

Introduction to The Kinderpuppy Course

Introduction to The Kinderpuppy Course

The Kinderpuppy Course – A Curriculum Manual For Instructors contains complete course material for teaching an 8-week, 12-hour puppy course. This curriculum has been continuously developed and refined for over a decade, and is being successfully used by “packs” of dog trainers worldwide. If you are new to teaching puppy classes, using the curriculum as is can save you the painstaking and daunting task of developing your own from scratch. If you are an experienced puppy trainer, you can use the Kinderpuppy Course material to enrich your existing course by picking and choosing elements that appeal to you, and integrating them into your own curriculum.

Structure of the Manual

Class Outlines, Class Plans, Homework Sheets, a Reference Information appendix and a Course Package for Registrants appendix are in print form in this manual. Homework sheets are also included on the accompanying CD-ROM, along with client handouts, a course evaluation form, and templates for graduation certificates. The CD-ROM material is intended for reproduction and distribution to participants. The CD-ROM files are in both Microsoft Word and PDF format, so that the material can either be used as is or customized.

The quick reference Class Outlines are designed for use during class. They contain activity titles, time allotments, and list the core elements of each activity. The Class Plans are designed as a lesson preparation tool. They contain detailed descriptions of each activity, including what to do and say in class, and tips on troubleshooting training problems. The Homework Sheets recap most of what was taught in class, in the form of homework exercises.

Using the Class Plans

The Class Plans consists of three columns. The first column contains activity titles and time allotments. The second column contains information for the instructor: activities to carry out and information to keep in mind. The third column contains, in the form of sample monologues, information to convey to the course participants. These monologues are not intended to be followed word for word, but rather, to give the reader a feel for how the information can be effectively conveyed. The second and third columns are staggered so that they can be read simultaneously, conveying a suggested flow between what is physically done, and what is verbally said. Blank space in the columns can be used to jot down personalized instructions, or other notes.

Some activities are entirely optional, and can be taught if the skill level of participants is high enough and if time permits. They are not required for continuity within the course. Some other activities are initially listed as optional and then reappear in later Class Plans. These activities can be bumped to their later slots, to provide some time flexibility within classes, without compromising course continuity.

Terms appearing in **bold** within the Class Plans can be found in alphabetical order in Appendix B. This Reference Information appendix contains additional information on a variety of training terms and related topics.

Class and Session Lengths

The course is designed as eight weekly 90-minute classes, to be taught by at least one experienced instructor to between four and eight puppies. Having assistants makes it much easier to cover all of the material at a comfortable pace. The course can be adapted to fit different length classes. With higher instructor-to-dog ratios, and by leaving out a few of the obedience threads, it can be taught as eight 60-minute weekly classes. Alternatively, it can be easily converted into two four-week courses, each course consisting of four 90-minute weekly classes, with a graduation at the end of weeks 4 and 8. It can even be shortened into a six-week course by eliminating some obedience components from the second half of the course.

Course Package

The contents of a suggested Course Package for Registrants are listed in Appendix A. It is helpful to provide participants, at the very beginning of the course, with some handouts on topics that they will be seeking information on. Referring them to handouts when they have questions about topics not yet addressed in class can be a big time saver. It helps the instructor stay on time during class without leaving clients feeling neglected. Some homework assignments also refer participants to the handouts in their course package.

Resources

Teaching this course does not require any special facilities. Many trainers run classes out of church basements, gymnasiums, or other essentially empty rooms containing nothing more than some chairs. An ideal teaching room would have double doors, a room splitter, matting and tethers. However, unless the class is being taught out of a facility dedicated exclusively to dog training, these resources are not likely to be available. While the facility does not need to be fancy, there are a few essentials that should be available:

- Enough chairs to seat everyone.
- A big *stable* table that can be used to place frightened children out of dog reach.
- An ex-pen or baby gate across any entrance that is not “double-gated” (a series of two gates or doors).
- An ex-pen available in case one or more puppies need to be segregated from the rest of the group.
- A spill-proof water dish, so that the floor does not become dangerously slippery.
- A clean-up kit that contains paper towels, poop bags, detergent (dilute soap solution), and disinfectant (1:30 bleach solution).
- A CD player or cassette deck for playing sound-desensitization tracks and for playing music during musical chairs at graduation.
- Demonstration and activity equipment (chew toys, tug toys, grooming equipment, tethers, t-shirts, spook items, prizes, etc.).

