

ADOLESCENCE IN DOGS

Like humans, dogs go through a period of adolescence as they mature. This is the time between "puppyhood" and "adulthood". Just *when* this occurs varies from breed to breed, (and from dog to dog). A general rule is that most small and companion breeds will begin adolescence around 6-8 months of age, and will usually be mature by the time they are about 2. Sporting and large breed dogs may not be fully mature (emotionally) until they are closer to 3 years old. Some breeds, most notably terriers, may seem to stay teenagers all their lives.

For simplicity, most of the following information refers to a dog as "he" or "him," however; the behaviors listed tend to be true of both genders.

During adolescence your dog may exhibit:

Exuberance -- has an intense joy for life; hard to settle down; may race around the house "wildly."

Aggression -- towards people or other dogs -- trying to determine his place in the pack.

Vacillating between dependence and independence -- hang on you one minute, and want nothing to do with you the next.

Shyness or being fearful of new people or surroundings.

Show inappropriate protectiveness -- to objects or places -- decides it's "his" toy, chair, couch, kitchen, etc.

Seem unable to resist temptations -- may be destructive in the house, have "selective deafness," and/or have house-soiling problems. Also known as "he didn't used to do that" syndrome.

Manipulation -- always testing; (do I really have to sit the first time I'm told?" "If I grab something and run, can they catch me?" Etc.)

The good news is this *is* normal! Your job is to reinforce your dog's position in the family and to establish your "alpha" (leader) position during this time.

Many of the "problem" behaviors during adolescence are caused by nothing more than the actual need for physical (and mental) activity. Adolescent dogs have a very high energy level. If you do not provide a way for them to "burn-up" some of this energy, your dog will find a way to do it himself, (in a way you will probably not approve of). Physical exercise is especially important if you and your family are away for long periods of the day. You can satisfy this need with long walks, strenuous play (such as "fetch" or hide and go seek, you hide and he seeks), romping in a safe ENCLOSED area with another adolescent friend, and through obedience sessions (1 or 2 sessions per day, up to 1/2 hour or longer each).

Being outside alone, whether in a fenced area or tied to a stake or tree, does not constitute exercise, and may even make some problems worse if your dog is not given ample time daily to interact with the family.

NOTE: If you have an "outside dog", consider bringing him into the house for short intervals (15 minutes or so), every day. This way he can experience some quiet time with the family (his pack), and learn some basic house manners. This can be done quite easily if you keep a leash on the dog, (yes, in the house), and have someone hold onto the other end. In this manner, your dog cannot get into any trouble without your being aware of it, and corrections can be easily made.

dog food. Once the period of rapid puppy growth is over, they no longer require the extra protein, fat and other nutrients contained in "growth" foods. Most dogs will do best if their daily required amount is split between 2 meals per day (a.m. & p.m. and this can also lessen behavior problems caused by excessive hunger (such as scavenging).

TO HELP YOU THROUGH THE "TRYING TIMES" WHILE YOUR DOG IS A TEEN:

- 1.) Tighten all obedience commands. This applies whether you own a tiny toy or a giant. Obedience commands can be practiced and integrated into everyday life. Continue (or start) having your dog sit for meals; have him wait for you to go through the door first (also reaffirms your "alpha" position); when going for walk, heel a block or so, and then release -- this allows time for him to "be a dog" (sniffing, exploring, etc.), and also teaches there are times he must pay attention to you. Have him sit before crossing any streets.
- 2.) Do at least one long (15-30 minute) down every day. This exercise reminds him who's boss (since this is a very submissive position) and also provides mental stimulation since he must remember to stay in place.
- 3.) Provide plenty of exercise, and follow play sessions with 1-2 minutes of obedience work.
- 4.) Set firm, fair rules. Be consistent in enforcing them.
- 5.) Most important: ***DON'T GIVE UP!*** We've all seen those ads in the paper that read: "Free to good country home: "6 month old puppy needs room to run". Many of these are adolescents whose owners either didn't know what to expect, or didn't have time to deal with adolescent behaviors.