

*Pandemic procrastinators, take heart! These tips can jump-start your training, even if you've neglected it for months.*

# 'Rona Dog Reboot



**2**020 was a year when many people became first-time dog owners or added additional dogs to their families.

But the extraordinary circumstances meant that not everyone was able to properly train and socialize their new canine best friends. At my school, the most common reasons we hear are:

- We were overwhelmed and couldn't find time.
- We didn't know how to get started.
- We couldn't find a way to socialize.
- We thought you can't train puppies until they're older, so we were waiting.
- We thought we could just "love" the challenges away. (Nice idea, but dog training doesn't work that way.)

Fortunately, because my school offers both in-person and online courses, people who reached out to me were able to navigate

the training and socializing challenges quickly and easily.

But there are still many dog owners who, right this very minute, are having an OMG moment as they realize that they have some—or a lot of—training and socializing to do with their pups.

## **IF NOT NOW, WHEN?**

If you're one of those people—or know someone who is—I have great news. Dog training is easier and more fun than you may think it is! To get you on the road to success, I'll start with what I teach at my school—the top three ways to get a fresh start on your dog's training.

### **1. What's in a name?**

Last week, a student brought me a puppy she's had for four months, but, due to the pandemic, she hadn't been in for training. The first thing I noticed

LABRADOR RETRIEVER PUPPY: ©TDERDEN/GETTY IMAGES

was that the puppy didn't respond to his name at all. After checking to make sure he wasn't deaf, the reason quickly became evident. Within the first five minutes, the student must have said *Wilbur, no!* and *Wilbur, leave it!* at least 20 times. It's no wonder the dog never looked at her when she said his name—he associated it with anger. That's when I gave her the choice to either change the puppy's name or rewire it so that it means something great. The easy part is to say the dog's name and follow it with an awesome reward. The challenge is remembering to do that, plus teaching people in the puppy's life to do the same, and not falling back into the pattern of using it in a harsh tone. (For more on dog names, see “[Canine Mind](#)” column.)

**2. Life is grand.**

Sadly, some puppies don't think so. Still, they can be converted from *ruh roh* to

*yipee* by pairing a potentially scary situation with rewards. When I learned that my student's puppy was afraid of skateboards (her son is an avid skateboarder), I did *not* advise her to go to a skate park, sit a few feet away from the skaters, and offer her puppy amazing treats. I suspected the puppy would be too stressed out to eat! I told her to go to the location, stay in the car with the window rolled down, and offer high-value treats or play a game of tug. At a greater distance, the pup was comfortable enough to take food. To boost her chances of success, I suggested that she do this close to her normal mealtime. Over several weeks, she gradually moved closer. Now her puppy pays no attention to the sight or sound of skateboards.

**3. Alone time is awesome!**

Unfortunately, because people are working and schooling from home, a

lot of puppies haven't been taught this critical lesson. Because of that, we're seeing a lot of overtired puppies who learned that couches, rugs, and wall molding are great outlets for boredom and frustration.

Teaching your puppy to be comfortable and confident while confined not only prevents him from redecorating your house—it prevents him from taking up behaviors you'd rather he not learn. By far, the biggest reason to crate train is to keep your puppy safe when you have to focus on something other than him. And if you're still not sold on the “why” of it yet, consider if your puppy has an injury or surgery and must be on crate rest—if he's not calm about being confined, it can make recovery a lot harder.

There are lots of ways to change your pup's mindset about confinement, starting with giving him his meals

in the crate. Also, any and all of his favorite chew toys and treats should make an appearance *only* in his crate so that he associates that location with great things. My student's new Afghan Hound puppy now *loves* his crate because she got rid of his toy bin and is keeping all his fun stuff in his crate! While that solution wouldn't work for a

dog who destroys toys, it worked for him because he loves getting cozy in his crate with his favorite buddies. The first few days that you close the door, stay nearby so you and other family members can walk past and “feed the meter” by dropping super awesome treats into the crate as a reward for quiet and calm behavior. White noise can

help, as does covering the crate to create a dark and cozy den. **FD**

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*Kathy Santo trains dogs for home and competition at her New Jersey school. She is the author of Kathy Santo's Dog Sense and has handled multiple obedience trial champions. Check out her new digital dog-training course at [dogtrainingtribe.com](http://dogtrainingtribe.com).*

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