

Dog Development



***When dogs are young, they learn much
and what is learned has a lasting impact.***

(Sue St. Gelais, Ontario, Canada)

All dogs, regardless of breed, pass through various stages as they grow and develop, physically, mentally, and psychologically. Psychologists use the term **critical period** to describe a specific time in a dog's life when certain experiences have a lasting effect upon their psychological development. Understanding these critical periods and a dog's stages of development will better help you to understand your foster dog's behavior and how to handle him during these special times.

Neonatal Period (0-13 days)

- Puppy's brain is not yet highly developed. He responds to the mother's licking for elimination; responds to warmth and food. Puppy's reflexes are slow.
- ê Make sure the puppy is safe, warm, and well fed.

Transitional Period (13-20 days)

- Puppy's eyes begin to open. He starts to walk and attempts to explore his surroundings.
- By 19 days, puppy's ears begin to open and he will startle by noises.
- By 20 days puppy's teeth begin to emerge

Puppy Toddlers (3 - 6 Weeks)

This is when the social period in your puppy's life begins. The puppies emerge on their own from the litter and venture into the surrounding environment. Gentle handling by you will help him to form a trusting relationship with humans in order to become man's best friend.

During the toddler period puppies learn basic behavioral patterns specific to dogs:

- While playing, they practice different body postures, learning what the postures mean and how they affect their mother and litter mates.
- They learn what it is like to bite and be bitten, what barking and other vocalizations mean and how to use them to establish social relationships with other dogs.

From the age of five weeks, the mother teaches her puppies basic manners. They learn to be submissive to her leadership and what behaviors are acceptable. If necessary, she growls, snarls, or snaps at them as a form of discipline. When weaning the litter, for instance, the mother will discipline her puppies so that they will leave her alone. Because the mother disciplines them in a way that they clearly understand, after a few repetitions, the puppies will respond to a mere glare from her.

- A **5 week old puppy** can begin to understand housetraining rules.

Housetraining Rules (Marty Smith & Race Foster, Housetraining Your Puppy)

Rule Number One:

This is The Most Important Rule – If you don't catch your puppy doing it then just clean it up and forget about it!

Rule Number Two:

Praise your puppy when things go right. Don't let this be a situation where your only action is saying "No" when they are caught in the midst of using the wrong area. If they do it right – let them know!

Methods of houstraining

Crate Training (call Claudia & Bob at 539-6561 evenings to borrow a crate)

A popular method of houstraining involves the use of a crate or cage. The often-stated reasoning is that the animal is placed in a cage that is just large enough to be a bed. Dogs don't like to soil their beds for they would be forced to lay in the mess. It works and while in these confines most pups will control their bladder and bowels for a longer time than we would expect. Start out with no more than 45 minutes or an hour at a time and gradually increase the time your puppy spends in the crate. If your dog has an 'accident' (urinates/defecates in the crate), just clean it up and forget about it. You do not want to create an aversion to the crate and it is not the dog's fault. You have left him/her in the crate too long.

During houstraining, whenever the puppy is inside the home but can't be watched, place him/her in the crate. This might be while you are cooking, reading to the children or even away from the home. The last thing you do before you put the puppy in the crate is take him outside to his favorite spot. The first thing you do when you take the animal out of the crate is another trip outside. No food or water goes in the crate, just a blanket and maybe a chew toy to occupy his time. Overnight is definitely crate time but remember to gradually increase the time your puppy spends in the crate (see above). As your faith in the puppy grows, leave him out for longer and longer periods of time.

Most people do not recognize an important advantage of crate training. It does more than just stop the animal from messing in the house. It also teaches the puppy something very important. The puppy learns that when the urge to urinate or defecate occurs, he can hold it. Just because the pup feels like he needs to relieve himself, the pup learns that he doesn't have to. This is thought to be the main reason why puppies that have gone through crate training have fewer mistakes later on.

Constant Supervision

This method involves no papers, pads or crates. Rather you choose to spend all the time necessary with the puppy. This works very well for people who live and work in their homes, retired persons or in situations where the owners are always with the animal. Whenever they see the puppy doing his "pre-potty pattern" they hustle him outside. It is important that the dog is watched at all times and that no mistakes are allowed to occur. This method has less room for error as there is nothing like a cage to restrict the animal's urges. When she is taken outside, watch the puppy closely and as soon as all goes as planned, she should be praised and then brought back inside immediately. You want the dog to understand that the purpose for going outside was to go to the bathroom. Don't start playing, make it a trip for a reason. Verbal communications help this method and we'll discuss them soon. For those with the time, this is a good method. We still recommend having a crate available as a backup when the owners have to be away from the animal.

