

About our Program

We believe that puppies need the safety and nurturing of a puppies-only environment so that they can build confidence and learn pro-social behavior and manners. At Dances With Dogs, pups learn appropriate behavior through supervised social interaction with a pack of similar age/weight pups in our nursery school class on Wednesdays. Pups are well exercised and get to play in a state-of-the-art playground designed just for them. There are tunnels, ramps, boulders and stairs for climbing on and hiding behind. There is a tree hang-out for lounging. A huge sandbox takes up one corner of the playground, with ample space and depth for digging and hiding bones! In warm months, there's even a wading pool for water fun! Just a ½ mile from Mill Creek in South Portland, the ½ acre property is fully fenced and includes additional interior fencing to separate areas of the yard and provide further security.

We also have an indoor classroom where pups can romp and play and run, as well as rest and nap at various times of the day and especially in inclement weather. For parents, we have a resource room full of free training articles, books and videos to borrow and business cards from a variety of small businesses serving the greater Portland dog community.

Your pup will be supervised at all times while in our care and manners will be taught and then practiced daily. A detailed progress report is posted to the DWD website at the end of every school day. The report includes info about the pups' development and social skills as well as lots of stories about what goes on in our pack each day! Reports are located under "News and Information" on our site.

As part of the Dances with Dogs family, you will be supported in all aspects of raising your pup to be a healthy and respectful member of your family. We encourage owners to sign up for a basic obedience course with a local trainer as soon as possible after acquiring their pup! This way, you'll learn how to encourage positive behavior and discourage unwanted behavior.

Hours, Rates, Program Limits for Puppies

Wednesday is Puppy Nursery School Day. School hours for puppies are 7 a.m. until 5 p.m. Your pup should enter our program as soon after you bring him/her home as possible after first vet visit and first shots (including Kennel Cough vaccine - please ASK your vet for this one). We require that all puppies be spayed or neutered at first opportunity. Any sexually intact puppy who is displaying sexual behavior that imposes on other pups' play/freedom will need to be removed from the program. In addition to standard immunizations (at least one set of shots), all pups must have the Bordatella (Kennel Cough) vaccine before starting school.

Small breed puppies may stay in nursery school for much longer than large breed puppies. Large breed pups will weigh-out of our program somewhere between 25-35 pounds for safety reasons. For this reason, it is essential that our large breed pups begin school ASAP. We want them to enjoy as many weeks in our program as possible! For qualifying small breed pups, we offer "next step" graduate classes when they outgrow nursery school.

There is a \$30 deposit required at the time of a new pup's first class. This covers the cost of two missed days of school. Absences are charged at \$15/class. This holds your pup's spot in class while he/she is absent. If your pup misses no days during his/her time in our program, the \$30 deposit will serve as tuition.

for their final puppy class. All pups need to arrive at school *no later than 9 a.m.* In the afternoon, please pick up your pup between 3 and 5 p.m.

A commitment of at least four classes is required for entry into our program. Admission is rolling - i.e. we take new pups almost every week. Graduations also occur regularly for our large breed pups when they outweigh our program. The class is capped at 15 pups. There is often a waiting list, so please email for availability of your desired start-date.

Payment by check is as follows:

Single class: \$35.00

Two in advance: \$68.00

Four in advance: \$132.00

Eight in advance: \$256.00

Credit cards are not accepted. We also have a cash rate. Please inquire via email.

School Routine

Mornings are the busiest time here at DWD because the pups have lots of energy those first couple of hours of our day! Outdoor play involves lots of running, chasing, hiding and romping. If the weather is nice, we're outside for long stretches. If it's cold or wet, we're in and out as necessary. The pack never spends more than 20 minutes inside without a full emptying of the school so that everyone can practice "potty outside." Inside, we have select "indoor play" toys, such as Nylabones, tug toys and other gnawing-type toys, as these require close supervision. Soft, comfy dog beds are brought out in the afternoon for napping. Outside, we have lots of balls and rubber toys to play with. Fresh water is available all day inside and out and our water bowl is cleaned several times each day to keep things as sanitary as possible!

The afternoon hours are the mellow ones for the pack, and you'll often find everyone napping at the end of the day. We ask that all humans practice the Golden Rule when you are at DWD: No look, no talk, no touch! That means that YOU are helping to train the puppies by not exciting them or giving them attention for behaviors that we don't want to see more of...such as barking, paws on gates, jumping up, etc. If YOU stay calm and quiet, the pups will, too! The outer door to the school is locked from 9:15 a.m. until 3 p.m. for safety purposes. Folks needing to pick up their pup early are welcomed to call the school phone and the door will be unlocked for you.

During the school day, the pups are fed a grain-free, very mild formula dog kibble as well as dried chicken strips made by Dogswell. These are highly nutritious foods and most pups, even those with food sensitivities, do really well on them. I do not serve "treats" as these tend to contain chemicals, flavorings and calories that do not enhance the health of growing pups. The pups are fed a "snack" every 2 hours while at school. I call it a "treat scramble" as the kibble is tossed in handfuls onto the stone patio (outside) or floor of the school room (inside) and the pups scramble to munch their share of kibble. Serving snacks in this way teaches the pups to respect each other's space and work cooperatively as a pack. Food aggression, if it occurs, is worked through with the intent that each pup will learn to stay calm and share cooperatively. No snacks or kibble are given after 3 p.m. so that the pups are ready for a good dinner in the evening at home.

Visiting

Seeing so many adorable puppies in one place at one time is enticing and exciting for humans, but please understand that this is a school environment for the puppies and my focus needs to be on supervising THEM when you are here. Customers are expected to help with this training by following a few simple rules while here. Please make your entrances and exits quiet and uneventful so that the pups remain non-reactive. Your children are your responsibility and they may NOT interact with the puppy students or disturb their play while visiting. Please observe the NO look, NO talk, NO touch rule (and explain to your children ahead of time) while you are here, giving no attention to the puppies for behavior we do NOT want to reinforce....such as barking, whining or putting paws up on gates, fencing or walls. Some puppies will have separation anxiety and are working through fears and insecurities and your attention will not help with their issues.

Please save your training questions and other topics of discussion for email, as I need to pay close attention to the pups during those busy times of day at drop-off and pick-up times.

Progress Reports / Photos / Videos

A progress report is posted to the DWD website every school day by 1 p.m. You can find this report by clicking on "News and Information" from the DWD homepage. Then, click Puppy Reports along the left side of the page. Next, a list of reports in date order should appear on the center of the page, with the current day's report being first.

I am an avid photographer and take photos of the pups every class. Your pup's photo will be on the DWD homepage and the Tiny Tots album on the DWD site on his/her first day of school. Photo albums are loaded onto Facebook weekly for the Puppy Class owners to enjoy. Please "friend" Julie Bernier on Facebook to have access to these awesome treats! I also have a group for Dances With Dogs on Facebook and will add you to our group once you friend me on Facebook. Please DO NOT download photos from Facebook, as these are my property. You may opt to purchase a CD containing ALL of your pup's photos at the end of their nursery school experience for \$100.00. CDs usually contain up to 1000 photos including solo shots as well as group/action shots! If you are NOT on FB, please email me and I'll be happy to send you a link to the albums so you can see them.

Videos of the puppy class are occasionally loaded onto YouTube for your viewing pleasure. Links to videos are posted on FB and on the DWD homepage.

I look forward to having your pup become a pack member in our program! Feel free to e-mail danceswithdogs@maine.rr.com with any questions!