Some optional but very handy additional resources include:

- Some hardy kid toys like wire-mounted sliding bead boards, magnetic doodle pads or shape-sorters. Enabling parents to keep their kids busy is always appreciated and well worth the small effort it takes.
- Assistants, who can function as door-watchers, poop-picker-up-ers or “shadows”. Some assistants may even be able to run demonstrations and activities. Teaching is a multi-faceted job, and having other people on hand to share the load makes the job easier, more fun and is growth-enhancing.
- Portable fencing, which can be used if there are problematic doggy dynamics that necessitate segregated play sessions.
- Spare clickers to loan to participants who forget to bring their own to class.
- Spare 6-foot leashes, to loan to participants who bring their puppy to class on a retractable leash.
- A few small bags of freeze dried liver, available for sale to owners who forget to bring treats to class.

A Note on Clickers

This course is designed in such a way that the use of clickers is optional. Using clickers is not emphasized in the course because some people find it cumbersome or intimidating. The use of clickers is incorporated in exercises that lend themselves especially well to clicker training, such as loose-leash walking or placement commands, but even in these exercises clicker use is optional. The course can easily be altered for greater or lesser clicker emphasis because, in all activities, the “click” and the verbal marker “Yes” are interchangeable. Owners who like using a clicker can be encouraged to use it in almost all of the exercises, and owners who dislike the clicker do not need to use it at all.

A Note on Play Sessions

Play sessions serve many important functions: they are an essential part of the dog-dog socialization component of the course; they provide an opportunity to educate participants about normal versus abnormal social interactions; they serve as a reward for the puppies and they function as necessary mental break times for both puppies and clients. They are a key element of the overall fabric of the classes. If the curriculum of the course is being used in its entirety, do feel free to juggle around the order of activities depending on the energy and the mood of the class. Implementing an extra play session, at just the right moment, can sometimes make all the difference when a class is a little bumpy.

Concurrent activities are often slotted within play sessions but they can be bumped to another play session whenever the need arises to have a leisurely play session without any other activities to focus on. Tailoring the play session to the needs of the class is always more important than sticking to class plans.

Structure versus Flexibility

The structure of a course is important because skills need to be built on from one lesson to the next. Structure is also an integral element of every puppy class because without it, dynamics in a room full of puppies and people can become chaotic. However, flexibility is equally important. Each puppy course and each class are unique. The human skill level, human social dynamics, dog personalities and doggy dynamics will all vary from one course to the next. It is the instructor's job to adjust the course material, as needed, in response to these variables – so that learning is maximized. Adjusting standards in a way that allows all of the participants and their dogs to succeed in learning is key to successful teaching. Some flexibility in timing and skill level of activities is built into the Class Plans to help you define optimum goals for each course and each class that you teach.

Accommodating Problem Puppies

One aspect of teaching puppy classes that sometimes can be tough is persuading owners that the social development of their puppies should take priority over obedience training. For example, owners of fearful puppies are not always convinced that the best thing they can do for their dog is work on the fear problem while others are practicing obedience skills. It can be tricky to convince the owner of a shy dog, in need of a little more low-key social exposure, that the puppy should be penned with an appropriate playmate for extra playtime while others are working on Sit-Stays. If there are several problem puppies in class (fearful, asocial or anti-social) then threads of the obedience components of the course should be left out so that the socialization components can be modified and extended. As experience in teaching puppy classes is gained, it becomes easier and easier to accommodate everyone's needs – really, it is almost always possible to do so.

Lastly...

Teaching puppy classes is incredibly rewarding. Young puppies are fun to teach – they are still so malleable that they easily make great progress. Puppy owners that enroll in such a course are naturally quite enthusiastic and committed to their dog, which makes them excellent students as well. The positive energy created by witnessing the puppies learn contributes to good class dynamics. Seeing puppies learn new skills and overcome problems is energizing and helps maintain a positive ambiance throughout the course. Knowing that you have played an integral role in shaping a puppy into a well-mannered, friendly adult dog is a most satisfying reward for any trainer.

Have fun teaching the Kinderpuppy Course – it's a blast!

Jennifer