



Top tips for tiny dogs



Tiny puppy tips

1. A dog's eye view

When you are tiny, the world must seem very big. This means that your small dog is entirely reliant on you for their security. However, we also want our dogs to learn to stand on their own four paws (no matter how petite) and so we need to balance getting them out and about to see and experience the world at large, along with making them feel safe. For this reason, use your judgement about when and where to encourage your puppy to walk on lead – and when to carry him or her. For example, it's important that your small dog learns to walk on lead and cope with people walking past and the sight and sound of traffic at a reasonable distance, but this is only fine if it's at a level they can cope with. In a situation where there are lots of feet, push chairs, bicycles or shopping trolleys coming too close, or when the noise and proximity of vehicles is frightening, then picking your puppy up for a while is eminently sensible.

2. House training for tinies

House training can be a little tricky for some tiny dogs – for three main reasons. The first is that small puppies inevitably have small bladders and digestive systems – meaning that they need to go to the toilet far more often than bigger puppies, and that they can't wait as long when they need to go, especially at the outset while they are still developing. The second reason is that small dogs are often sensitive to the cold and wet – so if it's raining outdoors, it's no wonder that your puppy may prefer to go in the nice warm lounge. The third reason is a simply practical one – the back door is a long way away when you are tiny – only a few steps when you are big. This means that by the time your puppy has realised they need to go outside, waiting for them to walk to the back door to tell you may be unrealistic. This always improves as your puppy grows and learns more control, but it can take a little time.



3. Elevation, elevation, elevation

While we all want to be able to pick up our tiny dogs and carry them to keep them out of trouble when necessary, ironically many really don't like being restricted and lifted – because that in itself is a little scary. Because of this, we need to teach our dogs that when we bend down and put our hands underneath them, it's a good thing. Encourage your puppy to you by crouching down, use treats and praise to make good associations between your hands reaching out and picking them up, and never pursue a puppy that has avoided your hands, as this will only make them more worried.

Tiny training tips

1. Do more training than you think you need to!

Should you train your tiny dog? Of course you should! Not only does training make your life easier with your puppy, it stimulates their minds, and increases bonding between you. Tiny dogs can, of course, be trained to do nearly all the same behaviours as big dogs – they should learn to sit, lie down, come when called, wait and walk nicely on the lead. Once you have mastered this, why not develop your training and teach some fun tricks, agility, or even scent work – small dogs can have just as much fun using their natural skills as big dogs.

2. Size matters

It seems obvious, but tiny dogs need tiny treats in training. There's also a limit to the amount they can eat in each day, so make every treat one count and reduce the amount of food that your dog gets at other times to prevent him or her becoming overweight if necessary.

3. No looming!

Many small dogs find the sheer size and height of most humans a bit intimidating. Playing and training is much better done on the same level as the dog – either with the human on the floor, or with the dog up on a non-slip surface (but being careful he or she can't leap off unexpectedly).



4. Train with care

Research studies have shown that small dogs seem particularly badly affected by owner inconsistencies in training, and by any form of punishment. These can make behaviours such as fear and barking much worse, so all training needs to be done using kind, positive methods. The type of exercises that you do also need to focus on safety – making the recall, wait and tolerance of handling very important, as well as fun tricks to keep your little dog's mind fully occupied!



tips when out and about with tiny dogs

1. Be more dog

It's important to try and treat your small dog like a big dog whenever possible. My little Chihuahua runs off lead with my Collie-cross and can almost keep up with her! She also plays with a full size tennis ball, does proper agility, and plays with my cats. She will walk happily through my local busy town centre on lead, and will sit and wait in shops, and settle down while I stop for a drink (or to try on shoes!). She's happy meeting other people, saying hello to children and other dogs and being out and about – but all this took time, as I gradually got her used to the sights and sounds, and built her confidence little by little.



2. Predict and protect

All this bravery needs to be balanced by keeping your little dog safe, and not allowing him or her to be frightened by unexpected events. Be careful not to allow children to suddenly try and pick your dog up (they always want to!), or other dogs to chase or bully him in any way if he's off lead. Pick your dog up rather than allowing him to become intimidated by lots of noise, vehicles or feet bustling past, and once in your arms, feed lots of tiny treats in order to maintain good associations with being out and about and the environment. This also prevents your dog from growling or barking at things below – which some small dogs are prone to do once they are elevated and feel that they are protected.

Tiny tips for happy dogs

1. Give more exercise than you think they need!

One of the biggest mistakes that people make with small dogs is in thinking that they don't need much exercise. Of course, just like us, dogs need to get fit gradually, but the fitter they become the more they enjoy it, and it's essential for good physical and mental health.

2. Challenge your small dog's big brain!

Sadly, studies show that owners of small dogs engage in fewer activities with them than owners of large dogs – and yet they benefit just as much. Training, playing games, new walks, social encounters and maybe even trying a doggie sport could be on the cards – and can be great fun for you both. Try and do something together every day.

3. Home alone training

Leaving your dog home alone for short periods right from the outset, is a really sensible way to avoid separation problems and over-bonding. Preventing your dog from following you like a little shadow in the house is also part of his independence training.



4. Breed needs

Just because your dog is small doesn't mean it doesn't have strong instincts to work. Many small dogs were bred with a specific job in mind, and the drive to perform this activity is still within them. Knowing what your dog was bred to do (or the combination of jobs if your dog is a cross between breeds) and then finding an outlet for these drives is an important part of keeping your dog happy. For example, many of the terrier-types were bred to hunt vermin – and even if that's not practical in our modern age, then teaching your dog to search for toys or titbits in the house and garden will help to satisfy his deepest needs.

5. Canine interpreter required

Many behaviours that are all-too-often accepted in small dogs, such as barking and snappiness, a dislike of being handled, or guarding food and other possessions are symptoms of fear or anxiety, and can be treated by increasing your dog's confidence through an individual training programme. This prevents the behaviours from becoming a habit, so getting some professional help early on is always advised and will pay dividends in the long run.