: ‘Ask me a question about puppy training,’ and I got a lot of questions.

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Hi, I’m Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Today I’m going to go through as many questions as I can during this 20-minute period to answer your questions about your puppy training and other things about your puppy. And the questions I don’t get to, we’ll just save those for another episode. So, let’s get going.

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First up. We’re going to open with a controversial one, “*When to spay my puppy?*” You know it’d be easy for me to sidestep this and just do what I do. Let me just preface this by saying in Europe; most dogs are intact. They are not spayed or neutered. I tend to keep my dogs intact as long as I can.

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Now I’m going to also give you this warning that if you own an intact dog or an intact female, then you have a huge responsibility to make sure that they are kept under your supervision or under your control and will not be responsible for accidental litters. We’ve got enough puppies out there, and I’m not saying that you shouldn’t be breeding your dog, but if you were going to think of breeding it, then you need to actually talk to your breeder.

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Go through all these health checks, yada, yada, yada. Trust me; breeding isn’t for the faint of heart. As much as I love having puppies around my house, I would rather really leave it up to the people who do it full-time. So, then the question is, “what about spaying?” You know, in North America, it’s just accepted that we should spay females before six months of age, and there was a theory that it would minimize the potential for certain cancers.

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When we do spay females, you’re actually removing organs that are responsible for sending hormones through your puppy’s body, and hormones are needed for proper growth. And when you remove those at six months of age, you actually are causing that puppy to not grow properly.

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In addition, if you have behavior problems like aggression or fear and you spay a female, studies have shown that spaying a female, young or spaying a female while they’re showing these signs of aggression, makes it more difficult to overcome the fears and aggressions.



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So ideally, if at all possible, you want to keep your females intact. My oldest female I spayed when she was nine years old, and Momentum is now six and a half, and she is still intact. That is what I do. You guys do you, but I would strongly encourage you to look up the works of [Dr. Karen Becker](#) and [Dr. Chris Zink](#), who both have excellent input on why the recommendation of spaying puppies young is really not a good recommendation.

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A lot of times if you're getting a rescue puppy, they might be spayed at eight weeks of age. Not the best decision for the long-term health, but I completely understand why they have to do it. Because the number one goal is we need to, you know, minimize the amount of unwanted puppies in this world. And that's really an easy way to do it, right?

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If you're a very responsible person, and you can take care of the action of your puppies, and you want them to have the longest and healthiest life possible, I would recommend that you consider not spaying that puppy until they're older. I mean, at minimum two years old, hold out to five if you could but again completely up to you to your research is the bottom line.

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Next question. *"Recall while distracted. My six-month-old is focused on me until distracted outside the home."* Number one, if you've listened to this podcast, you know the biggest problem with training, it doesn't matter if it's puppies or otherwise is that the expectations of the trainer are way, way, way too high for the capabilities at the level of training you've given that dog.

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So sure, they listen great when the fridge door is open; they may not listen as great when they're outside. And that's why you've got to be really, really strategic with the layers of learning and not giving that puppy the freedom to choose not to come when called when they are in an area where there's a really good chance they're not going to.

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And so, I'm going to give you a link in the description here or in the show notes if you're listening to this podcast; I'm going to give you a link to a blog that I wrote on [how to get your puppy to come when called](#). It will give you some really, really good ideas on how to start laying down those layers of learning for you and your puppy.

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Next. *"Any tips on dealing with puppies that like to hump."* Let me just say humping is completely normal for many, many puppies. Your last puppy may not hump, but your current puppy may hump. A lot of the time, it's a sign of excitement. It's a sign of stress or anxiety. Don't let anybody tell you it's a sign of [dominance or sexual activity](#).

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Some puppies jump and wag; some puppies hump. I actually am putting together a complete video. I'm going to put it on YouTube to help you overcome humping.



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I just wanted to say, though, that it's normal. Please don't discipline the dog. Please don't think that they're trying to rule the world. It's just excitement. Right now, best-case scenario, just take them by the collar, take them off, and distract them. *"How to combat puppy blues?"*

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Now, for those of you who aren't familiar, puppy blues is an actual thing. It's anxiety; it's depression, it's overwhelm, it's sadness, it's regret. Having owned a puppy for a set period of time, and that set amount of time could be different for everybody. There's something called puppy blues that may kick in. Think postpartum depression, and I don't want to belittle postpartum depression. They're completely different things, but I just want to give you that example.

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Buyer's regret or buyer's remorse. So somewhere between those two very real things is something called puppy blues. Now I'm going to give you my approach to it. It's very much taken from my approach to competing at a world championship, but I will tell you that I have never suffered from puppy blues. And I believe it's this approach that saves me.

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Now I've talked about this before. Any time you're feeling anxious or stressed, chances are you are in one of two places. So, if you're feeling anxiety about what might happen, "Oh, if I don't feed my puppy the right thing, they might get cancer. They might get sick." "If I don't give my puppy enough exercise, they're not going to develop properly." "If I don't get them into the right class, if I don't follow the right mentor, then something bad could happen."

