



Developmental Stages of Puppy Behavior

While making sure young puppies get food, affection, and healthcare, it is equally important that they receive adequate socialization. The early stages in a dog's life are critical for his development into a happy, safe, and loving pet. Fears and aversions developed during puppyhood can be altered, but never completely obliterated, in adulthood.

The following chart provides general guidelines for the stages of development. Depending on breed, bloodline, and individual dog, stages may be longer or shorter and may take place earlier or later.

Stage and Age	What to Expect	What to Do
Neonatal Period Birth-13 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to eliminate or regulate body temperature without mother. • Eyes closed and unable to hear. • Crawl forward and vocalize to seek mother. • EEG when awake identical to when sleeping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this age, puppies benefit from gentle daily handling by humans. Respect the dam's protective maternal instinct. Remember to create a disinfecting footbath at entrance to puppies' room and to wash hands before handling.
Transitional Period 13-20 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to react to sound. • Teeth erupt. • Eyes open, react to changes in light, but unable to see fully. • Crawl backwards as well as forwards, begins to stand, as well as wag tail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now is a good time to expose puppies to safe, novel objects, such as a baby bottle, a towel with your scent on it, even a dog-friendly cat. • Continue handling and talking to the puppies
Awareness Period 21-28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are able to use all their senses fully. • Can walk. • Can thermoregulate and eliminate. • Are learning at an extremely fast rate. • Begin to play with littermates. • Can eat by means other than sucking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because this time is full of sensory development, the environment should remain relatively stable so as not to overload the pups. • Pups can be introduced to carpet, wood, tile, linoleum, etc., for short intervals.
Canine Socialization Period 21-49 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn species specific behavior from dam and littermates such as facial expressions, body postures mouthing, chasing, barking, soliciting play, and status-seeking behaviors. • Begin showing appeasement gestures to dam when disciplined. • Learn bite inhibition from playing with littermates. • Begin to understand social hierarchy through interaction with dam and littermates. • Mother begins weaning pups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin short <i>positive reinforcement</i> training sessions. • Allow plenty of time for pups and mother to be together. • Introduce to crate: keep an open crate in the whelping box to facilitate in crate-training later on. • Provide aural stimuli through radio; continue handling and speaking to pups. • Introduce pups to short car rides, two at a time.

<p>Human Socialization Period 7-12 weeks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can form deep bonds with humans at this time. • Go through a fearful stage between 8 and 11 weeks of age. Anything that traumatizes them at this stage could potentially scare them for the rest of their lives. • Have the brain waves of adult dogs. • Can go home with a human family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puppies can start group classes as early as when they've had their first set of vaccinations. They can start being housebroken at as young as 10 weeks of age. • Despite their fear period, they should be exposed to many new objects, situations, people and dogs carefully and with plenty of positive reinforcement. According to Dr. Ian Dunbar, a puppy should have met 100 people by 12 weeks of age. • Ensure that puppy builds positive associations with, for example, vet visits, thunder, car horns, etc.
<p>Seniority Classification Period 10-16 weeks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to resolve questions regarding their status in the household • Become more independent • Pushy puppies will begin to display oppositional mouthing/biting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to provide a structured environment for puppies. • Begin 'Nothing in Life is Free' program (see handout) • Continue to condition pup to accept thorough handling.
<p>Flight Instinct Period 4-8 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May resist coming when called. • Venture off on own. • Teething and associated chewing and mouthing intensifies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep pup on leash to prevent him from wandering off • Redirect chewing onto appropriate items. Keep inappropriate items out of reach. See handout on puppy chewing.
<p>Second Fear Impact Period: Adolescence 6-14 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May become fearful of new, and even familiar, situations. • Reach sexual maturity; males begin lifting leg and females go into first heat. • Lifelong reactive behavior patterns (growling at unfamiliar people, for example) can form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earlier socialization should help this period pass smoothly. • Do not punish a fearful pup, instead help him overcome his fears through classical conditioning. • Make new experiences fun and rewarding by playing games and offering treats before the pup has a chance to become fearful.
<p>Maturity 1-4 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to grow to full size. • Behavior issues not addressed will become apparent, if not already so. These include: resource guarding, reactivity towards people or other dogs, dominance-related issues. • Continue to build associations with objects, people, and situations for the rest of life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to socialize with as many kinds of people and dogs for the rest of the dog's life. • Up until maturity, we recommend crating your dog whenever he cannot be supervised. At this point, you can test him, at short intervals (15-20 minutes, at first), for whether he can be trusted alone in the house. • The dog will, at any age, always need enrichment in the form of human and canine interaction, toys, and exercise.