

Puppy Owner's Manual

by

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Brief Introduction to the Breed

The Alaskan Malamute is a product of selection in a harsh environment. It is a natural dog, domesticated for tens of thousands of years and is no more related to wolves than are other breeds. It is a hearty and healthy breed which is large and very impressive. They vary in size, but males are 25+ inches and @100lbs, females are slightly smaller as a rule.

The Malahmut Indians, who used these dogs, took better care of their dogs than many of the other tribes. The dogs were depended on for survival and expected to earn their keep and then some. The dogs were required to work hard and make independent decisions on the trail. There was no need for a protection dog, and the Malahmuts did not allow the dogs to be aggressive towards humans. People-aggressive dogs were eliminated. Thus the Malamute is a people-loving dog, with no guard dog tendencies at all. But most bad guys would probably not mess with such an impressive looking beast. It is not likely to bark much, but "woo-woos" greetings and will howl if lonely or if sirens are heard. It can be taught to alert you to strangers if you wish.

The Malamute is a real people-oriented dog, but not always likely to come when called or readily obey. It is an independent, free-thinker and is not likely to stay on your property without a fence. As a natural dog, it is sensitive to dominance hierarchies (pack order) and will fight other dogs if they challenge dominance. You have some control over this, as well-socialized and trained dogs are not as likely to fight. Dominance-related dog aggression is a characteristic of the breed and it is unrealistic to expect an unneutered mature male to get along with other unneutered males. Males and females usually get along very well. A responsible owner avoids situations which may result in a fight (e.g. never let your dog run loose.)

Malamutes are great with children as a rule, although, as with all breeds, some tragedies have happened. Keep in mind the size of this breed; the Malamute could seriously injure a small child accidentally by knocking it down or pawing it. Regardless of the breed, no child should be left

unattended with any dog. Where serious attacks on children have been reported, there is concern that Malamutes are being implicated in incidents involving wolf crosses.

Although they are very large, they make excellent house dogs, usually content to lay quietly by the family. They are capable of incredible destruction (just ask my brother who came home to find his new couch disemboweled!) and should be crated for everyone's health and happiness when left alone during the growing up stage.

Most Malamutes like to be outside and of course the colder the better, but they tolerate heat well, with shade and cool water. They shed twice a year; once from January to June and once from July to December. Seriously folks, these guys have HAIR. Actually, shedding is not bad most of the year, but once a year for most males and twice a year for most females, they "blow coat" This means over a two or three week period they shed out about four shopping bags full of hair. You can brush it out and save your house from being totally fuzzed. Other than this, they require little grooming.

Malamutes are magnificent. Walking a well-trained, beautiful, Malamute down the street can turn heads. They are wonderful companions which can really enrich your life.

Picking the Dog for You

Dogs like people, have different personalities, tell the breeder who is offering the pups to you, what you want and expect from the pup when it is grown. An experienced dog owner who wants a spirited dog they can train for show should pick a different type of personality from the person who says they want a more-laid back family companion. Some pups are by nature active and bossy, others are laid back. Some pups are independent and do what they please, others look to you for direction and are very eager to please. While the home that a pup grows up in is most important, an experienced breeder or dog handler can pick up on some temperament characteristics in a young pup.

Most people want to pick the spunkiest pup in the litter. This is called the "Alpha pup" (meaning first ranking). Alpha pups are usually dominant, independent and bossy, and they resent being told what to do. This is not the right dog for someone who thinks a dog should obey them just because they feed it. An Alpha pup needs consistent training and attention from an experienced person. It is not the right choice for someone who wants an easy pet. Please listen to the breeder and consider what they tell you about the temperament of the pups you are considering. A more laid back personality may be the better choice for you.

Don't overlook older dogs if the breeder has one available and will vouch for its suitability as a pet. Do you really have the time to train a pup? Take a look at the grown dogs and see if one could move into your home and your heart.

