

# Educating owners: 'CREAD'

## Introduction:

Preventing canine behavioural problems relies very heavily on the owners and making sure that they understand normal canine behaviours, how to identify problem behaviours and what can be done to prevent these problem behaviours developing.

## CREAD

The acronym **CREAD** is a useful tool to help you remember what need to be discussed with owners when they bring their puppy into the clinic.

The following table shows five of the most important things that you can discuss with owners to help prevent behavioural problems, and therefore relinquishment of dogs, from occurring.

- **C**hildren – Young dogs must be positively exposed to children from as early as possible.
- **R**ecall – Dogs are 70% more likely to suffer from behavioural problems if they do not get off lead exercise.
- **E**ating – Puppies should learn from an early age that hands are for giving, not taking away food.
- **A**lone time – Puppies should be exposed to time on their own gradually from an early age.
- **D**ogs – Being sociable and well behaved around other dogs is vitally important to a dog's welfare.

Please read on for further explanation.

## 1. Children

- Many owners simply do not know how to read their dog's body language and think that, just because the dog is not growling or biting the child, the dog and child are ok together.
- Many dogs give lots of warning that they are going to bite so they are often avoidable.
- Because children are smaller than adults, the bites they receive from dogs are often to the face making them even more distressing for parent and child.
- Bites from dogs will often lead to the dog being euthanised so it is important to teach owners not only how to read body language, but also how to teach children to be safe around the dog.

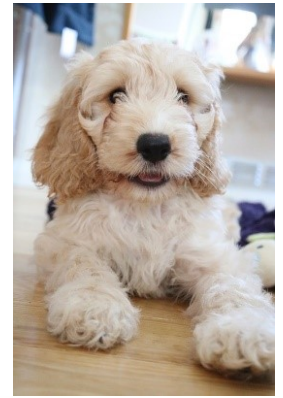


Some useful facts to teach owners are:

### Provide a Safe Retreat

- Create a canine sanctuary where children are not allowed to go.

- This can be a bed, a crate or a corner of the room that is respected by everyone as the dog's safe place where it can feel relaxed and is never intruded upon.
- Supervise children to enforce the rule if the children are too young to understand.



### Teach Kids Limits

- Ask a toddler to practice stroking a teddy before letting it near the puppy for the first time. This way the owner can correct any pulling, pinching or rough behaviour before the child gets near the live, sentient puppy! We want this to be a positive experience for both child and puppy.

### Children must be sitting

- Make it the rule that children must sit before they can stroke the puppy and that the dog gets to approach them. If the puppy wants to move away it can and must not be chased. And don't force the puppy to sit still.

### Offer Treats

- Use special tasty treats that only the child gives. Gently throw them to the puppy and allow it to approach the child. Feed from hands (not fingers) if the puppy is gentle.

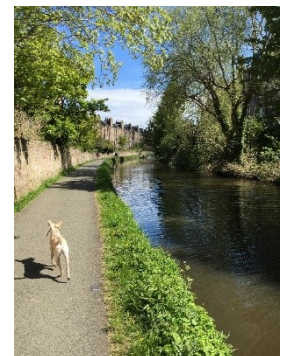
### Practice Quiet Puppy Talk

- Dog's are scared of high pitched and loud noises so noisy children can be a problem and cause significant anxiety to the dog.

Putting these steps in place early will hopefully lead to a positive relationship for both puppy and child.

## 2. Recall

- One study looking at dog behaviour suggested that dogs are 70% more likely to suffer from behavioural problems if they do not get off-lead exercise.
- Dogs need to run around, sniff at everything they want to, meet and greet other dogs and just generally be a dog whilst out on walks.
- Being on the end of a lead every time it goes out can be very frustrating for a dog.
- We need to ensure owners are teaching a good recall from an early age so that a restrictive, on-lead life does not happen.
- Educate owners on the following when they are teaching recall:



### Some useful facts to teach owners are:

- Ensure that the puppy knows its name so that they know you want their attention. Simply say their name and reward (food or cuddles)
- Choose a word or whistle as your recall cue that you use **ONLY** when you want your dog to return. It should be short.
- Start in your garden with some high reward treats. Get your pup's attention with their name, use your recall cue and take a step away from them. As they return to you reward with praise and give a tasty treat.
- Gradually increase the distance between you and your dog in the garden and continue to practise.
- Progress to outside the garden using a harness with a long line.
- Let them move away from you before using your recall cue.



