

"Belgian Malinois Puppy Training Plan"

Plan of 25 days to train your Belgian Malinois puppy in
obedience and socialization

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DAY 1

The Leash & Collar

Because all of your Belgian Malinois puppy's formal obedience training will be accomplished with the assistance of a leash and a training collar, his pre-school training should include familiarization with similar paraphernalia. Initially, the puppy should be fitted with a comfortable leather or nylon collar.

Care must be taken that the collar is not affixed either too tightly or too loosely. The puppy will immediately make attempts to shed himself of this new "thing". A loose-fitting collar would allow the puppy to slip his lower jaw underneath the collar. In this predicament, he could easily panic; or, even if he remained calm, he could chew the collar in two.

DAY 2

By the end of his first day of wearing the collar, he will have adjusted to the device and it will no longer attract his attention. You can then attach a light leash to the collar and allow him to drag the leash periodically during the day – indoors and under your supervision. By exposing the puppy to a leash and collar in this systematic way, no traumatic experiences will be allowed to develop.

You must always bear in mind that you are working with the mind of a living creature. You are molding it much like a potter molds what is to become his creation from clay. You must always exercise care and loving understanding. To abruptly affix a slip-chain training collar and leather leash to an eight-week-old puppy cannot possibly accomplish anything, except to create a very negative experience.

Negative experiences are the instruments from which trauma develops.

DAY 3

Let Your Puppy Walk

When your Belgian Malinois is accustomed to wearing the collar and has had the pleasure of romping around the house with the leash attached, carry him outdoors, a few hundred feet or so away from the house. With the leash attached, set the puppy down.

Let him walk you wherever he wants to go (within the bounds of safety, of course). Let him explore for ten or fifteen minutes while you follow him holding the other end of the leash. When the time is up, pick him up in your arms, take him back to the house and remove the leash. Chances are he will have walked you back in that direction anyway, since a puppy's instinct directs him back to the "nest".

Never Drag Your Puppy

Notice that at no time since the introduction of the collar and leash has anything been said about dragging the puppy. Although the puppy was allowed to drag the leash for a day or two, it must be pointed out and emphasized that he should not be dragged by the leash.

After three or four excursions in which the puppy is taken away from the house – with the leash affixed and the puppy allowed to walk at his discretion (with you holding the end of the leash) – he should be ready to walk away from the house.

Still, the leash should not be used as an instrument to drag the puppy. Let the pup do the walking; you hold onto the other end of the leash. By the end of the first week of his association with his new equipment, he will then begin to make the association of the new leash with control.

These daily outings on the leash must be considered as part of your puppy's preschool training. Human contact and socialization in the outside world is a very important part of this training – and a key to the puppy's future mental and emotional development. He'll see big trees, hear noises from power motors and passing automobiles, and be admired by an occasional passerby. The benefits produced by proper socialization at this time can never be duplicated later in life.

DAY 6

Fetching

The first positive command that your puppy should learn is the command to sit. By making it the first command, it therefore becomes the first positive word which we will write on the puppy's "chalkboard mind". In other words, at this age his mind is like a chalkboard – and not too much has been written on it yet.

The things that get written on it at this age should be constructive. Later, we will write the negative word "no" on the puppy's mind. The word "no" is the only negative command you should ever utter. Words which you will use when it becomes necessary to scold your Belgian Malinois are not considered "commands" but are merely words, the tone of which leave no doubt in the puppy's mind that you are doing some disciplining. The negative command "no" will come to

mean something to the puppy, no matter what tone of voice you use.

Loose The Distractions

It is recommended that the area you use for your puppy's preschool training in fetch and sit be as distraction-free as possible. Although we will approach this preschool training seriously, your Belgian Malinois should view it as game time. The "game" should not exceed ten minutes in length. If it does, the puppy will become bored with it all.

If you persist after he becomes bored, then future games with you will be considered a "real drag" and, of course, non-productive. By having as few distractions as possible, we can help keep the puppy's mind upon the game.

Let's Begin

To begin, select a toy that your Belgian Malinois has shown a particular liking for, then seat yourself upon the floor. This puts you down closer to the puppy's level and, among other things, will help to convey the "game" atmosphere.

Make sure that the puppy's leash is attached and that you are holding the other end. Toss the toy up and down for a few seconds, just enough to attract the pup's attention. Then, toss it out a few feet away from you encouraging the puppy to retrieve it. You can encourage him with things like "*Come on boy... pick it up! You can do it! C'mooooon boy! Good doggie!*".

