The Basics of Puppy Behavior and Problem Prevention

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Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prenatal Period</td>
<td>Conception - birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neonatal Period</td>
<td>0-13 days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transitional Period</td>
<td>14-20 days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socialization Period</td>
<td>3-12(14) weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juvenile Period</td>
<td>3-6(7) months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Maturity</td>
<td>6-7 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Maturity</td>
<td>Reached b/t 1.5-4 years</td>
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Prenatal Period

- Fetal development
- Effects of stress
  - ↑ Cortisol
  - Changes ‘set point’ HPA axis
  - High emotionality as adults
  - Puppy mills?

Neonatal Period

(0-13 days)

- Born deaf and blind, poor smell
- Eating and sleeping
- Very limited learning capabilities

Transitional Period

(14-20 days)

- Eyes open
- Tooth eruption
- Able to stand

Transitional Period

(14-20 days)

- Learn to avoid pain
- No emotional learning yet
  - No change in heart rate
  - Don’t learn from bad experience
- Startle response ENDS transitional period
  - Hearing begins
Socialization Period
(3-12 weeks)
• Gradual wean
• Leave nest to eliminate
• Offer play behaviors
• Social relationships
  – 6-8 week peak?

Socialization Period
(3-12 weeks)
• Avoidance response
• Fearful postures develop
• Learn from bad experiences

Socialization Period
(3-12 weeks)
• Early Illness predisposes to
  – Aggression problems
  – Fear of strangers and children
  – Separation-related problems

Socialization Period
(3-12 weeks)
• Isolation during this period leads to learning
deficits and fear response
  – “Kennel dog syndrome”

Fear Period
(8-10 weeks)
• Very sensitive to traumatic experience
• Single scary event can have life-long effects
• Can retain fear of person, dog, object
• HANDLE WITH CARE!

Juvenile Period
(3-6 months)
• Rapid growth
• Increasing independence
• Sexual interest begins
• Teething occurs
  – Destructive chewing ↑
Adolescence

- Time between sexual and social maturity
- Second fear period
  - 3 weeks duration, between 4-11 months
  - Same rules apply – handle with care!

Social maturity

- As early as 18 months
- As late as 4 years
- More proactive defense
- Fearful puppies tend to become biters at this point

Puppy Prep School

- Set puppies up for success by covering the basics:
  - Socialization
  - Early low stress handling
  - Housetraining
  - Crate training
  - Discouraging mouthing
  - Basic Manners
  - Avoidance of harsh punishment

Socialization

- People
  - Age, race, sex
- Dogs
  - Socially appropriate adult
- Leash, collar, head halter?
- Bikes, skateboards, wheelchairs
- Hats, winter clothing
- Crate, car

Puppy Kindergarten

Taking a puppy to puppy class is the single best thing an owner can do to their dog in its entire life.  
Andrew Luescher, DVM, PhD, DACVB

- Study: Puppies that attended socialization class were more likely to be retained in their homes
  (Duxbury et al, 2010)
Puppy Kindergarten

- Appropriate class
  - Observe class yourself
  - Puppies 4 months of age and younger
  - Appropriate sanitation before and after class
  - Appropriate supervision
  - Health screening

Vaccine Conundrum

- Should we isolate puppies until fully vaccinated?
  - Absolutely not
  - More likely to lose pet over a behavior problem than from infectious disease

- Make wise choices for socialization
  - Avoid dog parks, pet stores, etc.
  - Make play dates with healthy, socially mature, dogs with a history of appropriate social behavior with dogs
  - Puppy kindergarten

Early low stress handling

- Remember that puppies are typically in their first fear period at the time of their first vaccine appointment
- Potential frightening stimuli include:
  - Cold exam table
  - Rectal temperature assessment
  - Vaccine injection
  - Nail trims
  - Physical manipulation by a stranger

How do we prevent long lasting fear of the veterinary clinic?

ASSOCIATE FOOD WITH EVERYTHING!

- Squeeze cheese
- Baby food
- Peanut butter
- Canned food
- “Behavior vaccine”

Early low stress handling

- At home mock vet exam
  - Feet, ears, tail, mouth, exam table
  - Owner can use healthy treats to create a positive association
Housetraining

- SUPERVISION
  - Must be able to SEE puppy at all times when loose in house
- Frequent opportunities for success
  - Set a timer every hour for first 2 weeks,
  - Also after play, sleeping, eating, etc.
- Meal feeding
  - What goes in on schedule, should come out on schedule

Housetraining

- Food and verbal rewards
- Accompany pup outside
- Give food reward and verbal praise immediately following urination and defecation
  - Do not wait until puppy comes back inside
- Crate/Confinement
  - Can utilize when unable to supervise
  - Potty pads outside of crate if left alone for long periods

