



## Are Small Breed Dogs Right for Me?

### Tiny Dogs: Training and Behavior

#### General Information

In a broad sense of the term, “little dogs” are any breed that weighs less than 25 pounds. It can encompass a large variety of breeds from a tiny, fragile 2-pound teacup Yorkie to a short and sturdy 25-pound Pug. Between the different breeds there are varied personalities and specific traits. Owners should research their particular breed for individual training plans, but below are some common characteristics and training information.

#### Advantages of Small Breed Dogs

- take up less space
- eat less food
- smaller waste products
- don't need as much outdoor space
- highly portable
- less counter surfing
- less intimidating
- more acceptable to landlords, hotels, and public places

#### Disadvantages of Small Breed Dogs

- very breakable bodies
- reputation for being yappy ankle-biters
- can become defensively aggressive
- usually not a good choice for children (unless both dog and children have been properly socialized and have good manners)

#### Housetraining Challenges

Potty training your small dog may be difficult, but they are just as capable as any big dog of learning where and when it is appropriate to go potty. Below are a few challenges little dog owners face.

- Little dog signals are harder to notice.
- Accidents are small and may not be noticed until much later.
- Little dog = little bladder. They may need to go out more frequently than a larger dog.
- Owners provide less supervision to little dogs and use crates that are too large.

- Owners are more likely to use potty pads or paper training, sending mixed messages about inside versus outside elimination.
- Little dogs are more likely to have had previous “bad” housetraining. Because of their size, they are more popular in puppy mills – environments where they are more likely to be over-crated and required to live in their own filth.

The best answer to housetraining a small breed dog is scrupulous management and constant supervision - through appropriate use of leashes, crates, and regular trips outside (every ½ hour to an hour if necessary). Learn your dog’s signals, feed regular meals instead of free feeding, pick up water before bedtime, and clean up accidents with enzyme-based cleaners made for animal messes.

### **Training Tips**

- *Learn to speak small dog.* Dogs, especially small dogs, are intimidated and don’t understand human body language. Use soft eye contact, soft voices and small gestures, turn sideways to him when approaching, and squat down when interacting with him. Avoid direct approach, looming over him, assertive gestures, and loud voices.
- *Small dog = Small treats.* Little dogs need small, pea-sized treats and food pieces. Big pieces can be dangerous and hard to eat for tiny dogs. Also, you may need to eliminate one of his meals depending on how many treats he gets during training. Little dogs can quickly become overweight - leading to more health issues!
- *Make yourself smaller.* Start your training by sitting on the floor with your dog. This will save your back and make you less intimidating to him. You can also sit in a chair or put him on a raised surface like a bed or couch.
- *Reach-extending tools.* You also need to train standing up. Your dog needs to learn leash manners like walking politely without straining. You can smash a treat on the end of a stick and use it to direct him where you want him. Then, you won’t have to bend over to give the treat.
- *Little dog training tools.* Small dogs need lightweight collars and leashes because standard-weight items are too heavy and hurtful. All training tools and toys should be size appropriate.
- *“Pick-up warning” cue.* Of course you will want to pick up your little dog. Use a cue word to minimize the pick-up stress for your dog and let him know what is going to happen. Choose a cue like “Okay” or “Pick-up” and use it every time you pick him up. Place your hands around him, give your cue, and put a little pressure under him, but don’t pick him up yet. This will give him time to realize what is happening so he isn’t startled. Then, you can proceed to pick him up and soon the cue itself will be enough.
- *Respect his needs and preferences.* Teaching him to lie down may be difficult. Little dogs are already tiny and vulnerable and feel even more so when made to lie down. Also, many little dogs are sensitive to the cold and hard or rough surfaces. Try teaching him on a soft, raised surface (like a bed or couch), where he will feel more comfortable and less threatened.

- *Allow him to say "NO".* One reason little "arm dogs" have a reputation for being snappy is that they are forced into situations and restrained in their humans' arms without an escape route. If they feel threatened in any way, they can't move away or duck behind their owner like they could on the ground. Ask potential greeters to kneel down, make themselves small, and let your dog approach them. If he doesn't greet them, don't force him.

### **Companion Dog Basics**

Managing your small dog (like every dog) is just as important as training.

- If his potty training isn't rock solid, keep him out of situations when he is likely to "make a mistake."
- Don't reward him for unwanted behaviors and consistently and generously reward for good behaviors, with treats, attention, or a nap on the couch. Some examples include:
  - Turn your back on the jumper and only pet him or give a treat when he sits – make sure guests do the same. He then learns to sit for attention.
  - Don't let him sit on your lap or make space for him on the sofa until he sits. Then invite him up as his reward.
- **Treat him like a dog.** Every little dog needs to be well socialized. Make sure he has many positive experiences with other dogs, different settings, and friendly people of all ages, shapes, sizes, and races. Little dogs need to have their feet on the ground so they can learn to go up and down stairs, get into cars, and walk on grass, dirt, carpeting, wood, and tile floors.

### **Be Safe and Smart**

One of the reasons little dogs have attitudes about big dogs is that owners panic when they see a big dog approaching. The owner's stress transmits to the little dog, who then becomes anxious. If you grab your dog every time another dog approaches, you are creating more stress for him and increasing the potential for confrontations. Sometimes little dogs can get savaged by large dogs because their owners forget to anticipate and avoid hazards for their little companions. Don't take your little dog places that have large uncontrolled dogs. Only use the local dog park if there is a separate fenced area for little dogs. If walking on the street and someone approaches with a large and rambunctious dog, take evasive action - calmly cross the street so you can pass at a safe distance. If you see a loose dog approaching, look for an escape route - calmly step into a fenced yard or business for safety. Toss some tasty treats away from you to slow down the approaching dog and give you time to escape. Only pick up your dog as a last resort - doing so puts you at risk of injury and can stress your dog and set back his training.