

Puppy Freedom: How Much Is Too Much?

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG If you were to get 100 of the world's best dog trainers in a room together, there'd be a lot they would disagree about. However, I'd be willing to bet 99 of them would give you the same answer if you were to ask them, "what's the number one training mistake people make with their new puppy?"

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today, the topic is that number one thing. And here is something that I think is hysterical, or sad, or ironic. If you were to google "how do I get my puppy to stop?" and you allow Google to fill in the most popular answers, the three most popular answers I get is "how do I get my puppy to stop peeing in the house?"

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"How do I get my puppy to stop barking so much? How do I get my puppy to stop putting everything in their mouth?" All three of those things are related to this number one mistake most puppy owners make and that is, they give their puppies too much freedom. And I thought about this a lot, because even though everybody says that, yet still, here we are.

I've talked to some friends of mine just last week who gave their puppy too much freedom, even though I told them up front "this is the number one mistake people make". And I decided maybe people don't know what that means. What does too much freedom mean? And why is it that people are making this mistake?

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And I have to think it's because they have a vision of what their future will look like with this dog. The dog's going to, you know, hang out with the family and they're gonna sleep on the couch or sleep on their bed. And they're going to go to family events and just be such a cool dog to walk at night and after work. But what you don't understand is, you don't start out that way. You evolve to that way. And so yes, we might want our dogs to just have the freedom of the house and sleep on the couch and sleep on the bed. But puppies don't have enough self-control to be given that much freedom without something very, very bad happening.

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So, when you get a new puppy really, we want to do two things. We want to increase the number of good behaviors that that puppy does and gets reinforced for. And we want to decrease the number of what let's call them bad behaviors or undesired behaviors that a puppy can do and get reinforced for. Those are the things that people are Googling. "How do I stop my puppy from...?" Boom. Those are the bad and undesired behaviors that stem from getting too much freedom. Stick with me on this. You'll see how it all plays out.

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In a [previous podcast](#) I talked about puppy zones, places where I keep my puppies around the house as they're growing up. The puppy zones are to control the rehearsals of those unwanted or undesired behaviors until the puppy can make good choices.



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Because there's what I would call stages to puppy ownership. Now, the first one is what I call the 'no bladder control stage'. Now that could last a day, that could last a week. Some puppies actually learn not to potty in the house within that first week.

That's not the norm. So, if you are still struggling with [house training](#) challenges just know that a lot of people do. And it will get worse if they're getting too much freedom. So, the no bladder control stage requires a lot less freedom than even the second stage the puppy goes through. And the second stage is the 'everything goes in my mouth' stage.

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So, I've got my bladder under control. I know to potty outside, but I explore with my mouth. So, everything goes in my mouth. So, you might say, "Well, my puppy is house trained so I can just let them have the run of the house." Oh nay-nay, because "everything goes in my mouth" including electrical cords, your best shoes, the kids' toys.

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That's not a good rehearsal of behaviors for your dog. And there's two kinds of challenges we're faced with puppies with that's the avoidable challenges and the unavoidable challenges. Avoidable and unavoidable both cost money when you have to go to a Vet. The unavoidable problems might be, you know, like a genetic problem that you didn't foresee or maybe just a bladder infection your puppy gets.

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The avoidable problems are things like putting things in their mouth they shouldn't be. Getting an infection, having surgery for said infection. You know, getting injured because they got too much freedom. We want to eliminate avoidable puppy challenges. So, we have our no bladder control, everything goes in the mouth stage.

And then that kind of blends and morphs into your teething stage where 'everything goes in the mouth, but it needs to be destroyed because my gums are so sore because I'm teething'. That leads us to a puppy that ends up being about five or eight months old before the majority of the teething has happened.

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And at this stage, you can start to give that puppy more and more freedom. And the final stage is 'the puppy is [sleeping loose at night](#)' where they can sleep on the bed if you would like them to sleep on the bed. That happens for my puppy somewhere between 10 months and 15 months of age.

It happens when I have zero problems with that puppy being loose in the house because guess what, when you're sleeping, they can be out doing some very creative things and you won't even know about it. So, if we're not going to give our puppy the freedom of the house, what does that look like? Now, I talked about puppy zones.

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The first puppy zone is [in a crate](#). A dog crate. So, if you're one of the people who think crates are cruel and they're mean then please watch this to the end and I'm hoping I can convince you otherwise. The second area puppy zone, would be an ex-pen. That is an exercise pen that I have one set up in the kitchen when I have a puppy. I have one set up in my office when I have a puppy.



