

Understanding Your Adolescent Puppy

Webster's Dictionary defines adolescence as "youthful, exuberant, immature, and unsettled". If that describes your puppy or young dog he/she is a normal teen-aged dog.

Most puppies will go through a very trying stage when they turn about 5 months of age. Dogs often don't outgrow that teenager phase for 2-3 years depending upon the breed. Many experts agree that the most challenging time is between the ages of 8 months to about 18 months. Sadly, this stage of puppy/dog development is often when the family dog will be kicked out of the house to be an out-door only dog or even worse wind up at the pound, a fate which can be avoided with a little patience and positive training reinforcement.



Don't be discouraged! The first key is to understand what exactly puppy adolescence is and know that **IT WON'T LAST FOREVER**. The second key is recognizing this new phase of growth and realizing that you'll have to interact with your teen puppy differently than when he/she was younger.

What is the world like for my adolescent dog?

- According to experts, exposing your teen-aged companion to scary things can cause permanent fear of a particular experience or object.
- It's not unusual for your teen pup to become more interested in the world around you than in you. This is a natural event that corresponds to changes with your friend's brain development.
- Adolescent dogs may go through a period when they lack confidence around familiar people, other dogs and things.
- This stage is usually the final stage of the teething period for your family member (thank goodness!).
- Your teen-aged companion may backslide on his/her training. It may feel like your adolescent friend is ignoring you or has forgotten commands that came easily as a younger pup. And it won't be uncommon if your teen forgets proper housetraining etiquette.
- Dog-to-dog socialization may appear to become worse, especially for very small or very large breed teen-aged dogs. You may notice that your dog, especially males, may engage in aggressive behavior with other dogs.

Where do I go from here?

- **Continue Basic Training.** Fortunately, many of the training practices that you used for your puppy when he/she was younger can still apply with your teen-ager. You and your family may have to return to short basic training sessions in order to remind your teen-ager what is appropriate family behavior.
- **Provide Regular Exercise.** One of the best ways to set the stage for success with your companion is to provide regular exercise. That cannot be emphasized enough! Many if not most inappropriate puppy to teen behaviors stem from a lack of exercise. Your teen-ager has a need to expend energy and solve problems on a daily basis. This can be a very rewarding time for you and your companion if you and your family are willing to help your puppy to find ways to do both.
- **Continue Crate Training.** Continuing the compassionate use of a dog crate can also give both you and your teen-ager some well needed quiet time. Crates are also very effective at keeping your teen out of trouble or danger in addition to re-enforcing proper potty training.¹
- **Provide Chew Toys.** While this is commonly the last stage of chewing you and your family will still need to provide safe and appropriate chew toys for your teen-ager.

1 See "Crate Training" educational sheet, or contact your veterinarian for more information on how to properly crate train your dog/puppy.

- **Understand “Aggressive” Behavior.** Nothing can be more upsetting than watching your teen companion snarling, posturing, snapping and growling at another dog. Many experts consider this type of behavior normal adolescent behavior. Many experts also claim that this normal dog behavior often reflects a lack of confidence rather than aggression. One way to know whether or not your teen may have a problem with aggression is to establish your companion’s “Fight-Bite” ratio. To do this examine how many times your teenager has engaged in aggressive behavior with another dog and how often (if ever) the other dog was physically harmed. A Fight-Bite ratio for a normal adolescent male dog is about 10 encounters to zero injuries. Seek the advice of your veterinarian or an expert dog trainer for specific ways of handling your pup if you are concerned about your dog’s behavior. While it can be very nerve-racking when your teen engages in aggressive behavior it is very important that you determine how bad it really is and react calmly in order to determine the seriousness of the event.

Surviving your teen-aged puppy

- **Always** make a point of praising your adolescent whenever he/she behaves well.
- **Always** seek the help of a professional or your vet if you have concerns. Consider more advanced dog training classes for your teen companion.
- **Always** hang on to your sense of humor!