

Developmental Stages of Puppies & Dogs

A well-socialized mother dog is generally more likely to have well socialized puppies. Puppies separated from their littermates and mother too early often don't develop appropriate "social skills", such as learning how to send and receive other dog signals, what an inhibited bite means, how to play appropriately and the limits of each behaviour. Appropriate play is important to help puppies increase their physical coordination, social skills and learning skills. Interacting with their mother and littermates helps them learn how to be a dog and are also a vital way to explore ranking.

Skills not acquired during the first eight weeks may be lost forever. The following stages are important and fairly consistent; a dog's mind remains receptive to new experiences and lessons well beyond puppy hood. Most dogs are still puppies, in mind and body, through the first two years.

Socializing is critical to development. Puppies have developing immune systems, so it is important to avoid exposure to off-leash dog parks and sick dogs until vaccination is complete (typically at about 4 months of age). Puppy classes and exposure to healthy vaccinated dogs is encouraged.

General guideline for the stages of development:

3–8 weeks = Socialization Period

- ◆ The brain reaches the final stage of development at 5-8 weeks.
- ◆ Little or no sense of fear and is quick to approach anything & anybody.
- ◆ Awareness of difference between human and canines is evident.
- ◆ Weaning begins at 5-7 weeks.



What you can do during this stage:

- Introduce them to as many different people, situations and things as possible. Make the sessions short – 5 minutes.
- Introduce him/her to other animals. Supervise carefully! An unfortunate incident could scar him/her for life.
- Allow the puppy to investigate.
- Provide many stimulating toys and things to do.
- Hold, cuddle, groom and manipulate puppy during handling sessions.

8-12 weeks = Imprinting Stage

- ◆ At eight weeks, your puppy experiences a fear period. He/she may become hesitant about new objects and situations. He/she may become cautious and suspicious. If nothing traumatic occurs the puppy will bounce back to his/her normal self at 9 weeks.
- ◆ He/she is learning at a very fast pace; his/her character traits and personality will develop so rapidly and what he/she learns will become permanently fixed.
- ◆ His/her interaction with other animals and people will influence him for the duration of his life.
- ◆ You will have the ability to achieve a strong bond.
- ◆ He/she will start learning by associations and is capable of learning 'how to learn'.

What you can do during this stage:

- Protect him/her from things that could have a lasting effect on him during this time.
- Enroll him/her in puppy school.
- Apply mild restrictions to help him/her develop proper behaviours; ie. No chewing on slippers, biting, jumping or barking.
- Take him/her to new safe places.



- Introduce him/her to the car.
- Start introducing games (hide & seek, retrieve and follow me).
- Establish that you are a good and fair leader.
- Set up appropriate play sessions with other puppies, dogs and people.
- Continue to provide stimulating and fun toys.

3-6months = Ranking & Pre-Adolescence

- ◆ Puppy is fully developed and needing lots of experience.
- ◆ Teething and associated chewing.
- ◆ Beginning to see and use ranking (dominant & submissive) within the pack, including humans.
- ◆ Four months, another fear stage – flight response developing may flee from real or perceived threats.

What you can do during this stage:

- **BE CONSISTENT!!** Make sure that everyone in the house is on the same program and participating.
- Enroll in training classes preferably at 3 months (12 weeks).
- Do not give into your puppy.
- Do not allow him/her to get away with things.
- Continue to be a good and fair leader.
- Continue physically retraining, grooming and holding.
- Continue to socialize to new areas.
- Continue to enrich his environment.
- Continue to provide fun and stimulating toys.

6-18 months = Adolescence

- ◆ Most influence by human and dog pack members.
- ◆ Second chewing phase – part of exploring territory.
- ◆ Exploration of dominance – including challenging humans.
- ◆ If not spayed or neutered, beginnings of sexual behaviour.
- ◆ Sometimes can go through a third fear stage.

What you can do during this stage:

- Re-enroll in training classes.
- Remind them of leadership rules in the house.
- Treat as if they are 8-12 weeks again (more exercise and less freedom).
- Provide a lot of toys and more exercise.
- Hang in there – your lovely puppy will return if you don't get frustrated.

REMEMBER, ALL DOGS GO THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME!