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So these are just areas where the puppy has some chew things, some toys, occasionally I'll put in an educational game or something that gives them some sort of enrichment. But that's another safe area for the puppy that they can be in.

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I like to be in the same room, but I might be busy and less able to supervise them. Now, the next puppy zone might be a room with baby gates.

So, you've blocked off this baby gated room and the puppy has the run of the room. I would never do that unless I'm inside. So that's the sort of thing I might use if I'm going to either train the puppy, or let them have a ripper like if they have the zoomies.

Another puppy zone people might use is a small room. Like I use a bathroom for training. Some people lock their puppies in a laundry room. They think that's kinder than locking them in a crate. Now in [podcast to episode number 98](#) I talked about why a crate is actually much kinder than locking the dog in a big room.

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Plus, that's when puppies do things like chew on the doorframe and get themselves into those avoidable training challenges. So, if you are the kind who you know, maybe your family used to lock the puppy in a closet or not a closet, a small room, please don't do that.

You know, you can go to Facebook marketplace or go to the thrift store, and you can get used crates and used ex-pens for under a hundred dollars.

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Before this podcast I googled, and I found on marketplace ex-pens for \$40 and a crate for \$15. So, puppy zones. Now beyond keeping the dog locked in a small room some people might just get the puppy home and say "here, freedom, run of the house". And the biggest puppy zone there is, is I once saw somebody teach their eight-week-old puppy how to use their dog door.

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So, they not only had run of the house they had run of the backyard too. These are decisions that you will pay dearly for down the road when you are in the middle of the night googling "how do I get my puppy to stop?"

So, if you do have a dog door for your older dogs while you have a puppy in the house as they go through the different stages of puppyhood, I would keep that dog door locked so the puppy can't use it.

For no other reason other than you don't want them getting into trouble in the backyard when you don't know what they're doing. And it would be good if you could see their pee and their poop to make sure that there's nothing wrong with them or that they're actually doing it, right?

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That, avoidable problems, right? You want to be able to see that your puppies pee and poop looks normal. So, we've got our puppy zones. You know the ones that I strongly encourage you, the crate and the ex-pen. Now, what are we going to do to set our puppies up for success? There's four things that I want my puppies to learn.



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Number one is alone time. That they may be in that ex-pen while I might be in and out of the room. They may be in a crate when I may be in and out of the room and the puppies need to relax.

If you eventually want a dog who can hang out in your house and be completely comfortable with you coming and going and without them freaking out and howling or being destructive you want to set them up when they're puppies that they don't get to follow you all over the house.

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That if they're going to be locked in a crate it's a hundred percent fine that they learn that that is your alone time. And you've got to have what we call SRTs (scheduled rest time) for puppies because puppies of course sleep a ton.

So, teaching the puppy to be alone and teaching a puppy to be in a crate even when people are awake, those are two really important skills that you want your puppy to acquire. And it can happen organically just as you go through the routine of your day. And I will give you my morning routine because I think it's important that you have one to sets a puppy up for the whole day.

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Okay, this is a biggie. So many people, they have fenced in backyards when they have a puppy. That's great. And so, you take your puppy out there and you just let them have at it. Number one, I've recommended many, many times puppies need to learn to go potty on a leash. So, they're on a leash and they learn a cue.

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That's going to help them with their house training because there's a conditioned reflex that "this thing is attached to me when I pee and I poop outside". When I'm in the house that thing's not attached. So, it's just a little extra tool to help you with your house training.

Also, when you go to visit family and friends with your new puppy, if they have been used to peeing and pooping on leash, then before you go in or when you're visiting, they may not have a fenced in backyard you can just have them go anywhere in the front yard [on a leash](#) because you've conditioned it from the day that they came home.

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And if your puppy's older start now, because when they get older at some point your Vet's going say, "Hey, get me a urine sample." if you have a puppy who's used to peeing on leash with you right beside them a urine sample is no problem at any stage of your dog's life. But if you've never done that, it's going to be super difficult to get that urine sample from your dog. So many reasons why I strongly encourage you to keep that puppy on leash in the backyard.

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Now, the other mistake people go, "Okay. My puppies peed and pooped, I'm just going to let them have a ripper in the backyard." That's fine. But what happens is that gets to be their domain and they learn they don't really have to listen to you in the backyard. So, I recommend, especially those of us in a Northern climate or some of you in a really warm climate, you might tend to do your training indoors. Make sure you spend time with some reinforcement so that you teach your puppy that they listen outdoors as well as indoors.



