

# Step 9 – The Teenage Years

**S**cientifically known as 'secondary socialisation' this is the period where puppies carry on maturing and make the transition to adult hood. Dogs will mature physically, improve co-ordination and refine their existing skills.

Depending on the breed of dog this period will usually start from 3-4 months of age and carry on up to 18 months for giant breeds. During this time, dogs will gain their permanent teeth and reach sexual maturity; between 6-16 months for bitches and 10-12 months for males.

Naturally there will be an onset of different behaviours. Dogs will have an inclination to roam and mounting dogs can become prevalent with males. Both bitches and males can become territorial and you can clearly see a difference in personality as they change mindset from playful pups to more independent adults.

During this time, dogs will increase in confidence and underlying issues can come

to fruition. A dog that was once slightly shy and nervous can become outwardly aggressive with the change of mind set and chemical alterations.

Many dogs will also start to push their boundaries and depending on the reaction of adults or other dogs, it is quite easy for new behaviours to be formed and practiced.

With so many changes taking place this is a critical time of the dog's life and one that should be approached with much thought. It is very easy for training to regress, dogs will often appear to be ignoring commands that you know, they have already learnt. Parts of the house, things that you haven't even considered to be a problem may start to get the attention of the dog. If left unsupervised, dogs could quite easily land themselves in mischief, either destroying or becoming obsessed with certain things or areas within your property. Examples of this would be; a certain patch in the garden where they start to dig or an area in the kitchen they begin to chew.



It may sound negative but often, this period is best approached as 'damage limitation'. Trying best not to undo the good things your dog has learnt and preventing them from learning new bad habits. It may appear to be counter productive but limiting the amount they get to play with other dogs can also help. Quality over quantity is the best approach during secondary socialisation. Your dog will have hopefully had enough positive and rewarding experiences earlier on in their life that reducing the time they are with other dogs is not going to cause a problem. If you have used a day crèche or day-care for your dog, you will be better off stopping this service until they have matured.

Mental stimulation exercises will be extremely beneficial, giving needed outlets for built up energy and frustration. It is

also useful to have calming sessions with your dog. Instead of playing frantically and letting them get excited, sit on the floor and calmly stroke the dog slowly and firmly. This is almost like a massage and is great for strengthening your bond too.

One main point to consider during this period is neutering. This can calm your dog and lengthen the period of their puppy like behaviour. There are many things to consider and it is unprofessional to use a blanket statement that all dogs should be neutered at 5-6months. Always seek advice before deciding what to do. It is important that your dog is in the right emotional and physical state before neutering; otherwise it can create adverse effects to their behaviour and physical condition.

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