

When You Bring Your New Shih Tzu Home

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Training a Shih Tzu can be both an amusing and a frustrating experience. “Bad dog” generally elicits much tail wagging, many kisses, and lots of “Who, me?” looks of injured innocence. “How could you possibly be angry when I’m so charming?” seems to be the general approach. While all of these antics make the Shih Tzu a delightful and unique companion, you have to steel yourself to avoid succumbing to your pet’s charms. Most breeders know of a home in which the situation escalated until the owner had a chubby, less-than-completely-housebroken dog that roused him at 5 a.m. and had kissed and charmed its way out of being groomed so often that it was a smelly, matted mess. This isn’t fair to you or your dog, so be firm when necessary. Rest assured, your Shih Tzu will love you just as much if you teach it to be well behaved.

How do I get my puppy to stop barking when I leave him, especially at night?

While a young puppy is often distressed when he no longer has the company of his littermates, one of the first things your dog must learn is that he cannot receive attention upon demand. Going in and saying “quiet” or petting him when he barks is rewarding him for being noisy, so you must steel yourself not to react, or to provide only a mild correction from out of sight to interrupt the barking, such as shaking a few coins in a soda can. NEVER reward the dog by letting him out when he barks or cries; wait until he is quiet to release him. To alleviate anxieties, which aggravate the barking, begin with short departures, and gradually lengthen the amount of time that you are away.

Why is crate training recommended?

The crate should not be a place of punishment, but a sanctuary where your dog can retreat to rest and be secure. Provide toys and treats to make the crate a pleasant place. It helps to put the crate where people are during the day, or in the bedroom at night. This way the dog will be safe but not lonely. A radio or television can help to keep the dog quiet when you are out. Play with your puppy and take him out to eliminate before you confine him to his crate, and do not leave him there for such a long time that he has no choice but to eliminate in the crate. If you will be out for extended periods, you may want to puppy-proof a small room or use an exercise pen to reinforce your dog’s natural desire to keep his bed clean. Crate training is also useful when you need to board your dog or keep it safe while traveling.

How do I housebreak my dog?

Shih Tzu are often considered difficult to housebreak. The most critical thing is to avoid giving your puppy opportunities to have accidents inside, and to praise him profusely whenever he eliminates where you want him to, be it on newspaper or “piddle pads” in his puppy-proofed area or outside. This means that your puppy should be constantly supervised inside the house until he has not eliminated indoors for at least four to eight

weeks. You must also go outside with him, so that you can praise him when he eliminates outdoors. Watch for signals, such as sniffing and circling, and be sure to take him out every few hours, especially when he first wakes up, immediately after eating and before and after playtime. Suddenly, the light will dawn! A puppy has a very short attention span, so punishing him after the fact is useless and may instead teach your dog not to eliminate in your presence. You can gradually extend the time between outings as the puppy has greater control over his bladder. Some Shih Tzu owners teach their dogs to eliminate on paper indoors as well as outside all their lives, so they don't need to walk them in bad weather or rush home to take them out. You may want to associate a command such as "hurry up" or "go potty" with the act of elimination; this is useful later when you want the puppy to eliminate quickly in an unfamiliar place. If you are housebreaking an older dog, you may want to use piddle pants or (for males) a belly band with a sanitary napkin inside when the dog is inside, being sure to remove it and take the dog outside on a regular basis. After a few accidents, the dog will decide to go outside rather than be wet and uncomfortable. A classic book on housetraining is Shirlee Kalstone's *How to Housebreak Your Dog in Seven Days*.

How can I train my Shih Tzu to have its feet groomed (or just about anything else)?

Hold the dog's foot for five seconds, and then give it a tiny treat and lots of praise. Do this again for a little longer, again finishing with a treat. Gradually increase the time the dog must allow whatever behavior is desired, and decrease the frequency of the reward. Training Shih Tzu often entails tricking them into thinking that you are doing something for them, rather than vice-versa. If they think they are manipulating you to give them a reward, they will eagerly perform the behavior. For this approach to be effective, you have to ask your Shih Tzu to do just a bit at a time in a gradual manner—especially if he already objects to the project at hand. Handle and brush him regularly, and re-ward him for compliance. While you should not stop when your puppy is misbehaving, do not force things to the point where he becomes overly stressed. Instead, pause briefly to murmur reassuring words, then continue a bit, reward, and take a break.

Do "time outs" help discipline Shih Tzu?

Giving your dog a "time out"—separating it from you as a negative response to its behavior—works really well for this breed, because Shih Tzu crave human companionship. Yelling at or physically punishing a Shih Tzu usually just makes it more stubborn. Instead, get your Shih Tzu's attention by holding it by the scruff of the neck or the moustache and saying firmly, "No bite!" "No growl!" or whatever is appropriate. Follow this immediately with closing the dog out of the room so that it is separated from you (and from other dogs, if there are any). Pretty soon just the spoken correction will be sufficient, and you will have a much happier and more loving dog.

What about children and my puppy?

Shih Tzu puppies are small. Children should sit on the floor to play with the puppy. When walking in its vicinity they should do the "puppy shuffle," sliding their feet across

the floor to avoid accidentally stepping on or kicking the puppy, which loves being underfoot! Also, children should be cautioned to keep their fingers away from the puppy's eyes, which are easily injured, to avoid sudden movements or loud noises, and to let the puppy rest when it is tired.

What should I feed my puppy?

Initially, you should use the food recommended by your breeder to avoid stomach upsets. If you change foods later, do so gradually. Do not leave food down all day. Small biscuits and bits of raw vegetables, chicken, or hot dogs are favored treats. Pigs' ears and rawhide are NOT recommended. They can make your ShihTzu sick or pose a choking hazard.

What about traveling with my Shih Tzu?

Most Shih Tzu love to travel, but you should crate or otherwise restrain your dog so that it will not be injured in case of an accident or a sudden stop. NEVER leave your dog unattended in a parked car; it could be stolen. On a warm day the temperature can rise to fatal levels in just moments, and short-faced breeds are particularly susceptible to heat stroke.

How do I socialize my puppy?

From the beginning, try to expose your puppy to a variety of sights, sounds, smells, and situations. As soon as he has had all of his shots, take him out into the wider world. If a new stimulus creates fearful behavior, do not reward the fear by giving treats or cuddles; you are then reinforcing fearfulness. Instead, build up to whatever frightens the dog gradually, giving rewards only when the dog is being non-fearful.

How do I keep my puppy from chewing and other destructive behaviors?

Play with your Shih Tzu so it can work off its excess energy and provide plenty of toys, rotating them frequently so they remain interesting. Provide your puppy with a "puppy-proofed" area (perhaps behind a baby gate) that is safe for him to explore, and do not allow him unsupervised opportunities to get into mischief. It is much easier to reinforce desirable behavior than to break bad habits.