

Twilight Zone

You've just been mysteriously transported into a new environment. Nothing is like what you've known before. Everything looks, sounds and smells so different. It is the absence of all you've known. You start to explore on wobbly legs. Everything is so big. Who are the strange new creatures? The words they say are gibberish. It's all so strange.

Have you entered the "Twilight Zone"? No. You've entered the world of the newly placed puppy.

It's not just a "Twilight Zone" for the new puppy, it's also all new and strange for the new puppy owner.

As experienced dog people, we can easily forget what it's like for the new puppy owner when they take their puppy home. As a breeder, you may have said all the right things when placing your puppy but who knows what the new owner assimilates? Your going-home package for new puppy owners may be a masterpiece of informative articles and tips on puppy rearing, but will the new owners read it?

Weimaraner puppies are bundles of curiosity and energy. It's a combination that's very challenging for the new puppy owner. Don't undervalue having multiple, early conversations with the new puppy owner. Repetition is key to puppy and new owner training. Before the puppy goes home stress the importance of puppy proofing the new home, communicating with the puppy and laying down some basic "civilization" rules.

Even people who have successfully raised other dogs in the past may have forgotten some of the basics of good puppy rearing. Don't shy away from going over some basics. A refresher on Puppy Rearing 101 will ease the transition for the puppy who goes to his/her new home and for the owners who may be a little overwhelmed.

Safety is the prime concern so give your new owners some tips on puppy proofing the house. Explain that it's easier to make a small space safe than a large one. Having the puppy confined to a portion of the house or a room has many

advantages. Housebreaking is more easily accomplished, dangerous objects and situations can be limited, and the puppy has fewer “rules” to learn initially. Stress that the space should be part of the heavily trafficked part of the house so the puppy gets lots of social and physical stimulation.

Puppies don’t understand English or any human language. That sounds pretty obvious but it’s so easy for the new puppy owner to forget. Explain that tone is as important as the actual word. Stress the importance of keeping words consistent. Initially work on the puppy’s name, a negative word and a positive one. Having these “tools” the new owner can shape behavior

Puppies use their mouths to physically manipulate and explore their environment and they have no idea of how hard a bite is acceptable. New owners have to teach bite inhibition. Bite inhibition is simply a fancy way to say that puppies will continue to use their mouths but they will not bite down hard. Puppies get their first lesson in bite inhibition when they are nursing. If they bite too hard the mother will get up and leave. (The lesson is, if I bite. the milk bar is closed.) The same goes for the tumbling play between littermates. The puppy that bites too hard drives away play partners. New owners need to establish good bite inhibition and should be reminded of the use of positive/negative words, re-directing the behavior to toys, and the importance of consistent reinforcement.

Crate training is so important with Weimaraners that I’m sure that I’m preaching to the choir when I mention it. New owners may not be totally convinced. Explore the topic completely and extoll the virtues of the crate trained Weimaraner.

Puppies grow up so fast; puppyhood is gone in the twinkling of an eye. Enjoy the experience and help your new owners avoid some of the “bumps in the road.”

Carole Lee Richards

PO Box 516, Collingswood, NJ08108

ymar_column@yahoo.com