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It's a massive mistake I see so many people make with their puppies. So, we need our puppy to be okay alone in an ex-pen with people coming and going. Sleeping in a crate even in the middle of the day with people and coming and going. They need to learn to potty on leash and they need to learn to listen both indoors and out. That doesn't seem like a big deal but trust me it is a massive deal.

So, the routine of a puppy. Sleeping, lots of sleeping. That sleeping could be sleeping through the night. It could be what we call SRTs (scheduled rest time). It could be them just taking spontaneous naps in their ex-pen or in their crate. There's sleeping, there's pottying time what we just talked about on leash, there's training time.

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Now that training time could include things like puppy socializing when they're getting to meet and greet other people, or you're taking them to puppy class, or they're going to puppy socialization class. But training time should happen every single day in the house. And if you're training in our programs you use training games then it's easy to build that and weave it in the fabric of your everyday life.

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So, there's training time. There's eating mealtime. There's exercise. Now, when I get a young puppy exercise is in the form of games. So, I really don't take them out for walks until I've conditioned them to have value being at my side. I don't want them to learn to pull when they're walking. So that exercise when they're really young like less than four months old, that's more training games and the zoomies, restraint recalls, things like that.

And then the sixth activity is chill time. So, we have sleep time, potty time, training time, eating time, exercise time and chill time. Six different times. So, what does that look like? Now if you know that you leave for work at 8:30, my recommendation is for you to get out to bed at 6:00. Now, if your puppy wakes you before that, you say nothing, you get them out, you potty them, you put them back in their crate.

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If they didn't wake you up before six, I would get them out, I would potty them, I would still put them back in their crate for 30 minutes where you can now do what you need to do in the bathroom. Maybe have a shower. 30 minutes later you take your puppy out, go on in the backyard. Let them potty again, maybe play a little bit of a game with a toy and then they come back in the kitchen and go in the ex-pen.

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Now you can get your breakfast, get the kids' lunches made, whatever it is. Now that you are kind of supervising but they're having some alone time in the pen. What we don't want to do is to create a behavior chain of, puppy wakes you up, you get them out, get them outside, reinforcement number one, feed them their breakfast - reinforcement number two, and maybe play with them a little bit.

Because if the puppy waking you up created that cascade of really great events: I got to pee, then I got to eat and then I had to play, that wake-up time is going to start getting earlier and earlier and earlier. So, if your [puppy wakes you up](#) you always say nothing, take them out for a potty, put them back in the crate and then they stay in the crate for maybe half an hour before you take them up and then you are the one that starts the cascade of when these good things happen.



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So, we got our puppy out of the crate. We woke them up at six o'clock, got them outside, put them back in the crate for 30 minutes. Then that at 6:30 we got them out. Maybe played a little bit, they went into their ex-pen. At around seven o'clock I would do your first training session. It's five minutes guys, five minutes in the morning to play some puppy games and then give them the rest of their meal.

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They can be in their ex-pen now, just eating and maybe here's where you might give them a brain game. So, they get some time to digest that food. Of course, before I put them in there, I would take them out for potty because once a puppy eats, they will have to poop. If you are now not going to be in the kitchen or give attention to the puppy, if the puppy's super young I would put them in a crate now. That will bring me up to eight o'clock.

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At eight o'clock I take the puppy out and now they get the free run of either a large room or the house where you're supervising, and they can maybe have a little bit of the zoomies. Burn off some excess energy. Then maybe I do a couple more little training games for two or three minutes before you take them out for their last potty break, put them in their crate, and then you leave for work.

Now, if the puppy is younger, I'm hoping you have somebody come in at lunchtime that will exercise that puppy. But that pretty much is your routine for that puppy. And that can happen when you get home from work again, you could have longer play sessions.

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But it's all about supervising the puppy so the [good behaviors grow](#), and you end up with a puppy by the time they're five to eight months old you're gonna be blown away at how well behaved that puppy is. And you will not be one of those people googling at night "how do I get my puppy to stop?" Trust me on this, myself and 98 other professional dog trainers will agree, too much freedom is the number one mistake that people make with new puppies. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

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

[Crate Games](#)

[Podcast Episode 48: Potty Train Your Puppy in a Week \(Easy 3 Step Process\)](#)

[Blog Post: All About Dogs Sleeping in the Bedroom](#)

[Podcast Episode 98: Puppy Home Alone: Are You Creating Chaos or Calm?](#)

[Podcast Episode 26: Pro Dog Training Tips to Get Your Puppy to Sleep All Night](#)

[YouTube Video: Puppy's First Training with Susan Garrett: Shaping, Targeting and Collar Conditioning](#)

[Puppy Essentials Playlist on YouTube](#)



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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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