Housebreaking

Preventing accidents in the house is the key here. The more times the pup eliminates outdoors and is praised, the quicker it will train; the more times it eliminates in the house, the harder it will be to teach the pup where you want it to go. At this point I prefer mild discipline for accidents and mild praise when the pup eliminates outdoors. If you are consistent, you will have a pup over 14 weeks of age trained in a matter of 3 or 4 days, the younger pups don't have enough physical maturity yet, just like a little baby, so it may take longer. Any pup can be trained to be reliable in the house; if you are having problems, it is because you are lacking in consistency and are confusing the pup.

Paper training is an intermediate step which is not necessary; only paper train if you expect the pup to continue to eliminate on newspaper. Otherwise it confuses pups. As far as they are concerned, what's the difference between a rug floor-covering and a newspaper floor-covering? The pup needs to learn that it is supposed to eliminate outside and will prefer to do so if given the opportunity. Watch your dog in the house and learn to recognize "the look".

Use a confined area or a crate while the pup is being house trained. A pup cannot help but pee when it wakes up and moves about. Pick the pup up from the crate or confined area and carry it outside or it will have to stop and pee on the way to the door. A pup will make every effort not to soil its own area (but your living room is not its own area!). If it does, it has gone too long without a trip outdoors or the pup thinks the crate is big enough for a bedroom and bath. You may have to block off the back of the crate so there is less room.

A young pup will need to go out about once every two hours, although it should be able to make it through the night when its metabolism is slower. When you take the pup out say, "Hurry Up" repeatedly and the dog will associate that word with elimination. This is handy when traveling and "Hurry Up" is less embarrassing than other phrases one could use.

Because what goes in must come out, you should feed a premium quality puppy food. These foods are high in digestibility and result in smaller, firmer stools. They are quite expensive, but the pup needs a smaller quantity and in the long run they don't cost much more than the other brands. Eagle, Iams, California Natural are some of the choices available here. Follow the breeder's instructions, as good nutrition is critical to the healthy development of your pup.

Feed the amount specified three times a day on a regular schedule for a pup under six months of age. Cut back to two times a day when the pup is over six months. Twice a day feeding is recommended for the adult dog to avoid the serious problem of bloat. Do not let the pup free feed (have food available all the time) as you want to get it on an elimination schedule. Also free feeding will result in an overweight dog.

If the pup does have an accident, act upset and take it outside. Do not hit the pup, do not push the pup's nose in the mess; this is cruel and does not teach the dog anything. Do not let the pup watch you clean up. Some pups interpret this as submissive behavior on the owner's part and may use pooping as a control device. Others may mimic and start eating stool (YUCK!).

By the time a pup is about 5 months old it should be able to hold urine for six hours or so, although every 4 hours is kinder.

Discipline

A pup is not a child and cannot be disciplined in the same way. The pup wants and needs for you to set limits and be the leader. Be kind and loving, but let the pup know that you are the boss. When you say NO say it firmly and let there be no mistake that physical discipline will follow if the pup doesn't quit. I have found an EEHH or OWWWT sound to be more effective--dogs just respond to it naturally, whereas the NO has to be learned.

Pups do not understand pleading and begging that they obey. Discipline has to be direct and to the point. You may have to explain this to the kids or they may think you are not being fair to the pup. Don't ever kick or hit the pup and don't use a rolled up newspaper. The pup understands the kind of discipline it got from its dam (mother). Most corrections can be done with voice and posture. But if you must make a physical correction, grasp the pup firmly by the nape (skin only) of the neck and give it a quick gentle shake while you say NO. It might squeal but it will not be hurt. One good correction will save you fifty ineffective ones. If your correction does not affect the behavior then it is by definition an ineffective correction. Call me for advice if you feel that you are "correcting" but nothing is happening. With an effective correction, the pup may look upset and have its confidence shaken. That's ok, you can make up awhile later. These dogs usually do not have soft temperaments. In time you will not need to grab the pup, the NO or EEHH will do. Remember, most dams are very permissive with pups being silly and playing, but make them tow the line on important things--you should too.

