



New Transitions: Your Puppy's First Days in Puppy Day School

Starting Puppy Day School brings big changes to your puppy's routine! Here's what you may notice at home, as well as how to help. **These changes are normal and should improve within a few days.**

Questions? Email us any time, and be sure to schedule your [Puppy Teacher Conferences](#) if you haven't already done so.

Eating

Our goal at Crossbones is to create healthy eating habits for life. That means:

- Your puppy eats food (meals & treats) that is offered to them **immediately**
- Your puppy finishes **all** food (meals & treats) given to them

Healthy eating habits ensure your puppy is motivated for their training sessions and helps you spot health issues later. If a dog who normally eats well skips a meal, you'll know something is wrong. But if a dog has poor eating habits, it's impossible to know if they're not eating because they are sick or if they're just being picky.

In Puppy Day School, we feed meals out of enrichment toys (like a Kong, West Paw Toppl, or slow feeder bowl). This keeps your puppy busy in their crate, provides mental stimulation, and slows down eating.

Some pups don't eat well at first, and may skip or not finish meals. This is normal. This may be because:

- They're a little nervous about being in a new environment
- They've only eaten from a bowl and not an enrichment toy
- They've been allowed to free-feed at home and haven't learned good eating habits yet
- They've learned that skipping meals prompts you to mix tasty things into their bowl to entice them to eat, so they're holding out for "better" food
- They've been getting more calories than they need and are already full

Most puppies adjust with time. If needed, we'll make their enrichment toy easier. If we see that your puppy is still not eating well by day 3, we'll reach out with a plan.

At dinner, offer the measured amount of food we agreed upon at your evaluation appointment. Leave the bowl down for 5 minutes, then discard whatever is left over. See our [Free Feeding blog post](#) for details.

Don't give extra food at dinner to "make up" for them not finishing their meals during the school day. This reduces motivation to eat and train at school and will affect your puppy's progress here.

Drinking Water

Some puppies drink less at first, while others drink lots more. Both are normal. Reasons may include:

- They don't want to leave the action of playgroup, or the fun scents of the outdoor yard, to drink
- They're so excited and worked up being around other dogs and drink a lot of water as a displacement behavior
- They're too nervous to drink in an unfamiliar environment
- They're just too distracted to drink

Water is always available when puppies are out of their crates: in playgroup, in the potty area, and in the training hall. If we haven't seen a puppy drink water, we'll make an extra effort to bring them to a water bowl and point it out to them. But as the old adage goes, you can lead a puppy to water, but you can't make them drink!

If a puppy drinks so much water that we're concerned they may spit it up, we'll lead them away from the water bowl for a while to interrupt overconsumption.

These issues usually resolve within a puppy's first few days in school.

Fussy Crating

Some puppies are fussy in their crates at first, even if they crate well at home. For these pups, the change of routine is something they need to adjust to. Although they may be used to crating at home, resting quietly around distractions like other dogs and people is a skill they need to build. If your pup crates well at home, this period of fussy behavior is usually short. If not, there is usually a steeper learning curve.

We help by:

- Covering the crate with a towel to reduce visual distractions
- Crating fussy puppies next to quiet puppies who model quiet, relaxed behavior
- Playing music at a low volume and running a fan, creating white noise to help mask sounds coming from the play and training areas

We'll also coach you in [Puppy Teacher Conferences](#) to develop a plan to build your dog's crating skills at home. You can also review the "Crate Training" resource in our [Dog Training Handouts](#) digital folder.

Potty Accidents

At home after school, you should **expect** your puppy's potty habits to be different. If your pup was too distracted to drink at school, they'll be thirsty when they get home and drink more water. If your pup played hard at school, they may have consumed more water than usual. Either way, they'll need to pee more often after school. Take your puppy outside to pee every 45 minutes they are awake; some puppies may need to go even more often.

While your puppy adjusts to their new routine at Puppy Day School, they will likely have accidents during playgroup or even in their crate. While this isn't ideal, it is completely normal. Each puppy's biorhythms are different, and we adjust schedules to help them succeed. Rest assured, it is our top priority to help your puppy learn when and where to "go." If a puppy has an accident, we'll immediately adjust their schedule so that we are getting them out even more often.

Pups get a combination of potty breaks by themselves, as well as with other puppies, to help set them up for success. Our goal is ZERO indoor accidents for every dog in our care.

If you're having trouble with potty training at home, we can coach you through resolving this in your [Puppy Teacher Conferences](#). In the meantime, you can also review the "Potty Training" and "Crate Training" resources in our [Dog Training Handouts](#) digital folder.

Excitement in the Lobby

Arriving at Puppy Day School is really exciting! The first couple of days can be tentative as your puppy learns to leave their favorite person (that's you!), but once the puppies learn that we also have fun, treats, and lots of love, they are often amped up at morning drop off.

Likewise, getting picked up at the end of the day is really exciting! Your puppy has been napping, so their energy meter is full and they're excited to see their favorite person again!

We want your puppy to learn to stay calm and polite, even when excited. This keeps everyone safe. You can help your dog come and go from Crossbones in a more regulated way.

To help:

- Use the Freedom no-pull harness each time. This will reduce the effectiveness of your dog's pulling
- Bring high-value treats to every pick up and drop off. Reward your dog for walking without pulling, and seeing people without jumping up. Dropping the treats on the floor can help calm your puppy, or you can use a squeeze tube of something delicious like peanut butter or cream cheese
- Don't ask or nag your dog to sit. Sitting isn't necessary; excited puppies physically can't sit still when they're wiggling
- During handoff, scatter treats on the floor to help your puppy keep their head down
- At pickup, keep greetings calm. No high-pitched voices and don't call your puppy when we're still working with them. They're already amped up — don't pour gasoline on the fire!
- Attend Attention Please and Polite in Public classes to learn the skills to train through this

Excitement Pee/Submissive Urination

Some puppies may pee a bit when they are greeting people. This is normal for their age, but this behavior can persist if not managed appropriately.

To help:

- Stay calm and low-key. Don't "greet" your dog at pick up... until you get outside. Then you can say hi to them; if they pee, they're rehearsing peeing outside
- Walk your puppy around the mulch potty area for several minutes before bringing them in the lobby. The emptier their bladder, the more likely they will be successful
- Coach others who meet your puppy to ignore them at first. Don't let anyone make a big "fuss"
- During greetings, avoid petting the top of your puppy's head or leaning over them
- Don't reward "belly rubs." If your puppy rolls on to their back, stop petting them. Only pet your puppy when they are standing or sitting on their own four feet; reward confident body language rather than rolling or groveling
- For female puppies: delay spaying until this resolves. Their hormones will strengthen their bladder as they go through puberty. If your dog is already spayed and still exhibits this behavior past 6 months of age, discuss with your veterinarian.

Review the "Submissive and Excitement Urination in Dogs" resource in our [Dog Training Handouts](#) digital folder for more information on this behavior.