Housetraining

- Interruption instead of punishment
  - Clap hands, squeaker
  - Idea is to stop behavior without scaring the dog
  - Do not want dog to be afraid of urinating in front of the owner
  - May learn to go into another room
- Umbilical method
  - Owner attaches leash to belt loop
  - For difficult cases (small breeds)

Crate Training

- Why crate train?
  - Housetraining
  - Safety
  - Independence
  - A place to escape

Crate Training

- Pick a crate
  - Big enough to sit, stand, lie on side, and turn around
  - Can block off larger crates
- Happy place!
  - Where family spends time
  - Meals, treats, KONGs
  - Access to water
    - Ice cubes or frozen bowl if needed
- Gradually increase time spent in crate
  - Start with door open
- Bedtime
  - Move crate or place 2nd crate in bedroom
  - Don’t forget bedtime snack!
The mouthy pup

• Normal behavior in young puppies
  – Taste and facial sensation are among 1st senses to develop
  – Information gathering and food seeking
  – Mother typically discourages rough or harsh biting

The mouthy pup

• Persistent mouthing over 12 weeks of age may be a sign of
  – Premature maternal separation
  – Displacement behavior in anxious pups
  – Early signs of aggression if seen in the context of resource guarding and handling
  – Learned attention seeking behavior

Discouraging mouthy behavior

• Avoid play with hands and feet
• Avoid rough play or handling that increases arousal
• Always have a toy available
  – Set puppy up for success
  – Mouth on toy, not on hand

Discouraging mouthy behavior

• Provide appropriate chewing outlets
  – “Environment of plenty”
  – Nyla-bones
  – Kong toys
  – Busy Buddy toys
  – Durable stuffed toys
  – Meals via puzzle toys

Discouraging mouthy behavior

• Remove attention in response to mouthing
  – Pull hands away
  – Avoid eye contact
  – No talking
• High pitched “ouch” works in some cases
  – Caution this does not provoke fear in puppy
  – Caution this does not increase arousal and inadvertently reward mouthing
  – Always redirect to a toy when once pup calms down

Basic Manners

• Don’t encourage behaviors now that will not be desirable from an adult dog
  – Jumping
  – Pawing
  – Mouthing
  – Sitting on lap (owner preference)
### Basic Manners

- **“Sit” as default behavior**
  - Every normal 8 week old puppy is capable of “sit”
  - Hold treat to nose, lure head back and up
  - Rear-end automatically goes down
  - No need to push on rump
- “Sit” for attention
- “Sit” for food
- “Sit” for toys
- “Sit” for leash walks

### Basic Manners

- Avoid harsh punishment
  - Does not teach appropriate behavior
  - Inhibits learning and offering of new behaviors
  - May have devastating effects during fear periods
  - Can create fear of owner
  - May exacerbate existing fear or aggression
  - Attempts to punish aggression do not address underlying motivation and are dangerous

### Dog Appeasing Pheromones

- Adaptil® collar reduces fearful behaviors in puppy class
- Helps pup adjust to first night away from mom and litter mates
- Consider Adaptil® collar to be worn all the time and/or diffuser next to crate

### Red flag alerts

- Avoidance of people, animals, objects
  - Indication of fear – may progress to aggression during adolescence and social maturity
  - Create a positive emotional response NOW
- Alarm barking, lunging, hackles up
  - Not normal in a puppy – seek help NOW
- Excessive mouthing over handling
  - May progress to aggression later – toenail trims? Vet exam? Ear cleaning?
  - Pain?

### Red flag alerts

- Reluctance to “sit” or “down”
  - PAIN! Hip and elbow dysplasia may manifest early in certain breeds
  - Anxiety
    - Anxious dogs have difficulty focusing and may not be comfortable with focused interactions
    - Often referred to as “stubborn” or “hyper”
- Excessive vocalization in crate or home alone
- Inability to settle in crate
- Pup will not eat food without owner present
  - May all be indications of early separation or confinement anxiety
- Repeated elimination in appropriately-sized crate
  - NOT normal
    - Learned helplessness
    - Crate anxiety
    - Congenital abnormality
New DVD for puppy owners

Featuring an interview with Dr. Herron...

Further Reading

- The Domestic Dog – James Serpell
- Perfect Puppy in 7 Days – Sophia Yin
- Puppy Start Right – Ken Martin
- Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog – John Scott and John Fuller
- The Biology of Animal Stress – Gary Moberg and Joy Mench
- Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat – Gary Landsberg, Wayne Hunthausen, Lowell Ackerman
- Before and After You Get Your Puppy – Ian Dunbar
- When Pigs Fly: Training Success with Impossible Dogs – Jane Killion

THE END