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So, if you're thinking that way, that's getting you anxious. Because when you put yourself in the future, you create anxiety for yourself. You can't control the future. And so, by putting yourself there you're trying to control something you can't control. That's what causes anxiety. Now, the other place you might be is you might be looking at some of the things that have already happened.

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Maybe you've had some mishaps with your puppy. You might be blaming yourself. "Oh, if I hadn't left the garbage out, they might not have gotten sick." "If I hadn't have let the dog have so much line out of the park, they might not have got jumped by that other dog." "Oh, it's all my fault." "Oh, I don't know." "What is this going to do to that puppy?" And so, when you're living in the past, you create depression for yourself.

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You're thinking, "Oh, I'm in a pandemic, and I never got that puppy socialized, and it's all my bad. And now my puppy is just going to be in a horrific place. And they're never going to be properly socialized". You are living in the past. You're trying to change something that can't be changed. You're again looking at things that are outside of your control. So, you want to deal with the puppy blues, think about what is in your control right now—your ability to learn. There's over 100 podcasts here; every single one of them will give you really good dog training information, a hundred percent free for you.



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And once you've gone through all my podcasts, you can go to [my blog](#), where I've got all kinds of articles that you can carry on. And go to my YouTube channel, where there's some demonstrations of really good [dog training games](#) that will take you to a better place. Those are things that are in your control. Do one positive thing. Learn one new thing every day that's going to change your state.

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Think about what you can do that's going to help your puppy move forward in that training; moving forward is the number one challenge that you're faced with. And recognize that I believe you have got the puppy you've got for a very important reason. That the puppy you have today was sent to you to help you grow. That puppy was meant to help you become the best version of you so that you could show up for others, including that puppy, as your best version of yourself.

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And knowing that you should celebrate. So, all of the things that happen in the past that I was worried about that I've screwed up, "I let this happen" actually happened, so that you found Susan Garrett's podcasts. So that you could be sitting here listening to her talk about how you can get out of the puppy blues. All of those things, I believe, all brought to us by owning a puppy. To help us elevate to be that person we're meant to be.

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And so, ask yourself. If you're feeling depressed if you're feeling anxious if you're feeling overwhelmed, "Am I thinking about something outside of my control?" What can I control right now? What can I learn? What can I do with my puppy? What can I do one thing that's going to bring my puppy joy?" Go out and do that and then sit down and learn something new.

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Next question. *"How can you tell when a puppy's growl during play is excitement or if it's frustration?"* I'm not sure if anybody really knows for sure. And then the question is why is it important that if a puppy is frustrated, maybe they're frustrated because they don't really want to tug with you. They want to chase the other dog, but they know that they should tug with you. And so, they might growl with a little bit of a higher squeal at the end. But they're doing the right thing, so that's good.

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They might be frustrated because they really want to let go of the toy and bite you, but they're going to keep tugging on that toy, and they might be a little frustrated, and that's okay too. And if your question is, "how can I be sure that when my puppy tugs that the growl is okay?", Well, you've got to know that if you are tugging and then breaking it up with sessions where you're asking for the toy back, you're waiting for the puppy to show some control and then you're giving it back to them and you're going back and forth like that, then puppies can growl.

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They're having fun. And a lot of puppies express their joy with growling. And so, as long as that puppy's not redirecting, just lodging the toy and redirecting on you. I mean, that's not acceptable, but they're just having fun. Next question. *"Is it okay to have your puppy sit on you and chew their toys or chew sticks on you?"*



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This is a split between myself and Sharon, who works for us at DogsThat because we go through these podcasts planning together. And Sharon's like, "Oh, I'm disappointed when I have a puppy who doesn't want to bring their toys and sit on me." And I'm like, "Oh nay nay Sharon."

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Here's the thing, what we learn first, we learn best. What the puppies learn first, they learn best. If you have a cute little, massive puppy that likes to bring their chewy over and sit on your lap, how's that going to be when they're 140 pounds? Is it going to be just as cute? Then have at it.

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I personally want my puppies to learn to chew in their bed. And so, it's a big thing. Like Tater Salad, he had a habit of wanting to chew against people and then against furniture, which caused him to start to destroy furniture. And so, I want them to have the habit of independence. That doesn't mean that all puppies that chew in your lap are going to chew your furniture.

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Because like I said, all of Sharon's dogs when she raises them as puppies, she hopes that they will chew on her lap. So have at it if that's what you want, all I ask is, sometimes is anytime to a puppy. And is this going to be okay that they do it, not just to you, but to anybody else that comes into your house? If that's not going to be okay, then my suggestion is let's help direct them towards a dog bed or some other appropriate place for chewing their bones.

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Next question. "*How much exercise does my puppy need? He never settles down.*" Now you might want to refer to podcast [episode number 17](#), where I talked about puppies that are overtired. And it looks like they haven't gotten enough exercise when in fact, it's the complete opposite. So don't be too quick to think that your puppy is overtired but let me answer the how much exercise question.

