



Adolescent Dogs

WHAT COMES NEXT

As your puppy approaches the age of five months, they will become less interested in you and more interested in the environment. This is a natural event. Your puppy may seem to act as if they have never learned many of the behaviors you have worked so hard to teach them. This also is to be expected. When this happens you must put the floor cord back on your puppy and rehearse the behaviors you want them to exhibit.

A dog enters adolescence at about the age of 5 months, and doesn't leave it until 2 and a half or 3, depending on the individual dog. The most challenging age is usually between 8 and 18 months (which is when most dogs are surrendered to shelters). Some dogs pass through this phase with little trouble, but most drive their owners crazy! During this phase, it can be hard for owners to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Many small behavior problems can become large ones, and large ones can get much worse. Dogs learn to repeat behaviors that are successful - including bullying, fearful snapping, escaping, and mouthing, to name a few - until they become perfect!

Exercise for your adolescent dog also remains vitally important. Most inappropriate puppy behavior stems from a lack of enough exercise. Remember your puppy has the need to expend energy and solve problems on a daily basis. You want to be involved and help your puppy find ways to do both.

For the Prevention of problems with the adolescent dog it will be worthwhile to know that:

Major behavioral changes will take place when puppies begin to experience the hormonal changes that result in puberty. For example, play behaviors are often replaced with courtship behaviors.

- "Familiarity" will play an important role in a dog's response to the environment. Adolescent may go through a period in which they act apprehensive and lack confidence around familiar people, dogs and objects.

- Just because a puppy was very playful with its peers doesn't mean it will continue to view other dogs as good facilitators throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

- As a dog is reaching puberty, exposure to contact with people and dogs must be closely scrutinized and managed for the rest of the dog's life. Dogs "sociality" must not be taken for granted because dogs respond out of facilitation, not 'social' needs.

During the adolescent period you can reread your manual and again rehearse the games you have learned. Make the games more challenging for your puppy by changing location, increasing duration, and/or adding distractions. Make sure proofing the games is fun by rewarding your puppy with reinforcement that your puppy enjoys, such as very motivating food or toys.

You can also seek further structured training formulated to teach your puppy behaviors. Such as joining a dog club, continuing obedience training classes, or learning a dog sport in order to participate in structured training. Look for training centers or teachers that offer teaching methods based on reinforcement training rather than methods that use force or punishment to make your puppy do something. You have spent time teaching your puppy to make correct decisions. You will want to build on that as they mature.

Your dog's adolescent phase will pass as they mature. If you continue to rehearse calm behavior, even though your puppy may test your patience, your dog will return to the cooperative state that you experienced when they were younger.

5 month to 1 year critical stage of dogs

Most puppies will go through a very trying stage when they turn 5 months of age. We refer to this as the TEENAGE PHASE. You will probably notice your puppy doing some very odd things or exhibiting behaviors that have not been seen for a month or more. This is the time a lot of puppies get kicked out of the house to become outdoor only dogs or worse yet, wind up in the pound. This stage will last up to a year, depending on the individual dog. If the puppy is handled properly, they will come through it with no ill effects. If you are not aware that the puppy is in this stage, you can cause long term damage to your pup's personality.

This is what your puppy will be experiencing during this phase:

1) The final major fear impression period with disassociation of fear causing stimuli.

Here is an example. You are walking your puppy down a quiet street and they are playfully chasing a leaf blowing across the ground. A car comes down the road and backfires, scaring your puppy. Your puppy's attention was on the leaf so they are now, and forever will be, afraid of things moving along the ground! It is critical that you do not expose your puppy to potentially scary situations during this time.

2) The final teething period.

Your puppy will not be losing or gaining teeth, but their teeth are setting firmly into the jaw bone causing discomfort. Your puppy will chew anything it gets its mouth on. You will need to provide plenty of safe chew toys for them. A Kong stuffed with a mixture of moistened dry dog food and a teaspoon of peanut butter or grated cheese or hot-dogs, and then frozen over night will keep your puppy busy chewing and the cold will help soothe their mouth.

3) Loss of memory and learning ability.

Your puppy's brain actually seems to shut down in this stage. Most puppies forget they are housebroken, that they know the command "sit", what their name is, etc. You will probably notice this early on because it seems that your puppy is not listening or is just plain ignoring you. Not so... Everything your puppy has learned to date has been stored in their conscious mind. That is why we have to practice with many repetitions when teaching our puppies. At this age their brain seems to shut down as information switches to the sub conscious. Most dogs will obey better than they ever did when they come out of this stage if they have had training prior to this age. This is similar to downloading a program on your computer - you have to shut down all other programs and the computer is unable to continue until the download is finished.

When you notice strange things happening with your puppy, don't get angry or frustrated. Treat your puppy as if it were 8 weeks old. Go back to showing them what to do when given commands. Watch them closely so potty mistakes do not occur and keep things you don't want chewed out of their reach. If your puppy does something wrong during this phase, don't scold or punish them in any way. Instead, scold yourself for not watching the puppy closely enough to avoid mistakes.

Do not introduce your puppy to potentially scary situations during this time and above all else, have patience, stay calm and help your puppy through this phase.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THIS:

WHATEVER HURTS OR SCARES YOUR PUPPY IN THIS STAGE WILL AFFECT THEM FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIFE!!!

Negative experiences in this phase cannot be reversed!

Be gentle, kind, patient, and forgiving.