You need to establish yourself as leader to the dog. This can be done in subtle and non-physical ways. When around your dog you are KING. If you need to walk by and your dog is in the way, have him move for you. You are King so you go through doors first. Since you are King, your dog must wait for permission to get out of cars, sit before you condescend to give him food or a pat, etc. and of course must do as you say on your first command after he has been taught what the command means. Kings don't put up with their stuff being taken and their food being stolen, and Kings have a posture and bearing which commands respect. Believe me, all of these things are very important messages to your dog. REMEMBER, MALAMUTES WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOU IF YOU LET THEM. Your dog will love and respect you more if you are consistent, firm, and fair.

If you find it necessary to give a lot of physical corrections you are either offering too many opportunities for the pup to be "bad", your actions are inappropriate and not understood, or you have a pushy pup who doesn't want to listen. In any case, you should contact your breeder or seek out a trainer who can give you some advice. Continued yelling and scolding is not only ineffective, but tends to depress and confuse the pup. Believe me, a quick physical correction is both kinder and more effective. Dogs don't mind corrections if they understand what it is they did wrong. Remember, it is in the nature of the species to try to please the leader (that's you folks!) Try to structure things in the beginning so that the pup has few opportunities to do wrong and many to do well and be praised. Dogs always take the easy way out, make being good the easy way.

Know your dog, some are soft and crumble with a stern look--others are tough and remain confident even when given a firm correction. Let the discipline fit the dog. And remember that you want a dog you can live with and love. Let this goal guide your actions.

Dominance

Pups are naturally pushy and will get away with anything they can. Some pups are by nature active and bossy others are laid back. Some pups are independent and do what they please, others look to you for direction and are very eager to please. Dogs can be classified according to their reactions to threat. Dogs with passive defense reactions leave or go still when threatened, dogs with active defense reactions fight back. You need to consider if your pup is very active or very passive (or falls in between) and treat the pup accordingly. Remember that the way a pup is brought up will make a difference too. For example, rough play with children can hype up even the most relaxed of pups. The following are dominance games; never encourage these behaviors and I suggest you correct a pup for these behaviors.

* Biting your hands--even in "play".

VERY IMPORTANT:

Whether pug or pit bull, no dog should ever be allowed to learn the power of its jaws--all biting even in play has to be strictly forbidden. No pant's leg tug-o-war, no sleeve or hand chewing allowed. This is the most important rule for the dog. If you slap or hit the pup when he does this it will either make him hand shy or more aggressive. The correct response is to create a negative situation which is removed when the dog releases your hand. I push my fingers way down the pups throat until he "gaks" them out and decides that that wasn't as much fun as he thought it would be. If you have long nails, pointing the nails up so that they hit the roof of the dogs mouth is effective too.

* Mounting and humping--this is not really sexual in a young pup--it is dominance and should be discouraged. If your young pup does this (both males and females do this) contact your breeder for advice on how to eliminate the behavior.

* Tug-o-war is more than just a game to a pup. This is how dominance is established in the pack and winning means the pup is boss. I strongly suggest you not let the kids play tug-o-war with the dog. You can allow tug-o-war if the pup is taught to release on command and will do so for anyone who plays the game.

* Barking at you to get food or something else it wants--you are supposed to tell the pup what to do, not the other way around. If your pup nudges you for pets or barks demands that you get treats, please resist the urge to think it's cute and respond. Remember, Kings don't get told what to do.---One exception, Kings don't like poop on the floor, so if your dog pesters you to go out give in, unless he is simply taking advantage of you.

* Stealing food, or taking things and running--A well socialized pup would never do this in a pack. A pup who does this thinks it is the boss. Correct the pup if it does this!

Remember, the dog is a pack animal and looks to you to be "alpha-wolf" if you don't act the role the pup will. Your dog will be a happier dog and you will be a happier owner if you are boss. You can be kind and loving but still be boss.

*grabbing and chase games-these tend to produce a hyper pup that does not mind. If you are in control and can call off the grab or wrestle game this may be acceptable. Getting on the floor and encouraging the dog to mount and pretend maul you is not something which should be done with dogs.

