



## How to get the most out of your puppy course

The most useful thing you can do to prepare your puppy for class is **teach them how to settle in a home environment**. I guarantee it if your puppy can't settle calmly in a room by themselves, or even with you nearby while there's a little bit of distraction, there's **no way they're going to settle in a classroom** with lots of new smells, sounds, people, and other puppies around.

So the homework for this class actually **begins at home**. And it all starts with a puppy whose nervous system is fully regulated - emotionally, physically, mentally, and socially prepared for learning. A well-regulated puppy is better equipped to cope with the stimulation of class, focus on you, and enjoy the experience.

Let's break this down. I'm going to show you exactly how to **help your puppy settle** and set them up for success - so that class time is calm, productive, and enjoyable for both of you.

## Emotionally Prepared: Supporting Your Puppy's Nervous System

The first piece of prepping your puppy for class is **emotional regulation**. A puppy who is emotionally supported, confident, and calm will be much better equipped to cope with the stimulation of a classroom environment.

One of the most important aspects of this is **sleep**. Puppies need roughly **18–20 hours of sleep a day**. If they aren't getting enough rest, they can't focus, and learning becomes almost impossible. Meltdowns caused by sleep debt aren't a sign of naughtiness - they're simply your puppy's nervous system asking for a break.

Equally important is helping your puppy feel **safe and secure** in their home environment to help them fall asleep. This means:

- Giving them resting spaces away from the traffic of the house
- Supporting your puppy when new people come into your home
- Teaching them that normal household and garden noises aren't scary
- Waiting until they can handle being on their own for long periods of time in a room before leaving the house altogether
- Introducing independence at night gradually, in a way that supports sleep through the night

All of these things help your puppy regulate their emotions so that when they come to class, they are **ready to learn, engage, and enjoy the experience**.

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## Physically Prepared: Creative Exercise for a Calm, Confident Puppy

Physical exercise also helps with emotional regulation. But right now, many puppies can't get the type of exercise we want them to because they're not fully vaccinated. The good news is, there are **lots of clever ways to exercise your puppy safely while supporting their nervous system**.

Before vaccinations are complete:

- Encourage play in the home or garden using balls or toys
- Offer mentally engaging activities, like food-filled chewtoys or puzzles
- Take your puppy out to the park and use a blanket for them to sit on to allow them to **watch the world go by** without risking them being on grass
- Parking up outside busy parks/supermarkets and letting your puppy watch from the window whilst you feed them yummy treats allows them to see and hear lots of activity while keeping them calm and secure

Once your puppy is fully vaccinated, you can start exploring **quiet outdoor environments**. Ideally:

- Use a long line and give your puppy space to roam
- Avoid busy streets and overly social situations
- Allow your puppy to engage with the environment at their own pace

- Aim for around **20–30 minutes** in these environments, with plenty of opportunities to rest

The key is helping your puppy **experience the world without pressure to interact**. This builds confidence and helps them practise calm observation - a crucial skill for settling in class.

A simple example: take your blanket to the local park, let your puppy settle on it with a chew for 5–10 minutes, then head home. They're learning that being out and about can be safe, calm, and rewarding - and this practice directly prepares them for class.

## **Physically & Mentally Prepared: Practising Calm Focus at Home**

A big part of preparing your puppy for class is teaching them **how to occupy themselves calmly**. This is where activities like long-lasting chews, lickmats/pots, and snuffle mats come into play.

Using things like **long-lasting chews (for example Yak chews or similar), lick mats, snuffle mats, and food-dispensing toys** teaches your puppy how to settle and stay engaged without constant input from you. These activities encourage calm behaviour, help regulate the nervous system, and give your puppy something appropriate to focus on.

If your puppy has plenty of practice with these activities at home, they're far more likely to engage with them in a class environment.

That said, it's really important to remember that **class is much harder than home**. At home, your puppy might be able to give 100% of their focus to an activity. In class, with other puppies, people, smells and sounds around, that capacity is much lower. So when we ask puppies to concentrate in a more distracting environment, we have to **make it easy for them**.

