

As a dog trainer, we often get similar complaints from owners about their new(er) dog. This blog is for all you newbies. I have compiled the top five mistakes and how to fix (or better yet) prevent them.

#1 - "He pulled on walks. So, we got him a harness."

This is the most common complaint we hear. I know you mean well and society DOES say that you should get your dog a harness if he pulls, BUT have you stopped to think what a harness was originally (and still is) used for? Have you seen the movie "Eight Below" with Paul Walker and the Huskies? Can you guess what they used harnesses for? If you answered, "pulling," you would be correct! Harnesses were made to encourage dogs to pull. So instead of going out and buying a harness, go get a 15 foot long training line and a prong collar. Then place the handle of the leash around your right thumb, wrap your fingers around the leash, and grab the leash with your left hand directly below your right hand. Once you've properly sized (see my YouTube video on the benefits of a prong collar and how to fit it properly) and placed the prong collar on your dog, walk back a forth and in all directions opposite of where your dog wants to go. After your dog gets to the end of the line and you're already walking the opposite direction, he'll race after you and probably pass you. When he does pass you, turn and go the opposite direction. Rinse and repeat. With just a few minutes of this, your dog will be walking right beside you with no pulling!

#2 - "He'll grow out of it." Will he? Really? Unless your talking about his collar, the answer is no. Unless taught what they should do instead of a particular bad behavior, these behaviors will just cement and stay forever or, get WORSE. So, here's a freebie: My three step formula to fix any bad behavior. ONE: Stop the bad behavior in the act (like while they are doing it, not afterward) with an effective correction. A correction is just something that gets their attention, it should never intimidate or cause fear. In fact, when I tell my dogs "no" they get excited because they know "here comes step two"... TWO: Proper Alternative: what should they be doing instead of the naughty behavior.

(EX: if they are chewing on something they shouldn't be, give them something they can chew like a nylabone) And lastly THREE: Praise! Praise them as soon as they are doing what you want, not before and not after. Praise doesn't have to just be a treat. In fact, not all dogs even like treats. Praise can be a pat on the head, scratch under the ear, a toy, a treat, some kibble, a good wrestle, etc. You get the idea.

#3 - "He chews and jumps because he's a just a puppy"...at 8 months old. You can teach a 10 week old puppy to not chew or jump. By 6 months, dogs are considered adults. While they may not be physically mature, mentally they are as a mature as an adult dog and can be held accountable to that standard. So no more excuses, see mistake #2 on how to fix those naughty behaviors you've been excusing.

#4 - "We've had him for (insert a number) of weeks and then all of the sudden he started doing xyz." This grace period is what we like to call the "guest" period. When you have a new guest over to your home, the first few times they are polite and respectful, he doesn't put his feet on the coffee table, he doesn't himself to the fridge, he doesn't barge into your bedroom unannounced. But after awhile, that friend turns into a "Bestie" and comes over all the time, practically sleeps on the couch so you don't even put away the blankets, eats and drinks whatever out of the fridge, and goes wherever he likes unannounced including the bedroom. Does this sound like anyone you know or does this just describe my friends???

Dogs are the same way. Those first few weeks they are treading that water lightly. Then, without proper guidelines in place, once they've settled, they think **THEY OWN THE PLACE**. But, don't worry we know who's paying the bills and we're on your side. Put the house rules into place on day 1 (or preferably before you bring your new four legged guest home) and make sure everyone in the house is on the same page, so when your dog does try to test those waters someone is there to remind them of the rules and show the dog what he should do instead.

#5 - "He's a little guy so he's not hurting me by pulling on the leash." While this may be true, think about all that pressure on your dog from pulling. And then think like a dog trainer, and think about how much anger/aggression/testosterone your dog is thinking he's feeling come down that leash from YOU. A tight leash, whether by your cause or your dogs, SCREAMS something is wrong, I'm scared and so your dog thinks, "BARK. Yea, that's right other dog, keep walking. BARK. BARK. Don't come this way, you're scaring my mom! BARK. BARK., etc." So review mistake #1 on how to get your little dog walking kindly on a loose leash.