* Malamutes are not guards, but just in case some occurs, any protective behavior towards the children should be strongly discouraged. The pup needs to understand that all kids are your responsibility not the pup's and it cannot defend or discipline (read growl or snap at) any child. Do you want to trust your dog with high level decision making? I don't. How is a dog supposed to determine a real threat versus a rough game of "Masters of the Universe". Most problems occur when a family dog is allowed to assume a dominate position in the family and misinterprets its role as protector. Bite injuries result when dogs think a child is being threatened and react by attacking another child that they think is hurting "their kid". If you want protection buy a security system--the dog however cannot be dominant in the household if it is to be reliable as a family pet.

Problems

* The pup may get loose stools from excitement or change of water or food. Loose stools are ok for a day or so, but if there is watery, bloody or mucous stool a trip to the vet is required. For loose stools you should restrict water (but give enough so that you do not dehydrate the pup), and food for several hours

then feed boiled rice. Gradually mix food in with the rice. Take the dog to the vet if you do not see improvement in a day. If there is explosive or purulent stool, go to the vet.

* If your dog is ever throwing up and not passing stool, go to the vet. Especially if you know he has consumed something he shouldn't have, as this may indicate an intestinal blockage. (Don't worry this doesn't happen much. My dogs have had whole socks move through!)

* No dog should be teased; teasing can make a dog with a great temperament mean. Children (or adults for that matter) should not be allowed to tease. If you are not sure what constitutes teasing, use this criteria: Would you like someone to do it to you? Small children may not understand you when you say, "Doggie might bite you if you do that." in fact some of the recent research on children's cognitive and language development suggests that this type of phrasing strengthens the child's urge to do it. As a mom I have found it much more effective to teach children how to behave around dogs and to supervise their interaction.

* All pups chew. Do not give the pup a bunch of toys or it will think that everything can be chewed. Stick to two or three toys and make it clear that is all the pup may chew. If the pup grabs something else, correct it, and then give the pup a toy that it can chew. You will need to have the dog confined in the house when you are not there to supervise or your property will be destroyed or your dog possibly injured. Don't get into the "come home and beat the dog for chewing up the _____" routine. Your dog will be so stressed about your homecomings that it will chew more to release tension. Chewing is one of the ways dogs get rid of tension, the more they are punished the more they will have the need to chew. Confinement in a crate for reasonable periods of time is kinder than continually punishing a dog or getting rid of it because of its behavior. I strongly recommend the dog be crated when alone in the house. Properly done this is not cruel. The Malamute is a big dog and it has the ability to do unbelievable damage to your home should it go on a binge of destruction.

* Eating cat poop is one of the great joys of a dog's life. Some people freak out, others consider it a handy way to keep the litter box clean. Covering the litter box or putting it where the cat can get to it but the dog can't is the only solution.

* A puppy needs the chance to play and be silly and I'm sure the pup will love playing with the kids. I would urge you to avoid letting a pup get hyped a lot as I think you will regret it later. I'm assuming that you want a laid-back-no-trouble sort of companion. Constant chase games and grabbing (as well as the dread tug-o-war) tend to create a hyper pup. Children need to be supervised some when playing with any dog. Small children need constant supervision and should not be left unattended with any dog. Children should not be allowed to walk on lead a dog that they cannot control in an emergency.

* Dogs that don't come when they are called is the number one complaint of dog owners. You won't have this problem if you follow the advice I'll give you. Whenever the dog is heading towards you praise the dog and say "come". Give the pup a treat when it comes to you for the first couple of weeks. Have one word you use only when the dog has to come, "Here", "Front" or something, don't let the kids use this word and reserve it for times yourself when the pup must come. NEVER CALL THE DOG TO YOU AND PUNISH IT. Even if you have chased it for 20 min and are furious--if it comes, it is praised--NO MATTER

WHAT. When the dog is older, obedience class is advised to teach the dog that it has a responsibility to come when called.

* If your pup does not know how to walk on a lead. Carry the pup away from the house, put it down and praise and urge it to follow you back to the house--try not to drag.

* Please do not let your pup get fat. Extra weight stresses developing joints. Hip dysplasia can result from both genetic and environmental factors. A fat dog is at greater risk. You should always be able to feel your dog's ribs and hip bones.

