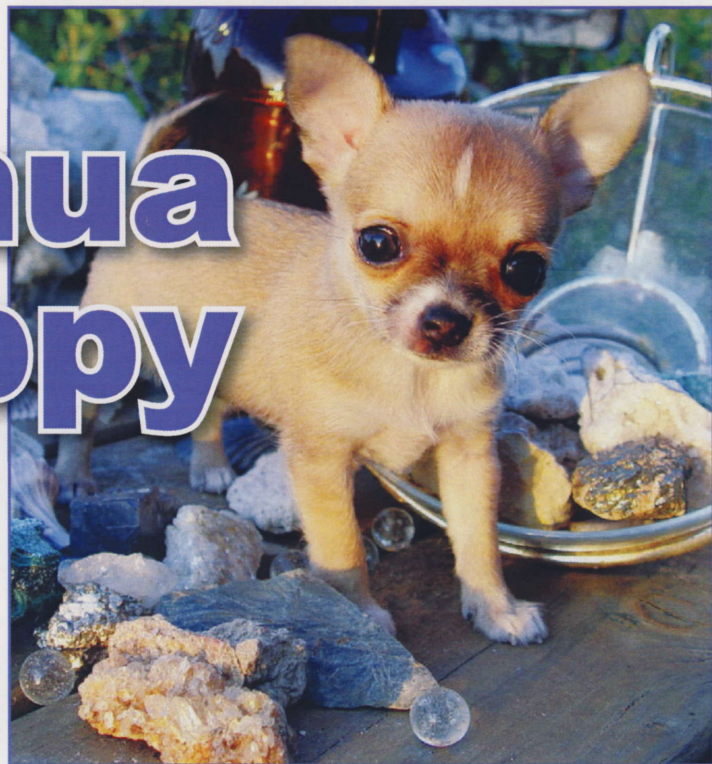


# Getting Off to a Good Start with Your Chihuahua Puppy

By Amy Bender



CH TnT Whistling DreamGirl Amy. Photo courtesy of TNT Chihuahuas

When you bring your adorable new Chihuahua puppy home for the first time, it's tempting to let him bend a few rules while he's getting comfortable in his new home. Before you let him have the run of the house or run to him each time he cries, however, think about the habits you want your Chihuahua to have when he reaches adulthood. The behaviors you allow now are going to become habits that are hard to break later on. Your best bet is to get started on teaching good behavior from the moment you bring your Chihuahua puppy through the door. Here are some tips to help you get off to a good start:

■ **Don't let your new Chihuahua puppy have the run of the house.** Letting your puppy run around the house gives him the opportunity to chew your belongings and to relieve himself wherever he wants. To start good habits, your Chihuahua should only be allowed to have supervised playtime in one puppy-safe room. When you're unable to supervise him, your puppy should be in a crate. Just keep in mind that your puppy shouldn't be crated for more than a few hours at a time so he has the opportunity to relieve himself and get some exercise.

■ **Provide your puppy with plenty of appropriate toys.** Don't leave it up to your puppy to find ways to entertain himself – like eating a pair of your shoes. Give him plenty of his own toys to play with and chew on, and give him lots of praise when he's playing with them.

■ **Praise good behavior.** It's common for people to scold a puppy for bad behavior and to ignore him when he's calmly chewing a bone. Unfortunately, all this teaches your puppy is that he gets lots of your attention when he's acting up and none of it when he's well-behaved. Make it a habit to praise your puppy when he's doing something you like. If he's sitting calmly and chewing a bone, praise him and throw him a little treat. Capturing good behavior in this manner is a great way to strengthen good habits, and it takes very little effort.

■ **Socialize your puppy.** Getting your new puppy used

to a variety of life experiences sets him up for good mental health in the future. If he's not exposed to things such as walking near traffic, children, other animals, and anything else he might encounter over the course of his life, he may exhibit fearful reactions, such as cowering or biting, when he meets them in the future. A great way to ensure your puppy gets proper socialization is to enroll him in a puppy kindergarten class designed especially for this purpose.

■ **Don't let him do things now that you're not going to want him to do in the future.** Often we find behaviors cute when our tiny puppy does them, but they become less adorable as our dog ages. Your best bet is to think ahead, and keep your puppy from doing things that you would rather your adult Chihuahua refrain from. Would you rather your adult dog stay off the furniture? Don't let your cute puppy get away with cuddling up on the couch with you. Would you hate it if your adult Chihuahua pawed your leg and whined to get your attention? Resist giving your puppy attention for doing just this thing, no matter how cute he looks doing it!

■ **Start where you are.** If you've had your puppy home for awhile, and have allowed him to get away with some of these behaviors, all is not lost. It might take a little longer to retrain some of the bad habits your puppy has begun, but with a little persistence these tips will work for you, too. Just start from where you are and begin implementing these new rules immediately.

*Amy Bender has worked in the field of animal welfare for almost a decade training shelter dogs and educating the public about pet care. She has also owned a dog training business. Since making the career change to freelance writing, Amy has written numerous articles, books, and blogs on the care and training of dogs.*