There's enough verbiage there to make sure not a single word sticks on that chalkboard; but your tone of voice, together with your enthusiasm are the prime considerations here. If the puppy goes to the object and shows any interest in it at

all, that's grounds for praise and further encouragement. If he picks up the toy and brings it back to you, really pour on the praise and toss it out again.

Try to get four such retrievals into your first ten-minute play session. Then, remove the leash and end the game with a tidbit – a cookie or other food reinforcement. Why the tidbit? Why not just praise? Remember, your Belgian Malinois is now nine weeks old, and praise just hasn't had time to become that big of a thing. Sure, it's nice at this point in life, but the food reward is nicer.

Sit & Come

While learning the fetch game, it is important that tasty treats be used in place of too much praise, as previously mentioned. The importance of praise hasn't been firmly written on the chalkboard of his mind – so until it is, give your pup what is known to be a positive reward stimulus - food!

(Some trainers might ask, "But shouldn't training take place in the head, and not the stomach?" Yes that is true, but this is game time, remember?)

Try to get at least three fetching games (ten minutes each) into each day for three days in a row. These fetching drills should be in addition to a five or ten minute walk on the leash – daily. We're going to sneak in two commands while the puppy is having these "game times" and before he even realizes what's happened, he will have been trained to respond to "come" and "sit".

DAY 9

During your retrieving games, when your Belgian Malinois has returned the play toy to you, place your left hand on his rear end and your right underneath his chin. Press lightly with your left hand while exerting a small amount of upward pressure with your right as you command "sit".

As soon as you have placed the puppy in that sitting position, pour on the enthusiastic praise, then toss the play toy out again. When the puppy returns with the toy, withhold any praise until you have commanded "sit" and have placed him in the sitting position. If the puppy should squirm from your grasp, and you fail to get him properly seated, do not throw the play toy, do not praise, and above all, do not give up!

Always Remain Positive

Thoughts like "he just won't do it," or "he won't let me," have absolutely no place in Belgian Malinois training. Use the leash to bring the puppy back to you, say "sit" and place the puppy in the sitting position. Conclude each fetch-sit game with a tidbit reward.

DAY 13

By the time you finish your third session of fetch-sit games, you'll notice that it really doesn't take much left-hand pressure at all to get your Belgian Malinois seated. You have a 10 minute walk on leash still scheduled for each of the days four through seven. All things will be as they've been on preceding days, except – take **four** small tidbits with you. Make sure they are tucked away in your pocket – out of sight and scent – as you take the puppy outdoors.

After you begin what with the puppy believes to be a routine daily outing (we know it to be an important part of his socialization training), take a tidbit out of your pocket, kneel down to his level and say his name, followed by the command "come."

Using the leash, carefully pull the puppy towards you. Give him the tidbit, and at the same time pour on the praise. By giving the tidbit with the praise, your Belgian Malinois will begin to learn that praise is synonymous with the reward.

DAY 16

Reinforcing The Come Command

At this point during the beginning of preschool puppy training you should now have your puppy slowly conditioned to expect his daily 10 minute walk, while learning that praise and tasty treats go hand-in-hand.

As you continue each walk with your Belgian Malinois, take notice to see if he is preoccupied with the sights or sounds around him. When this happens, repeat the following maneuver: kneel down, say your puppy's name, followed by the command "come". Gently pull him to you, give him the tidbit and pour on the praise. You have 10 minutes, and four tidbits, to get four "come" maneuvers in during each daily walk for 4 days.

Why So Many Treats?

You may be wondering why it's necessary to give your Belgian Malinois a treat in each instance that the "come" maneuver is

executed. We don't want the tidbit reward to become the prime motivating factor in later training, as would happen if we were to give the tidbit all of the time – and for all responses.

Keep this very important thought in mind: *we are teaching the puppy how to learn, knowing that praise alone just isn't that big of a payoff at his young age.*

By the end your Belgian Malinois will realize that the play toy does not get tossed for him to retrieve until he allows himself to be placed in the sitting position. The fact that you will again toss the toy becomes the prime motivating factor, with praise being secondary. Since the game must eventually end, there must be some reward at the conclusion – thus, the tidbit treat.

Because praise alone is not sufficient motivation for a nine week old puppy, we must motivate him something else when teaching “come”. For a puppy to give up his sight and scent excursion, and come running to you when commanded, it must be something more in it for him than a pat on the head, or simply being allowed to continue his walk. Therefore, the treat, of necessity, becomes the prime motivator. Again, the praise is secondary.

