

Chapter 7

Learning about the world

Wolfie has been going for a walk along the lane for a while now, and his lead walking is coming along really well. He is more inclined to sit down and choose not to move for some time, rather than rush about, pulling me all over the place. For those of you with dogs who do pull like a train, you will read how I deal with this with Remy in the relevant chapter. Unlike Wolfie, Remy has no intention of even slowing, let alone stopping!

The worst thing I can do when Wolfie decides not to move is to bribe him with food, because, in the short term, this will not change his desire to stay put, he's not motivated to move, and he's simply taking the opportunity to have food if it's available. Pretty soon he will become suspicious of the food, knowing it's intended to get him to do something he doesn't want to, and will ignore it, as it will not be sufficiently motivational. Of course, some dogs will do anything for food, however many times it's used in this way, in which case, you have a solution.

The first thing I do is ascertain *why* Wolfie has stopped and is refusing to continue. Is he happy and content? Anxious? Tired? Do his legs hurt? Or does he not want to go home? Most people are familiar with their off-lead dogs not coming back to them at the end of the walk, as they don't want the fun to end; the same happens when dogs are on-lead, if they don't want to go home and would rather stay out. I could use many of the words and phrases



On walks, Wolfie spends more time lying down than he does walking!

A puppy called Wolfie

circumstance to break this loop is often needed, as this is not a healthy state of mind, and the transition from mania to a calm state can take a little time. Watch for signs from your dog that tell you he is beginning to calm down – a sigh, shake off (where a dog physically shakes in an effort to change the focus of his emotional mind), visibly relaxing his body, rather than looking tense. Don't resume engaging with him too soon or this may set off the mania again.

DEALING WITH MOUTHING

All puppies mouth and bite: it's part of their development, and helps them learn bite inhibition. Wolfie is no exception, and when he becomes over-excited, he gets very bitey. I have a toy with me all the time, and if he starts biting me or the furniture, I give him the toy, which, because he's a young puppy, still, does work, although his attention span is short, and he does not want to calmly sit and chew a toy, he wants to keep exploring with his teeth. I engage with Wolfie when he does this, telling him what is and isn't a toy, using my voice as feedback to his decisions, and also use it as an opportunity to teach bite inhibition, as long as he is not manic. If he bites me, I say 'Careful, that's mum, have a toy instead' each time he does. I repeat this phrase, and add others, such as 'Oh no, don't bite me, have your toy.' As we progress, Wolfie's mouth becomes softer until the point at which he goes to bite me but then chooses not to. It's a simple progression, then, to his not putting his teeth on me at all as he does not try to engage with me with his mouth, and chooses a toy instead.

It is really important to teach good bite inhibition so that, as a young puppy, he is not afraid to explore with his teeth, which shows him his own strength and how to control it. If a puppy is never allowed to mouth, the possibility exists that he will hold back until he no longer can, and then have no control over his bite. A dog is far less likely to cause injury if he has learned to control his bite action, and to walk away and find a toy. If he is reprimanded for mouthing, he will not have learned this ability. This

does not mean that I encourage Wolfie to mouth: I am simply making the most of this stage in his life when he is exploring with his teeth and learning how to interact. If he becomes too excitable, I keep my hands well out of his way, as he won't be able to learn when in this state; nor is he really aware of how hard he may be biting. The whole learning experience should be completed within a few weeks when he is still a young puppy, and is not an ongoing exercise. Wolfie is taught how to feel what his mouth is doing, how to control his strength, and how to make the decision to find an alternative to mouth or bite.

Sometimes, a loud, high-pitched noise is used to stop a puppy biting, because that's the noise that siblings make when young and trying out their teeth on each other. This may work, but often does not. One problem is that your puppy gets used to the noise, and then will ignore it, so it becomes less effective. This is an attempt to stop a puppy biting, that doesn't teach the puppy how to do this. It can be useful in some situations, and can be a strong interrupter, but it is not teaching the puppy bite inhibition. A noise like this can also fuel mania, as it can be quite exciting and stimulating for the mind.

When working with over-excitable dogs, I often see owners matching what their dog is doing, as they've been told that they must be more exciting than the dog to get through to him. But couple this activity with a high-pitched voice, and it's easy to see that all they are doing is stimulating their dog! I ask owners to do the exact opposite by calming their body language and their voice so as not to fuel their dog's mania.

INVESTIGATORY EXPERIENCES

When Wolfie becomes manic I have a number of things I can try to help his mind calm down. We do not engage in teaching bite inhibition when Wolfie is in this state of mind, and my hands and the rest of me are well away from him. Tone of voice, movements and actions can all contribute to escalating his current state of mind, or help to dissipate the emotions so that Wolfie can return to a

A puppy called Wolfie

me, ask if he wants his special treat, and he always comes to me for this. I want to create the idea that I am worth coming to when I call him, as it is always rewarding in one way or another. By asking Wolfie if he wants his treat, to play, or to do something with me, I am providing him with the necessary motivation to come to me, and now he associates me with his favourite treat, toys, reward, and excitement.

I've taught Wolfie 'wait' and 'no further,' both of which act as an emergency stop when out. He understands what I am saying when I tell him what we are going to do, which provides motivation for him to disengage with a current activity and move on to something else.