Verbal cues

Specific verbal communications will also help the two of you understand what's desired. It's an excellent idea to always use a word when it's time to head to the bathroom. We like "Outside?". Remember that whenever you use a verbal command or signal, it's important that everybody in the family always uses the same word in the same way. Think of the word "Outside" in this situation not only as a question you're asking the pup but also as an indication that you want to go there. Some dogs may get into the habit of going to the door when they want to go outside. This is great when it happens but it isn't as common as some believe. We've found that it is better to use verbal commands to initiate this sort of activity rather than waiting for the puppy to learn this behavior on his own. It seems like your consistent use of a word or phrase like "Outside" will cause the puppy to come to you rather than the door when he needs to go outside. The pup more quickly sees you as part of the overall activity of getting him where he needs to go. We believe this is much better.

Once outside we try to encourage them to get on with the act in question. You can use "Do It", "Potty" or "Hurry Up". As soon as they eliminate it is very important to praise then with a "Good Dog" and then come back inside immediately. Again, make this trip that started outside with a specific word "Outside" be for a purpose. If we are taking the pup out to play with a ball or go for a walk we won't use this word even if we know they will eliminate while we are outside.

When an "accident" happens

One of the key issues in housetraining is to follow Rule Number One: If you don't catch your puppy doing it then there is nothing you can do. We don't care what someone else may tell you or what you read, if you find a mess that was left when you weren't there, clean it up and forget it.

Discipline won't help because unless you catch the puppy in the act, he/she will have no idea what the scolding is for. Your puppy has urinated and defecated hundreds of times before he met you. Mom or someone else always cleaned it up. Nobody made a fuss before and they will not put the punishment, regardless of its form, together with something they've done without incident numerous times before. Especially if they did it more than 30 seconds ago! Puppies are just like children. Unless something was really fun (and a repetitious act like going to the bathroom isn't), they are not thinking about what they did in the past. They're thinking about what they can do in the future. At this point in their life a puppy's memory is very, very poor.

Anyway, let's face it. It was your fault not the pup's. If you had been watching, you would have noticed the puppy suddenly walking or running around in circles with his nose down smelling for the perfect spot to go to the bathroom. It's just as consistent as the taxi cab driver behind you honking immediately when the light changes. The puppy will show the same behavior every time. It may vary a little from pup to pup but they always show their own "pre-potty pattern" before the act.

The same should be said as to your first reaction when you actually catch them in the act of urinating or defecating. It's your fault, you weren't watching for or paying attention to the signals. Don't get mad. Quickly, but calmly pick them up and without raising your voice sternly say "No". Carry them outside. It will help to push their tail down while you are carrying them as this will often help them to stop urinating or defecating any more.

They're going to be excited when you get them outside, but stay there with them a while and if they finish the job reward them with simple praise like "Good Dog".

In the disciplining of dogs, just like in physics, every action has a reaction and for training purposes these may not be beneficial! If you overreact and severely scold or scare the heck out of a puppy for making what is in your mind a mistake, your training is probably going backwards. With housetraining this is especially difficult for them to understand as they are carrying out a natural body function. Carried one step farther is the idea of rubbing a puppy's nose into a mistake he made, whether you caught him or not. In the limits of a puppy's intelligence, please explain to us the difference of rubbing his nose in the mess he left in your kitchen an hour ago versus the one the neighbor's dog left in the park two weeks ago. If the dog were smart enough to figure all of this out, the only logical choice would be to permanently quit going to the bathroom. Punishment rarely speeds up housetraining. Often it makes the dog nervous or afraid every time he/she needs to go to the bathroom.

Feeding and housetraining

The feeding schedule you use can help or hinder housetraining. You'll soon notice that puppies will need to go outside immediately after they wake and also within 30 to 40 minutes after eating. Be consistent when and what you feed the animal so you can predict when they need to relieve themselves. Plan your trips outside around these patterns.

All of this may seem simple and it really is. The keys are that it will take time and you must be consistent. And, of course, you must never lose your temper or even get excited.

Spontaneous or submissive urination

Puppies may spontaneously urinate when excited. This may be when they first see you, at meeting a new dog or when they are scared. It is often referred to as submissive or excitement urination. Do not discipline the puppy for this, as it is something they cannot control. Simply ignore it and clean up the mess. If you don't overreact, they will usually outgrow this between 4 and 7 months of age.

- A **6 week old puppy** can be introduced to some basic rules of living with you. Physically remove the puppy from dangerous situations or places where he shouldn't go to. Reward him with cuddling and praising rather than food.

Clapping hands to encourage puppy to approach you for cuddling and warmth as well as following you can be done individually away from litter mates. Try to avoid excessive noises and other sudden changes.