- If they ignore you gently guide them back to you with the long line and reward them once they are with you.
- If they didn't need the gentle pull on the longline then make a big fuss of them and reward with high value treats so they build up a really positive association with coming when called.
- You want your dog to learn that coming back to you straight away is really rewarding.
- Always reward (never punish) them when they come back no matter how long it took! If they are punished when they come back, they will learn to fear coming back and may be reluctant to do it.

### 3. Eating

Food guarding can be a major problem with our pet dogs. Unfortunately, it can start before they even arrive at their new owner's home. Not giving puppies their own individual bowls and space to eat, can make feeding time stressful and competitive.



- Some dog trainers still advocate for showing the puppy 'who's boss' and advise taking food away from the puppy whilst it is eating. This creates unnecessary stress around mealtimes with the puppy feeling that it now HAS to guard its food as it is regularly taken away from it.
- A behavioural problem has been created that could have so easily been avoided. Since we now know that we do not have to dominate dogs or they will dominate us, it is completely unnecessary to take their food bowl away from them.
- Of course, we need dogs to be safe to be around when they eat and not growl or bite us if we go near their food and this can be done by following the steps below

#### Some useful facts to teach owners are:

- Calmly drop some treats near your puppy while they are eating from their bowl then walk away.
- Repeat this whenever your dog is being fed from their bowl.
- Never take the bowl away from them whilst they are eating.
- Hands are for giving – not taking away.



Following these steps will teach the puppy to be relaxed when you approach as you only ever bring more food.

## 4. Alone Time

- Dogs are social animals and are most comfortable within a social setting.
- Dogs form secure attachment-type relationships with humans (different to the attachment they form with other dogs).
- These share the same properties of the relationship a child has with its parent.
- For many dogs being separated from its social group (the humans it lives with) can be very distressing.
- Vocalisation, inappetence, house soiling and destruction are all common problems with this disorder.
- Having a dog with separation anxiety is not only stressful for the dog but also extremely stressful for the owner.
- Coming home to scenes of destruction and toileting is upsetting and many owners start to feel that they cannot go out anymore.
- Preventing separation anxiety is far easier than treating it. Treating it takes a lot of time and effort from the owner and many cannot commit to the treatment programme which results in the dog being relinquished.



Many owners, when they get a new puppy will book time off work. The puppy has always lived with its mum or litter mates so when the new owner then has to go back to work the puppy cannot cope at all as it has never been on his or her own before. It's extremely distressing for the puppy and house soiling, destructive behaviours and vocalising may be seen.

### Some useful facts to teach owners are:

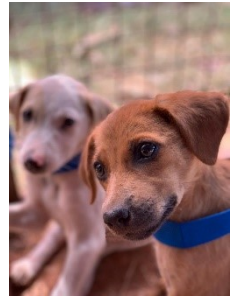
- Reward your puppy, with treats or gentle stroking, for being calm and relaxed on its bed.
- Move away from the puppy **gradually** progressing to just a few metres, to leaving the room, to leaving the house.
- Leave the puppy something delicious and time consuming to eat.
- Using puzzle feeder toys is a great idea as even small amounts of food can take a long time to eat.
- These really help to direct and hold the dog's attention on the food rather than the owner's absence. The food should be something it does not routinely have but a special treat.
- Build up the time left alone in very small stages, so it doesn't notice.
- Do not over greet the puppy when you come home. We do not want to reinforce that life is so much better when you are around!





## 5. Dogs

- The younger the puppy, the easier it will be to socialise them.
- As puppies get older, they become more cautious when faced with new experiences.
- The early weeks are when most puppies will approach anything or anybody willingly and without fear.
- By about 12 to 13 weeks of age, anything not yet encountered is likely to be approached with caution.



### Some useful facts to teach owners:

- Meeting other dogs must be a positive experience so carefully introduce to a variety of adult dogs as well as other puppies.
- Ensure these dogs are safe around puppies as a bad experience is often worse than none at all. Some puppies who have an early negative, painful or frightening experience with another dog, may be fearful around other dogs for the rest of its life so important is that early window of socialising opportunity
- Monitor your puppy playing with other dogs carefully. Keep reading its body language and the other dog's.
- Intervene if your puppy starts to annoy other dogs or other dogs get too rough.
- Keep initial sessions short and always positive.
- If the puppy is very nervous then take the sessions very slowly and always create a safe environment with your body for the puppy to hide and shelter in if things are getting too daunting for it.