* Do not give the pup rawhide as it can cause an intestinal blockage. Pig's ears and cow hoofs are OK. Nyla and Gumma Bone are best. The only natural bones you can give the dog are the shank portion of beef femur with the marrow removed. If you give the head of the femur you need to take the bone away after a short time. If you let the dog eat the head of the shank bone, or let the dog have the marrow, the high fat content will make the dog seriously ill. It cost me \$350. in vet bills to find this out!

* Do not let your pup be around other dogs or out in areas frequented by other dogs/pups until the shot series is complete. Immunity is not assured after the first or even second shot is given.

* Recent flooding has created a bacterial and protozoan jungle out there! Do not let your pup drink from creeks, ponds, or puddles.

* Many pups get bumps on the upper muzzle when they cut teeth. These are very noticeable and come up fast. Unless there is sign of infection (obvious pain or a bad smell) this is not a cause for concern.

* Ears go up and down as the pup matures. I have never known of a dog from these bloodlines where the ears did not come up. I had one pup whose ears did not stand until one year. He was a very big, slow maturing dog, who had a magnificent head when mature. Don't sweat it. The pups ears were up at 4 weeks and flopped again at about 7 weeks.

* These dogs are from very slow maturing lines; they do not mature either physically or mentally until about three. Pups may seem goofy or high strung, but with proper training mature into relaxed and stable adults. Believe it or not you will miss all the puppy craziness when they are adults.

* Many of my dogs go through the "puppy uglies". Most pet owners don't notice, but those of you with show dogs please have faith that the promise that was there at eight weeks will be back when the dog has matured. In the meantime you may experience a rear that grows before the front and a body that grows before the head. Also, the head you see at one is not the one that the dog will have at three. (I assume you know what I mean!) Pet owners who will be neutering their dogs should let their vet know that the breeder said that the dogs were from remarkably slow maturing lines.

* If you have any questions or concerns please call me. I would rather nip a problem in the bud than have it get out of hand. Even if the question seems silly, I'm sure that someone (possibly me!) has asked it before.

Training your Dog

Training is a lifelong process, not a discrete act such as taking the dog to class. You should have a clear idea of what you want your pup to be like and every thing you do should have this in mind. Remember, inside the little fuzzball you just brought home lurks a 100lb dog. Don't encourage the puppy to do things you will punish it for later. On the other hand, it is a baby and cannot be expected to behave in ways it has not been taught to behave. Teach him gently and give him a chance to be silly and have fun.

Formal training for your pup is an absolute must. Start with a puppy class, but check with me regarding what to look for; some trainers can ruin a good dog. Don't wait until your dog is six months old and strong as an ox. Malamutes love to pull, establish control while you still outweigh the beast!

Your pup will go through a period of adolescence where his/her brain may appear to take a vacation. At about 18 months take your dog through obedience class again and make it clear that he's a big kid now and it's time to tow the line.

Some dog trainers do not understand Malamutes. Malamutes are very smart, but put it to use in ways other than learning the commands you wish to teach! Remember, they are independent working dogs. Malamutes are very trainable if you use the right approach. Because of their size and temperament, they are sometimes difficult to force-train. It helps if you can make what you want them to do appear to be in their best interest. They work well for treats and praise but make sure that once they learn a command you make them follow through when you give it.

Malamutes will do as little as possible and will con you into thinking they are stupid, just to get out of work. Call me if you need help and encouragement. I had the number one ranked advanced obedience Mal in the United States in 1989. Beware of the dread "Malamute Prejudice"--some trainers will tell Malamute owners that Malamute's don't do well in obedience. This is not true and it undermines the confidence of the Malamute owner. Others assume that Malamutes will eat other dogs and treat you like a dangerous subversive--"Watch the Malamute"--"Put the Malamute on the end!"--Try not to let it get you down.

If you don't give a pup some direction, their smarts will turn to mischief. Training with a young pup needs to be non-force. Treats and praise should be used to make the training fun. Classes which teach you how to train your dog are available everywhere but some are better than others. Ask your breeder for references.

Dogs are like kids in that the more you put into them the more you can enjoy them.

Welcome to the wonderful world of the Malamute!