

The Mechanics of Puppy Care
: A Community-Sourced Guide

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Preface : Wes

This guide was created as a result of Wes, a puppy a roommate of mine (and indirectly, all of us as an apartment) adopted on February 4th, 2018. As of the writing of this edition, he has lived with us for a little over a month, and is about two months old.

There are three of us that take care of Wes: his owner “J.” J.’s partner and my second roommate/good friend “T.” and I the author. Wes is solely J.’s puppy and J. has taken full responsibility to care of him, but in reality all three of us, as occupants of where Wes lives, take on some caretaking roles. This is why this guide has a focus on dialogues within the puppy’s caretaking community.

The guide is meant to strategize and implement practices that will positively raise a puppy through community discussion, hence the community-sourced aspect. The intention is that through our personal experience communicating how we as a group intend to raise Wes, other can build off this model to their needs, improving it collectively.

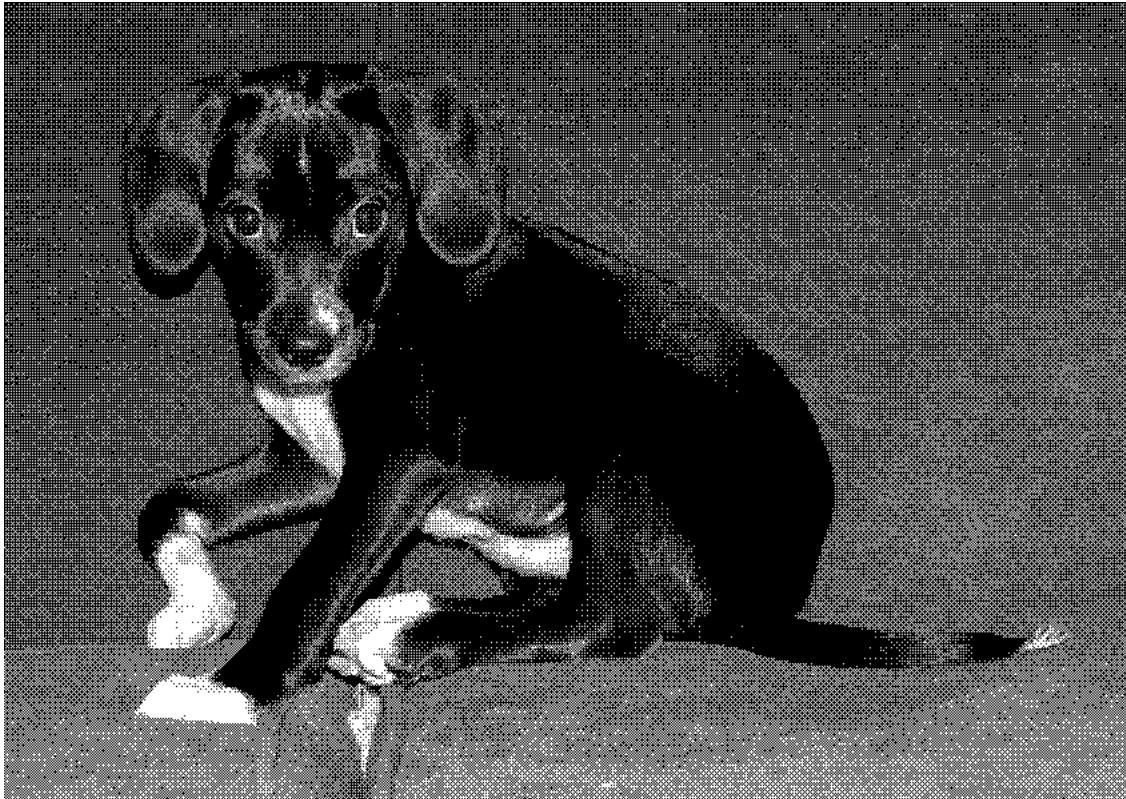


Fig. 1
Wes the puppy, March 13, 2018.

Step One : Problem Identification

What does the puppy do that you are not okay with? Why?

We started with this question because that was what it was about: preventing Wes from behaving badly. Each of us had our own idea of how Wes should appropriately act, and this question was meant to formalize exactly what we as individuals didn't want to allow.

