

Tips and Suggestions from a fellow Chihuahua lover

NOTE: ALWAYS seek the advice from your veterinarian FIRST should you have any cause for alarm or concern! I am not an authority on this breed, but I do consider myself well versed and my love for the Chihuahua breed immeasurable. I offer you these tips and suggestions based upon my experiences in rehabilitating them and having the gift of being a guardian of a few!

- This breed (and their owners) frequently gets a touch of LDS ("little dog syndrome"). Chihuahuas will always look like puppies their entire life – and accordingly, owners allow their Chihuahuas to get away with things with an "Awww... Isn't that just TOO cute~!" validation of bad behavior. The end result is usually a snarfy, yappy Chihuahua or Chihuahua mix that is not a good canine citizen and difficult to handle down the road.
- I believe in positive reinforcement – ignoring the bad behaviors and rewarding the good ones.... **BUT...** Keep a spray bottle filled with water handy (or several around the house within reach) when training out any unwanted behavior. A quick squirt of water on the back end will redirect their attention and focus when issuing the new command (i.e. "QUIET") --- it is an invaluable tool for things such as barking, going potty inside the house (but ONLY when you catch them in the act), chewing, aggression, etc.
- Nothing in life is free, so I hand out treats only once they've done something for me – a 'sit' on command, 'back' when I've asked them to do so, etc. They'll respect you in the long run if you use this technique.
- Chihuahuas don't have a CLUE as to just how small they are, so they'll go up to any dog regardless of their size. To most other big dogs, Chihuahuas appear as prey, and without proper supervision, can be grabbed by bigger dogs, inflicting serious and sometimes terminal damage to their spinal columns. If **BOTH** dogs do not have their ears back, heads down as they approach and tails wagging, be on the alert immediately and be prepared to get your Chi out of harm's way instantly. Chihuahuas frequently go chest-and head-up into any canine meeting and while you don't want them to be overly submissive, there is a middle ground that will make encounters with other dogs less hazardous to their health (I use the command 'easy' in a slow low tone to slow down any behavior like this).
- Along with the size issue, Chihuahuas can easily be hurt by attempting too large of a jump or by under estimating their climbing/jumping abilities. Invest in doggie steps if they're going to sleep with you or ramps with no-slide tracks work great.
- Chihuahuas tend to be 'clannish' in nature, preferring other dogs of their own breed versus other dog breeds (regardless of the sex). They also tend to pick 'their' human person in a family when there is more than one, and while they will tolerate others, once you've crawled into a Chihuahua's heart, you are there forever. If you weren't picked by the Chi, you can't take it personally – in this regard, they are very much like the feline species. But don't allow them to become aggressive to other members in your family. If this occurs, then the 'unpicked' person is the one who should immediately take over the feeding and giving of treats until the aggression subsides (and don't falter with this no matter how sad they look or how bad you feel!).
- Chihuahuas are notoriously difficult to house train. Keeping a spray bottle of "Nature's Miracle" handy for any accident is almost a must, but for big clean-up jobs, a mixture of 1:3 parts vinegar and water works best. Dogs urinate based upon triggers – if they've

urinated somewhere and you haven't denaturalized the smell, they'll assume next time it is OK to go there again. There are those that prefer to potty train their Chihuahuas with pitty pads and I have friends who have 'litter-trained' their Chihuahuas in preparation for the rainy seasons around here – either way works well, but not if you have scatter rugs around the house, for they'll not know the difference.

- If you'd prefer your Chihuahua to go only one or two places in the backyard, put up a cat scratching post where you'd prefer for them to urinate. There are various products on the market you can sprinkle on the cat post that will encourage a Chi to ONLY go there. Might sound like a silly trick but it will save brown spots on your lawn!
- Chihuahuas tend to have three main hereditary health issues you need to be aware of:
 - Luxating patellas (AKA "popping" kneecaps)
 - Hypo- or hyperglycemia (corrected by smaller meals several times a day, but a side effect of this is usually weight maintenance issues - overweight Chihuahuas have difficulty with their joints – especially in their knees if allowed to get overweight when young)
 - Collapsing tracheas (avoided by using a slip collar for dog obedience training and a halter when on lead) – pulling on the collar when walking can cause the trachea to collapse and in extreme cases, the dog will pass out and fall over. We ALWAYS recommend harnesses when walking a Chihuahua and a collar with their ID tag for around the house when not on lead.
- If you have adopted one of my fosters with TLC, they will be crate and/or Xpen trained. Even if you don't believe in either of these, continue to refresh this skill for we live in wildfire country and most evacuation shelters will not allow you to bring your pet with you unless they can deal with being in a kennel or crate. It is a beneficial skill for trips to the vet's office as well! Chihuahuas never lost that 'den' preference when sleeping, so an open crate or kennel around the house will usually become their favorite napping spot.
- Because of their slight weight, Chihuahuas do not have the weight to wear down their nails as most other dog breeds do. Be prepared to either learn now to clip your Chihuahua's nails or make monthly trips to your groomer's to have this done. If you have adopted a puppy from TLC, they have been raised to allow considerable amount of interaction between a human's hands and their paws in preparation for the vast amount of nail clipping that will go on in their lives. Take my advice and when sitting and cuddling your Chi puppy, continue to rub their paws and reinforce the idea that it is OK for a human to do so much with their paws and eventually, clipping their nails.
- Chihuahuas are the smallest dog breed in the world, but their blood system and energy levels exceed their small sizes most of the time. Accordingly, they tend to get colder quicker (especially if they have the silkier coats). Sweaters or T-shirts are good ideas once fall begins and throughout the winter. Once it is inserted through the head, use the command 'give me your paw', then reach through the OUTSIDE of the arm hole, hold the dog's paw and pull it through the arm opening; repeat for the other side. You will quickly find that most Chihuahuas appreciate the extra warmth regardless of their gender.
- Speaking of gender, Chihuahuas (like many other breeds) do not 'mark' based upon their sex, but rather dominance and position in the pack. If you have two dogs, one will always be the alpha and marking is how they establish this. If you don't have another dog and your Chihuahua is marking, it is because he/she considers themselves the alpha and not you. Again, the squirt bottle filled with water is a great deterrent to this kind of behavior.

- Chihuahuas tend to be sun bathers by nature. Bandits (black) tend to overheat easily, and brown bandits need to avoid long periods of sunbathing for health issues. White Chihuahuas can become an off-white 'dingy' cream if allowed to indulge in this pleasure too much as well.
- In rescue of Chihuahuas, the number one health issue we see is a lack of proper attention to their teeth during their life. Bad dentition issues leads to heart problems in the Chihuahua and if you brush your Chi's teeth once a week, provide wet AND dry food regularly, you will increase their life span and improve their health overall.
- Small Chihuahuas are picked up off the streets (or stolen) in LA and surrounding areas to be used as bait dogs for those who participate in dog fighting on a regular basis because of their small size and demeanor when approached by bigger dogs. ALWAYS make sure your Chihuahua has on an ID tag in the event they escape, and the microchip registration information is up to date in the event you move, change phone numbers, etc. It is your **BEST** chance at getting back your much loved pooch.

I've always said and felt that this breed might have a VERY small heart in size but it is as big as Montana when they love you. If you EVER have any questions, please feel free to contact me!

~ ~ ~ **Linda Nelson**

Info, courtesy of TLC
www.tinylovingcanines.org