Socialization Period (7 - 12 Weeks)

- At **7 weeks**, puppies can learn and what they learn will have a lasting impact. Everything he comes in contact with will make a lasting impression upon him as it never will again!

Not only will he learn, but, he will learn whether he is taught or not. Though he has a short attention span, what things he learns are learned permanently and resistant to change. Therefore, you need to be careful about what your puppy is learning at this time. Your puppy

is very anxious to learn how you want him to behave and react, and he needs to be shown what is expected of him in his new role as your pet.

There are rules you will expect your puppy to obey. Establish those rules NOW while behaviors are easy to establish. For instance, how your pet interacts with you is determined during puppyhood. What he does now is what he will likely do later. So, don't allow your puppy to do things which will be unacceptable when he becomes a dog. During this time, you and your puppy will also begin to know and understand each other. You will get to know about your puppy's particular temperament and personality - whether he is strong-willed or eager to please, gentle or rambunctious, shy or outgoing, and just what else makes him the endearing individual that he is.

For the puppy, this is both an exciting and somewhat confusing time. There is a whole new world of things to learn about and all sorts of new experiences to digest. Your puppy needs to learn how to interact with humans and other animals who live with them. Puppies must be able to adapt to the patterns and tenor of their future homes. And you are the one helping him with this by laying a groundwork for a trusting, happy mutually satisfying relationship.

- During the Socialization period, there is a fear imprint period from **8 - 11 weeks**. During this time, any traumatic, painful or frightening experiences will have a more lasting impact on your pup than they would if they occurred at any other time.

An unpleasant trip to the veterinarian or a long and stressful car ride, for instance, at this time could forever make your dog apprehensive about veterinarians and frightened of cars. To avoid this, take some treats and a toy with you to the veterinarian. Take the puppy frequently on brief car rides with you and stop for a short walk somewhere interesting for the dog – even if it's just a 5 minute walk after your shopping trip.

Remember, dogs are social animals. To become acceptable companions, they need to interact with you, your family, and other people and dogs during the Socialization Period. Dogs that are denied socialization during this critical period often become unpredictable because they are fearful or aggressive. It is during this time, that your dog needs to have positive experiences with people and dogs. Take your dog to places where other people walk their dogs. Begin by taking him there when there are few other dogs and people. Give him time to get used to new places. Make sure he is secure. Schedule 'doggie play time' with other dog owners in the park. If you have children that visit only occasionally, have your puppy meet children as often as you can. If you live alone, make an effort to have friends visit you, especially members of the opposite sex so that your dog will become accustomed to them. Go someplace fun!

Seniority Classification Period (12-16 Weeks)

- At **12-16 weeks** your dog will begin to test you to see who the packleader is going to be.

He'll begin to bite you, in play or as a real challenge to your authority. Such behavior is natural in the pack and not necessarily undesirable. It is important, at this stage, that you establish your position as pack leader, and not just another sibling. Other behaviors, such as grabbing at the leash, will be observed, and all are attempts to dominate you. Biting, in particular though, should always be discouraged. Therefore, you should not wrestle or play

tug of war. Such play is aggressive-inducing. What you see as a fun game may be perceived by your dog as a situation in which he has been allowed to dominate. Wrestling, of course, communicates to your puppy that he is allowed to bite you. Tug of war sets you up in a dominance confrontation over an object. He learns that he can keep objects away from you. During tug of war games, puppies will often growl. Growling is a dominance vocalization, designed to warn another pack member that they better not confront the growler or he will bite. Puppies see these games as situations in which they have been allowed to dominate. They do not understand that these are games designed by humans to entertain them.

Continue to play with your dog during this period, but make it clear that no mouthing of your body is allowed and when your dog does mouthe, you respond with a quick and sharp "NO!" or "No Bite!" Play that does not get rough is best. If you cannot keep the dog from getting overly excited during a game and he persists in biting at you, don't play that way.

For these reasons, this is the stage when serious training should begin. Training establishes your pack leadership in a manner that your puppy will understand. By training your puppy, you will learn how to get him to respond to commands designed to show that you are in charge.

Flight Instinct Period (4 - 8 Months)

- At **4 - 8 months** the puppies become more independent of their owners and are likely to venture off on their own.

Puppies that have always come when called or stayed close to their owners will now ignore them, often running in the opposite direction. This period can last from several weeks to months. How you handle your puppy's refusal to come or stay with you will determine whether or not he will be trustworthy off leash. Therefore, keep your puppy on leash when this period arises and keep him on leash until he readily returns to you or shows no inclination to leave you.

Releasing an unleashed dog in an unconfined area that is not well trained off leash may be dangerous to your dog. Even well trained dogs can make mistakes or become distracted by something in the environment so that they do not respond to their owners' commands.