I did not want Wes to relieve himself in undesignated areas, bite me, chew anyone's belonging, or bark excessively. I could not allow him to do these things because it directly hurt my body, our belongings, and the space we lived in.

What does the puppy do that you are ok with? Why?

This question was to delineate what we individually wanted to let Wes do, to make us consider what precise boundaries we had about his behavior.

I was okay with everything else, and even with what was not ok with me I was generous lenient towards. This is because I thought Wes was still in the process of learning his boundaries and too young to control himself, so I gave him many, many chances.

What does the puppy do that you are not okay with? Why?

What does the puppy do that you are ok with? Why?

What are the other caretakers not ok and ok with, and why?

This question was to start a conversation between all of us, as Wes' caretakers, to see where our expectations for him lie.

J. did not want Wes to hurt them or damage their possessions because it is a large inconvenience and cost factor, and to bark because they did not like uncontrolled loud noises and because we have neighbors.

T. did not want Wes to eat their food, relieve himself off his designated areas, whine when left alone, chew on their possessions or sleep in their bed. T. did not want this for various reasons, mostly attributing to their health, the wellbeing of their possessions, and our neighbors.



(6)

Fig. 2

Wes is a teething puppy and likes to bite when receiving tummy rubs, which is one of our concerns.

What are the other caretakers not ok and ok with, and why?

(7)

How does the puppy add to our interpersonal issues? Should that be distinguished, and how?

This question was one that, I realized, should be asked because our conversations about Wes had often been related to our disagreements with each other. This question was valuable to me because I didn't think we should base what we would do for him as judgements on how we would treat each other, and because I didn't think he should be subjected to pain that does not come from his actions.

After discussing this question, we agreed that we all may have read into how others have treated the dog as a sign of the other's feelings or morals. Additionally, J. mentioned that Wes has probably added stress to those living in the apartment, and I believe that this may heighten other issues between ourselves, especially when it was relevant to disagreements on how to treat Wes and our beliefs on having a puppy.

We have more to talk about on this, but we now decided to not use how one treat Wes against each other personally.

How does the puppy add to our interpersonal issues? Should that be distinguished, and how?

Step Two : Solution Strategization

How do we believe the puppy
should be treated?

This question was to get all of the us on the same page as to how we choose to raise Wes. These steps are where our discussions got the most tense, because it dove into our beliefs on parenting a puppy, which are not the same.

I believed that Wes has some capacity to ask for his needs, and so he should sometimes be given the autonomy to ask and have those needs met. J. and T. mainly agreed that Wes has no agency and that our role as caregivers was to react to Wes' instincts and to train him to do and not do things. T. specifically believes that Wes should be trained using a system of rewards and punishments, and J. and T. both believe that whatever rules and methods of discipline for Wes should be fully consistent between all of us.

These beliefs were a factor in interpersonal issues between us about Wes, mainly on how I was seen by J. and T. as too lenient, and how I saw J. and T. as too harsh. We also had not communicated these beliefs prior, so we had a hard time understanding each other's actions.

How do we believe the puppy
should be treated?

What is the puppy owner's decision on this?

If the puppy has a set of primary owners, like Wes does, then it is their right to decide on how their puppy is treated. The dialogue before laid out an honest understanding of each caretaker's beliefs on how a puppy should be cared for, but it is the owner who has the final say as to what is chosen.

J., Wes' owner, wanted all of us in the apartment to not be burdened by taking care of Wes, so we should only do things for him when we have the capacity. J. wanted to be responsible for the resources Wes needed, so if J. was unable to provide those alone, they did not expect I or T. to take responsibility.

J. also sought consistency in disciplining Wes, as each of us have rewarded and punished behavior on our own terms before. J. wanted a set a ground rules to be abided by that maintain a standardized disciplining structure, so that all of us would use the same tools in correcting Wes' behavior and so he would be less confused, as well as a livable standard in the apartment.

What is the puppy owner's decision on this?