This is why I strongly recommend bringing something your puppy can **lick or chew**, ideally a long-lasting chew. These keep puppies engaged for longer and are inherently soothing - every bite gives them something back. If an activity is too difficult, your puppy will simply give up, and settling becomes much harder.

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## **Mentally Prepared: Teaching Your Puppy to Choose Calm**

These same activities should be used regularly at home. While it's fine to feed some meals from a bowl, the **majority of meals are best given through activity toys**. This supports mental engagement and promotes calm behaviour.

More often than not, puppies will choose to lie down in their bed or crate while working on one of these activities. That's exactly what we want. We're teaching puppies to **choose to relax in their place**, rather than needing constant entertainment or interaction.

This matters because when puppies come into the classroom, we want them to already understand how to:

- settle on a blanket or mat
- focus on a task
- stay regulated even when things are happening around them

Mental enrichment isn't about tiring puppies out - it's about helping them practise calm focus, which is a skill they'll rely on heavily in class.

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## **Socially Prepared: Habituation, Not Interaction**

The final piece is **social preparation**, and this is one of the most commonly misunderstood areas.

If your puppy is only going out once or twice a day for very short periods, with little exposure to the outside world, they're likely to struggle in a class environment. The puppies who settle best are not necessarily the most "social" - they're the ones who have been **well habituated**.

That means they've had lots of exposure to:

- people
- dogs
- environments
- sounds and movement

**without being expected to interact.**

If puppies are taken to busy places and allowed to greet everyone and everything they see, that sets an expectation. When they then come to class and *can't* interact freely, frustration builds quickly, and settling becomes very difficult.

Social preparation looks like:

- taking your puppy out and letting them watch from a distance
- feeding them food while the world goes by
- settling them on a blanket with a chew
- sitting in the car and practising calm observation
- asking for gentle focus on you while distractions exist around them

All of this teaches your puppy that they don't need to engage with everything to feel safe. They can observe, relax, and regulate - and that skill is invaluable in a classroom environment.

## Final Thoughts: What I Want You to Take Away From This

Puppy classes are not the place where puppies *learn* how to settle for the first time. They are a place where puppies **practise settling skills they are already working on at home**.

We cannot train puppies to settle in class if their lives outside of class are dysregulating them.

What your puppy experiences during the rest of their day matters far more than the one hour we spend together. Evening calmness, in particular, doesn't just happen - it's the result of a puppy whose needs have been consistently met throughout the day.

At a basic level, this means your puppy's needs are being met **before they have to ask**. They are on a predictable schedule for sleep, food, toileting, enrichment, connection, and outings. When puppies don't have to worry about when their needs will be met, their nervous system can relax.

You're taking your puppy out several times a day, but those trips are **short, sweet, and intentional**. Every new experience is paired with food. This part is key. We want puppies leaving the house thinking, *this is good*, and coming home thinking, *that was amazing*.

Once your puppy is fully vaccinated, you're aiming for around **20–30 minutes twice a day** in calm, open environments on a long line - not constantly walking on a short lead, which can quickly become frustrating and overstimulating. Your puppy doesn't need to say hello to everyone they see. In fact, that expectation often makes settling much harder later on.

Cafés and restaurants are best avoided for now. They are simply too overstimulating for most puppies. A good rule of thumb is this: a well-matched outing leaves your puppy coming home ready to sleep. If your puppy comes home "high as a kite", unable to settle and doing a lot of biting, it's a strong sign that whatever you just did was too much for their nervous system.

During the day, you're also providing plenty of enrichment - chews, licking, sniffing, problem-solving - not to exhaust your puppy, but to give them **practice regulating themselves**. This is the progression from co-regulation to self-regulation, and it's one of the most important skills your puppy will need for class.

Above all else, you are prioritising that your puppy feels **safe, secure, and connected**. Your relationship and attachment matter. You're not leaving your puppy to "figure it out" alone or pushing them through distress. With things like crate training, your puppy shouldn't be left crying — if they are, it's a sign they've been pushed too far, too fast, and they need more support.

When puppies feel safe, rested, regulated, and supported, settling becomes possible. And when settling is possible, learning can happen - both at home and in class.

Thank you for taking the time to read this – your puppy will benefit hugely from the care and thought you're putting in now.