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Now for me personally, I don't take puppies for walks on leashes when I first get them home. I prefer to take them for adventures. So, I get them playing little games like tugging, and I desensitize them wearing a collar and a leash so that we don't have any flailing puppies who are freaking out because they're on a collar or a leash.

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And then I might take them on an outing where I'll just play a few little games for five minutes and get back in the car, and then we go back home. Or I'll play these games in the backyard or in the living room. Puppies going for a walk on a leash I personally don't think is a great idea because it's highly unlikely they are going to know how to walk on a leash.

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But let me just say that 99% of the time, maybe 99.999% of the time, a puppy is not going to walk on a leash. So, they're going to struggle, or they're going to pull ahead; they're going to learn bad lessons. There needs to be a history of you teaching them to find value at your side.



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And so, I'm all for it. If you have a safe environment where you can take that puppy for a little walk off-leash, then that's great. And you know, maybe five minutes, it really depends on the breed. So large breeds can't be out that long and smaller breeds, I think the rule of thumb is five minutes for every month old that that puppy is.

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But if I have an eight-week-old puppy, chances are I'm not going to get out and play with them much more than five minutes period. So, I don't actually take them out on a leash walking really until they're six months or older. Now, for those of you who live in the city and that's the only form of exercise you can have, then you're going to have to start working on the value for Reinforcement Zone.

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Get that in early, and you can find videos on my YouTube page, referred to podcast [episode number 53](#), where I talked about building value for walking at your side. And that's what's going to help your puppy want to be at your side. So my benchmark is six to eight months before I'm taking them out into the city for very long walks on leash.

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That might happen for you at three to four months but play those games. So, I'll go to a baseball diamond; there's a place where I'm going right now with my puppy This! to get her more socialized with kids, activities, other dogs, cars, people, and everything because I live in the country. And just little outings, get out of the car, play a few games with me. She's almost a year old now, so we might spend 40 minutes there, but in between, she's chilling on the ground and just hanging out. And then I'll do some games, and then I'll have her just chill on the ground again.

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So, exercise really depends on the breed, the size of your dog, how big they may be as a mature dog, and also how much value you've built for walking on a leash. Next question. *"How do I work my puppy up to being comfortable alone in her ex-pen for more than five seconds?"* So, I'm going to suggest a couple other podcasts for you.

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Number one, [episode number 30, "why crates are not cages?"](#) Also, a recent episode, [number 99](#), where I talked about a routine that I have when I leave home, which is really important. So, I would start this routine by number one, playing [Crate Games](#). So, I'm going to put a link in the show notes or in the description here if you're watching this on YouTube of how you can find information about Crate Games. But you want to build value.

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It's not natural for a puppy to be put into a cage or box and then say, "Oh, yes, I'm happy here. I'm completely comfortable." Now some puppies are; it depends on what kind of environment that they were raised in at the breeders. And it also depends on how long or how you've grown that value once you've brought that puppy home. But I would say most puppies aren't naturally going to go, "Oh, I'm chill here." So, they're going to be a little bit anxious, and it is up to us to build that comfort by building value. And those two resources will be great ones for you to really start to build a value for being in any kind of confinement.



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Final question. *“What age is your puppy before you start weaving?”* So, many people in the sport of dog agility, they look at the behavior of weaving between poles, and they think, “Wow, that’s pretty high tech. That I’m going to have to get on this really early because it’s so difficult.”

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Now I have a method that I developed called the [2x2 method of weave pole training](#), and it’s super easy. Most of my dogs are trained within a week of starting that. Now some of my students might take a month or longer. But the bottom line is it is super stressful. I think it is the most stressful activity for a dog in the sport of dog agility.

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And so, I’m in no hurry to start my puppies on weave training. Now, This! is almost a year old. Zero activities related to actually going through weave poles. When she’s 14 to 16 months old is when I would recommend that you start training your puppy or, at that time, adolescent dog, to learn to love and execute a set of weave poles.

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Thank you for your questions. Thank you everyone. I will get to more puppy questions in upcoming episodes of Shaped by Dog. But that’s it for today. Thank you for your questions. I’ll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog. Or “Shaped by Puppy” as the case may be.

Resources:

[Dr. Karen Becker \(Facebook Page\)](#)

[Dr. Chris Zink \(Website\)](#)

[Blog Post: How Do I Train My Dog To Come When Called?](#)

[Podcast Episode 46: Is Your Dog Trying to Dominate You and What You Can Do About It](#)

[Susan Garrett’s Puppy Training Playlist on YouTube](#)

[Susan Garrett’s Blog: Puppy Posts](#)

[Podcast Episode 17: Help! How Do I STOP Puppy Biting?!](#)

[Podcast Episode 53: Stop Your Dog Pulling on Leash and Start Walking Together](#)

[Podcast Episode 30: Why Dog Crates Are Not Dog Cages](#)

[Episode 99: When Reinforcement Based Dog Training Doesn’t Work](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

[2x2 Weave Pole Training DVD](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her “Clicker Dogs” website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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