



Maplewood Dog Training

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Developmental Stages of the Dog

When adding a new puppy or dog to your family it's important to know what to expect from your dog's behavior as he grows and develops. Dogs go through a number of critical developmental stages over the 1st 2-4 years of life that can significantly affect their ability to succeed in a home if that new home is not aware and prepared to properly enhance that young dog's life. It is also important to recognize that recent research states that an adult dog has a mental cognition of a 2 year old human child. Knowing this important key fact can help you understand your new dog and set him up for long-term success.

In the Whelping Box- Birth to age 7 weeks:

- Critical Early Periods- Birth to age 20 days
 - Neonatal- birth to age 14 days- puppies eyes & ears are closed & they rely solely on scent and touch to survive and find their nursing mother & littermates
 - Breeders may lightly stress puppies with Early Neurological Stimulation/The Super Puppy Program to enhance their ability to tolerate stress as adult dogs
 - Transition- age 14 to 20 days- puppies eyes & ears open & they begin to assimilate sensory information through all senses
- Canine Socialization- age 21 to 49 days
 - Awareness of other littermates- age 21-28 days
 - Weaning to solid food
 - Developing 'normal' interactions with other dogs & puppies
 - Begin to accept discipline from their mother
 - Bite inhibition- learning how to control their mouths & bite through play & interactions with littermates & mother
 - Elimination- begin to seek out places away from sleeping, playing & eating area to void, setting the foundation for house breaking
 - During this period it is critical that puppies experience daily handling by people and begin to be positively exposed & socialized to various toys, surfaces, noises & sounds
 - During this period is the best time to expose puppies to safe, puppy-friendly cats

Transitioning to a New Home & Family- Age 7 weeks to 4 months:

- Human Socialization- age 7 to 12 weeks
 - Best time to go to a new home
 - Best time to begin 'formal' training & enrollment in a puppy kindergarten class that focus' on early positive socialization & exposures as well as self-control & basic obedience skills
 - Continue with bite inhibition & learning bite control with people
 - House breaking
- Critical Socialization Imprint Window- age 6 to 14 weeks
 - Period of largest neural brain growth
 - Stress daily early positive exposures to new & varying people, surfaces, smells, noises, sights, sounds & puppy-friendly animals
 - Positive, safe out of the home exposures & socialization is critical

- Enrichment experience- the 4 E's- Explore, Encounter, Examine, Experience
- Critical for preventing long range fear based aggression & behavior problems
- 1st Fear Impact Period- age 8 to 11 weeks
 - The 1st Fear Impact Period generally falls just as puppies are going to their new homes
 - During this period, your generally confident & happy puppy, suddenly becomes nervous or afraid of often times very usual situations they have previously had no negative response to
 - Fear impact events can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days to a week
 - When you notice this period has begun, create a positive association with the situation your puppy had a fear response to, then severely limit exposures until the fear period is over
 - Situations that cause a fear response during this period of time often have life long lasting negative fear response consequences
- Seniority Classification- age 12 to 16 weeks
 - Age of "Cutting"- milk teeth begin to fall out as adult teeth surface & period of increased independence from owner
 - 1st teething stage begins at age 12 weeks and is complete at age 6 months when canine teeth emerge
 - The Importance of Separation
 - Learning that being left alone for periods is not stressful or scary
 - Foundation for preventing separation anxiety
 - Builds confidence & sense of 'self'

Adolescence- age 4 months to maturity

- Flight instinct- between age 4 and 8 months, generally lasts approx 2wks
- 2nd Fear Imprint Stage- between age 6 and 14 months
- 2nd Teething Stage- around age 8 to 10 months
 - This is generally when dogs will engage in serious destruction of property & can be very detrimental both to your dog's health & your home
 - Recommended that you continue with crate training & confinement through age 18-24 months to maintain safety for your dog & home
- Critical to continue with consistent early training to prevent behavior problems & encourage lasting appropriate behavior
- Critical to continue with positive socialization & exposures to prevent fear based behavior & aggression problems

Maturity- between age 1 and 4 years

- Increased level of protectiveness
- Often around age 18-24 months aggression may surface as dog reaches sexual & mental maturity
- Age 24 months growth plates close & physical growth & maturity is complete
 - It is unsafe & not recommended to do any hard exercise or running with dogs under the age 2 on hard surfaces such as pavement or concrete or on-leash
 - Safe exercise before the age of 2 can be done off-leash on soft surfaces such as grass, dirt or sand or in water
- Testing- dog will often test limits & boundaries, important to be consistent with training throughout maturation
- Training- it's never too late to teach an old dog new tricks!