An ideal way to reinforce the command “come” - at times other than when school is in session – would be at feeding time. Call the puppy's name, followed by the command “come” as his food dish is placed on the floor. Don't take the food to the puppy; instead, make the puppy come to the food dish as you speak the command “come”. Don't clutter his chalkboard mind with “*come on boy, it's time to eat*” and expect it to reinforce the come response.

While it is necessary that you talk to your Belgian Malinois to help develop his personality and vocabulary, don't use any other word except the command word when reinforcing a training response.

DAY 19

The Stay Command

The next step in preschool puppy training begins at around 10 weeks of age. We are now going to introduce your pup to the "stay" command.

But first, a quick word of caution from the last training article. It involves the rewards given to the puppy when playing the fetch-sit game. As you near the end of each 10 minute game time, you may notice your puppy tiring. If he poops out and refuses to retrieve, do not give the tidbit reward and end the game. To do otherwise would be to reward the puppy for giving up and quitting. Always end each game session by commanding "sit" and placing the puppy in that position, followed by praise in the tidbit reward.

Now on to this week's training session; keeping firmly in mind that kindergarten training is primarily for teaching a puppy **how** to learn, we can introduce the command to "stay" when the puppy is but ten weeks of age. Thus far, we've written the words "sit" and "come" on the chalkboard of the puppy's mind.

We've given the puppy no opportunity to do otherwise when those commands have been given. Therefore, the puppy cannot have been guilty of any disobedience in response to those commands. He certainly didn't perform any of those behaviors on his own, of course, but at that age he shouldn't be expected to. We're teaching the pup *how to learn*, so always keep that in mind!

Introducing The Stay Command

During your fetch-sit games, you can introduce the word "stay" into your puppy's vocabulary in the following manner:

With the puppy in a sitting position, and prior to throwing out the fetch toy, place your left hand on the puppy's rear to assist in holding him in that sitting position. Give the command "stay" in a firm, authoritative voice, placing your other hand (palm open) at his eye level for added emphasis. Then throw to fetch toy.

If the puppy does not move in an attempt to go to the toy, praise him immediately and release him with "Okay, get the toy." If the puppy moves in an attempt to retrieve the toy, tell him "No!" Lead him back to the exact spot and reinforce the command to stay. Have him hold that sit-stay position for a few seconds, then release him to retrieve the toy, followed by the usual praise – and, at the conclusion of the training period, his treat reward.

DAY 21

Building A Strong Foundation

A ten-week-old puppy should not be expected to respond upon command like a pro, anymore than would a child being taught to add and subtract while attending preschool. A puppy has the ability to learn upon completion of the seventh week of his life. Since that ability is there, it is important that the things he does learn are constructive.

The more he learns – though he may not perform well – the more solid the foundation for future training will be. A child plays with building blocks and builds a house – one block at a time – until, finally, one block causes the house to fall. The next attempt at building that block house will result in a much firmer foundation than that of the preceding house.

Each time a puppy is taught a new word – and given no opportunity to respond in any other manner except the proper one for that word – a foundation block is being added. Later, as the puppy's mind expands, the opportunity to disobey can be introduced; correction for that disobedience will put the pillars into place, thus providing a solid foundation for the dog's future behavior.

Weeks 11 and 12 will conclude the puppy's preschool kindergarten training, and should begin with you controlling the direction of your short daily walks. It is at this point that you will – for the first time – exert your direct influence regarding walking with the puppy. Up to this point, he's had no form of absolute control placed over him, with the exception of your command “come” (wherein you gently pulled him to you and rewarded him with a tidbit treat).

Because he has not had absolute control placed over him during his daily walks, you may encounter some signs of attitude or a temper tantrum when you decide to go in a direction that the puppy just doesn't happen to want to head

towards. If he balks, backs up, or acts like a wild bull on the rodeo grounds, just stand calmly, holding firm to the leash, and let him get it out of his system.

Don't make a big deal out of it. Simply let him throw his tantrum – but do not give in and go in the direction that he wants to go. He'll tire from his own antics in a very short period of time, especially when he sees that such behavior gets him nowhere.

When he finally calms down, speak lovingly and assuredly to him. Make him think that everything is going to be okay and that you've got things under control. Do a few “come” maneuvers as explained in previous puppy kindergarten tips and be sure to follow them with the treat reward. So far, the word “come” always culminated with something good, and you will be the recipient of benefits of this later on in your dog's training.