So, how do you respond when your puppy suddenly develops the urge to bolt? First, you must, for his safety, put a leash or a long line on your dog whenever you are not in a confined area. Second, work hard on training your puppy to come on command. Use the recall game and the spontaneous recall. When walking your dog, suddenly run backwards and encourage your puppy to come. If your dog still continues to bolt or run away, then your dog probably does not view you as the dominant figure in this relationship!

Adolescence Period (5 - 18 months)

- Adolescence can appear in smaller dogs as early as **5 months**. In larger breeds, it can start as late as **9 or 10 months**. In giant breeds, adolescence doesn't take place until **12 to 18 months**. In general, the larger the dog, the longer it will take to physically mature. Some breeds can remain adolescents until they are two and a half, or three years old.

Adolescence is expressed in male dogs by scent marking behavior. Scent marking behavior is stimulated by the release of testosterone into the dog's system. At this time, males may become macho. Male dogs may become less friendly and even somewhat aggressive to other male dogs. He may begin lifting his leg in the house. He may become very interested in girls, tend to roam, and certainly not interested in listening to you! Some males at this age become totally unruly.

In females, adolescence is marked by the onset of the heat cycle, estrus. During this three week period, your dog could become pregnant. So, keep her away from all male dogs. Female dogs exhibit erratic behavior during estrus. Some get real moody and insecure. Others become quite bold or even aggressive.

Spaying/neutering your dog will help to alleviate these problems!

Adolescence is a very difficult time for pet owners. They are surprised when their cute little puppy becomes a free and independent thinker. Adolescence is certainly a good time to start (or reinstitute) rigorous training. You must work hard NOW to mold the dog of your dreams. Establish yourself as the leader of the pack. Be realistic about your expectations. You cannot expect young dogs to grow up overnight. Learn to appreciate your dog's adolescence for it is a truly wonderful time. At this time of their lives, dogs are very energetic and exuberant in their responses. They can be full of beans, but still, delightful playmates. You as the owner must learn to channel that energy and exuberance into learning, working, exercising, and playing games. It is not too late to train (or retrain) your dog to help him to become a long-lasting companion.

Second Fear Imprint Period (6 - 14 Months)

The Second Fear Imprint Period occurs as dogs enter adolescence and seems more common in males. It is often referred to as adolescent shyness.

Your dog may suddenly become reluctant to approach something new or suddenly become afraid of something familiar. This behavior can be very frustrating to the owner and difficult to understand because its onset is so sudden and, seemingly, unprovoked. If you notice this behavior, it is important to avoid the two extremes in response: Don't force him to do or approach something frightening to him and don't coddle or baby him. To get through situations that make your dog fearful, be patient, kind, and understanding. Desensitize him to the object or situation by gradually introducing him to it and using food rewards and praise to entice him to confront the fearful object or situation. Do not coddle or reassure him in any way that will encourage his fearful behavior. Do not correct him either. Simply make light of it and encourage him give him food rewards as he begins to deal with his fear better. Make sure you lavishly praise his attempts! This phase will pass!

Mature Adulthood (1 - 4 Years)

During this period your dog may again become aggressive and assertive. For instance, he may become more turf-protective, by barking when someone comes to the door. Temper his protective behaviors by teaching him how to accept strangers into your home. His friendly

play with other dogs may escalate to fighting with other dogs. Teach your dog to ignore other dogs that he sees if he can't be friendly towards them. Take him to places where there will be a few dogs at first and train him there. Then, train him in areas with more and more dogs. Next, allow him to interact with non-threatening dogs. Puppies and female adult dogs are good choices, if he is a male. Always praise his positive efforts to interact or if he displays no reaction.

Also, be alert to the posturing of aggressive behaviors. Watch for circling behaviors, walking on toes, stiff tail wags, and tense facial expressions.

Adulthood is also a time that your dog may again test your position as pack leader. If he does, handle him firmly, suspend any rough play that may be giving him the idea that he can dominate you, and continue with training. Proceed with training in a matter-of-fact, no nonsense manner and your dog will become a reasonably obedient dog. Give him lots of positive attention for his efforts!

Summary:

Remember - All dogs are different!

Some will not exhibit the behaviors discussed here and others will pass through them at varying rates with smaller dogs maturing faster than large dogs. In addition, other problems may arise during puppyhood, adolescence, and early adulthood which are not the result of the developmental period itself, but are caused by something in the environment or the dog's basic personality. Understanding, training, and perhaps professional help with training are the keys to success. Your foster puppy/dog needs you to play a role in his development so you can help him to become a loving, well-adjusted dog and companion who greatly deserves to be adopted into a new home.