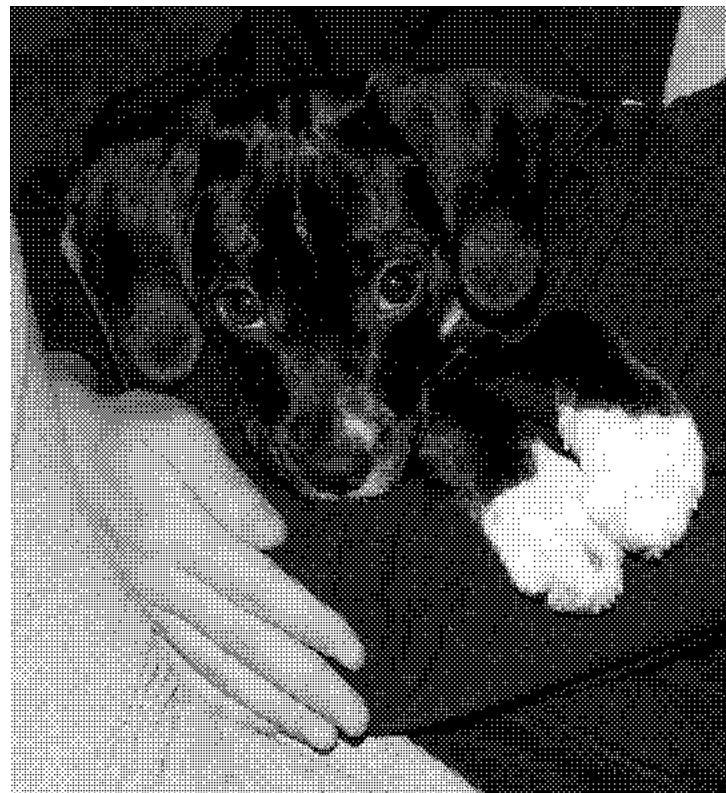


Fig. 3
Wes nestled in the arms of his owner.

What should be collectively done about the puppy?

This question was meant to finalize what strategy we want for collectively training Wes. We decided, under the decisions of J., that we would have two basic ground rules: Wes cannot relieve himself in undesignated areas, and Wes cannot bite undesignated items. A third rule was that Wes should not bark, but that was considered a separate rule because of how we decided to discipline him.

When disciplining Wes, J. wanted to use an sound-reactive training collar that responded to barking, so that when he barked he would be reprimanded automatically. We decided on this because he often barks when we step into a closed room or out the apartment, so a system that worked when we were not there was best. As a result of this, none of us caretakers would be responsible for disciplining Wes for barking, so that was why it was not considered a ground rule that we needed to discipline for. With the other rules, we would use a manual training collar so the discipline method was reduced to a consistent means.

What should be collectively done about the puppy?

Do external resources have insight for us?

I didn't want our decisions to stay in an isolated bubble because I am new to raising a puppy and my perspective on it is limited. So I wanted to have the chance to talk to an external perspective on our situation, and hear some comments about our decisions.

I eventually found Cat, a worker at a local pet store, to ask about our arrangement for Wes. As a prior puppy owner, her biggest comment was that we had Wes living with too much freedom, and this may be why he was behaving the way he did. She suggested enclosing an area of our apartment off to Wes, either by fencing off a part of our space or by bringing in a dog crate. He should be isolated there for the majority of his time, with a lot of toys to occupy him. She explained that this was to teach him boundaries and to physically stop him from harming us and our things.

Other than this, she suggested socializing Wes soon and having him trained early, in these formative months of his life.

Do external people have insight for us?

Step Three : Implementation

What steps can be done today,
this week, and this month
towards our goals?

This question, and entire step, is here to put these abstract goals into a schedule, so that there is a sense of accountability for change. It is divided into thinking about change in these different spans of time, to shift the mindset away from one daunting task to approachable everyday steps that may make the process more accomplishable.

In our care of Wes, we could change some things immediately, while other required more time. We have already taken steps to unify how we punish and reward him using the resources we already have in the apartment, for instance by diligently rewarding him with treats when he relieves himself on his pads.

For longer term steps, J. plans on getting the training collar, and materials to make a puppy pen, from March 15th to 18th. Immediately after that, their priority is to get a dog crate for him and to finish preparing the pen, so that Wes can be using the space by the end of the month.

What steps can be done today,
this week, and this month
towards our goals?



Fig. 4
Wes being led by us, both
physically and metaphorically.