As we progress, Wolfie automatically begins checking in with me when he is off-lead, as I am an important part of our walks. When he does this, I have a number of responses, including 'wait for me,' 'off you go,' 'I'll follow you,' and 'meet you at the pond,' depending on how excited he is. I add in 'don't go too far' when he checks in with me when off-lead to maintain a proximity with him. If he gets a little ahead I ask him to wait for me. He's still young and learning so I match my conversation and requests to what I think he is capable of.

All of these things, which are part of other aspects of life and learning, are also instrumental in a robust recall strategy. Different situations require different recall options, and sometimes Wolfie does not recall, so I need an alternative. If I use the things he already knows it makes it easier for Wolfie to recall, and I always have options if he finds it difficult.

I also choose when to let him off the lead and when to recall him to avoid problems. If I think something is too tempting for him to ignore, he stays on-lead. If I know he cannot recall when he gets too close to a particular thing, I recall before we reach that point.



WOLFIE'S DIARY

July 24

Day 50 with us: 16 weeks old

NOTES

He's been with us for 7 weeks now, and is 16 weeks old today.

Lead walking is going well; he's good at walking with us, and the times he sits on the floor and doesn't want to move are fewer – just as well because, at one point I was spending a very long time going not very far!! He loves running, and, between playing in the fields and going out, we're getting plenty of exercise. Great for my appetite! He's really progressing with playing without trying to bite us, and now he's got the idea that he can move away, he's really enjoying running after toys we throw. Mad half-hours are manageable, and fun, not manic. He hasn't quite mastered eye/mouth co-ordination yet: he sees a thrown toy as it flies towards him but looks confused when it falls on the ground! He's met more horses, and an entire herd of cows said hello the other day – he wasn't overly sure of their intentions, though.

We've been out and about in the town, and he's now not trying to say Hi to everyone who passes us, only those who stop to speak to him. He had his first encounter with a dog who growled, barked and lunged at him all in the blink of an eye; thankfully, at a little distance, and he was okay; just walked on.

His latest weigh in at the vet has him at 28.9kg (63.7lb), so he's getting bigger, and is now too heavy for me to pick up and put in the car. He's learning more and more language, so is managing himself really well. He had a visit from a friend who said he was really calm for a puppy, which prompted two thoughts: one, what a nice compliment; he is doing so well at balancing his behaviour, and two: he was actually very excited, and if he had been any more active I would have asked him to calm down. It's interesting how perceptions can be so different, as my friend's perception of an excitable puppy is, to me, actually one who is over-excited, without impulse control.



A puppy called Wolfie

though we are going further now, which is great progress. Wolfie has acclimatised to the car quite quickly because he was only ever anxious about it, and not scared, or terrified of it. I have ensured that each journey is within his capabilities by assessing his emotional state before deciding to take him out. If we have a scheduled appointment, such as at the vet, I make sure we have done some activities before we go so that Wolfie is quieter and more relaxed. I also make sure he hasn't just eaten: he's never yet been car-sick, so I don't want to take any chances.

Teaching tip

 Teaching strategy isn't working, change it. Additionally, a particular strategy does not necessarily continue to be the right one as your puppy develops; often, you need to adjust or progress this for whatever development stage your puppy is undergoing.



WOLFIE'S DIARY

August 6

Two months with us: 17 weeks and six days old

NOTES

The settee ate Wolfie in the night ...

Well, it got to his shoulders, and then I rescued him. Wolfie's favourite sleeping position is on his back with his legs stretched out. I can only assume that moving about in his sleep resulted in him ending up under the settee, and when he tried to move there wasn't enough room, so he was stuck. Or the settee really did fancy him as a midnight snack ...



Wolfie is progressing really well with walking along the lane, and sitting down and not wanting to move is becoming a much less frequent occurrence. He's also getting better at coping with cars and tractors we meet in the lane, so the natural progression is that, as long as there's not something really big and noisy coming, we do not have to stand at a distance. This does mean that cars now pass closer to us, so I have begun teaching Wolfie 'stay close' when we need to stay still to let traffic pass. We move to the outside edge of the road and I crouch down and hold the back of Wolfie's harness with one hand, placing the other on his chest. As the cars get so close it's vital that Wolfie does not suddenly lunge, and my holding him in this way prevents this whilst he learns. If he'd seemed too worried when we first tried this I would have gone back to the previous step and stayed at a distance from the cars. As it is, Wolfie is a little worried, but copes well, and does not try to run. I do not notice any flee instinct, and he is not concerned once the vehicle has gone past. This strategy is going really well, and Wolfie is now automatically moving to the edge of the road when he hears approaching traffic, staying close and sitting in advance of the car passing us.

Our 'steady' cue is now pretty well perfect, as we've been practising this every time we go for a run along the lane, and Wolfie has got really good at keeping the same pace, so I don't need to stop any more. Obviously, he is now bigger, stronger, and faster than he was when we began this a couple of months ago. He also loves running, so his motivation to get faster is strong. Although he really wants to speed up, he doesn't, however, and has found a way of managing his enthusiasm. His solution? Instead of getting faster and lengthening his stride, he goes higher in the air, and runs with a more bouncy gait. This is often referred to as handicapping during play between dogs, when they match their activity to who they are playing with. I haven't taught Wolfie to do this when we run, he's done it of his accord. From the expression on his face, he is definitely enjoying himself.



Our 'steady' cue is now pretty well perfect.