

STAGES OF PUPPYHOOD



Like humans, puppies experience stages of development marked by different milestones. These moments are individual, and there is no hard or fast rule about what will happen, or when.

Regardless of when these moments take place, great training – built on a foundation of good communication, strong leadership, and a healthy dose of love and respect – can help navigate each stage of development, including the critical, highly influential first three-to-four months of life. Here are some important milestones to keep in mind as your puppy matures:

BIRTH - 13 DAYS

New puppies can't hear or see well and will stay close to their mother and littermates. Breeders will provide a warm environment to keep them comfortable and safe.

13 - 20 DAYS

By 13 days, puppies' eyes open and they begin to hear (and even walk, in a wobbly fashion!) They will also start to respond to taste and smell.

21 - 28 DAYS

This period is marked by very rapid sensory development, making environmental stability crucial. Pups experience a more pronounced sense of sight and hearing and begin learning from the mother alongside their littermates.

21 - 49 DAYS

21-49 days is critically important to a puppy developing a stable emotional temperament. In general, the Primary Socialization period lasts from 3-5 weeks – they can begin positive training sessions at 5 weeks – while the Secondary Socialization period takes place from 6-12 weeks. Puppies should be left to learn and play with their mother (who begins to wean puppies between 4-8 weeks) and littermates.

At this age, puppies learn species-specific behaviour, like biting, chasing, barking, fighting, and body posturing. They begin to accept discipline from their mother and learn to use important postures, as well as to not bite too hard. They socialize with their littermates and develop an understanding of leadership through play. Leaving the litter before 7 weeks can affect a puppy's ability to get along with other dogs.

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 7 - 12 WEEKS

This age is perhaps the most vital period of a puppy's development, defined by rapid learning. Puppies are completely weaned from their mother and possess fully functional brains but a clean behavioural slate.

The best time to bring a puppy into its new home is around week 8 – studies indicate that “the 49th day” is a critical milestone. This is an ideal time for education and socialization, though it is important to keep in mind the puppy's physical limitations and short attention span.

 8 - 11 WEEKS

During these 4 weeks, dogs generalize their experiences. As a result, anything that frightens the puppy will have a longer-lasting effect than any other time, making it especially important to avoid physical or psychological trauma.

Gentle guidance and management are essential at this age. Training should be kept short and fun as your puppy continues to socialize.

 10 - 16 WEEKS

By this time, your puppy has been home for approximately 6 weeks. It is natural for pups at this stage to attempt to clarify and resolve leadership questions, so it's important to establish and preserve your role as the family leader by providing structure, creating and maintaining a schedule, and using your body language and voice tones to show approval and disapproval of behaviours.

 4 - 8 MONTHS

Now your pup is changing physiologically (much like a teenager going through puberty). While early training is extremely important, no amount of diligence will prevent a puppy this age from trying to assert itself; they will seem to forget everything they learned as they challenge your leadership. It is important to be aware of this and ride it out – a secure den area can help minimize human frustrations at this stage, which can last from a few days to several weeks.

Among the many changes, your pup will be uncomfortable because his adult teeth are growing in. Be prepared to provide appropriately sized (large enough to prevent choking) chew toys.

 6 - 18 MONTHS

6-18 months is the time that puppies begin to mature sexually: males begin to lift their leg to mark territory, and females have their first heat period at anywhere from 6-12 months. It is a time marked by growth spurts, which are characterized by rising confidence, reactivity, and even recurrences of teenage flakiness. Dogs may become protective and territorial, be suddenly apprehensive about new situations, things, and people, and may make a new attempt to take on the role of leader towards/for their owners.

This age requires lots of patience. Owners should take care to not reinforce temporary fears by praising or petting their fearful dog – reassurance tells puppies it is okay to be frightened! Instead, dogs should be encouraged to work out their fears on their own, building confidence through training while avoiding overwhelming situations.

Also, be sure to speak to your vet about the benefits of spaying and neutering your dog, and the best timing for this procedure based on your dog's gender and breed.