

Mental Development and Training

| Age in Weeks | STAGE 1 |
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| 0-7 | <p>Puppy is learning good potty habits, bite inhibition, and playing with other dogs. This is where much of the dog's confidence and trust is developed. Many of the behavior problems we see in dogs is because the puppies were not nurtured properly by their owners at these stages. Do not bring a puppy home before 7 weeks. It must stay with its mom and siblings at this stage.</p> <p>A good breeder will already have taught the puppy sit, follow, leash walking, sleeping in a crate, and riding in a car. They will also have had lots of people handle the puppy.</p> <p>This is the dog imprinting stage.</p> |
| 6-12 | <p>This is the secondary socialization period. Puppies require plenty of play time with other dogs and with people for them to develop good social skills. The puppy's mental development is dependent on the complexity of their environment. The more changes are in their environment, and the more fun they have, the smarter, calmer, and more confident the adult dog should be.</p> <p>All training needs to be positive, food reinforced, and followed by play.</p> <p>The window of opportunity is closing. This is the stage of rapid learning. They learn 'how' to learn. They learn communication skills. This is when puppies learn what is expected of them. But remember they still have a very short attention span.</p> <p>This is the people imprinting stage ends at 12 weeks</p> |
| 8 -9 | <p>Volhart temperament test is done on the 49th day. Puppies temperament is 'fixed'. This is the time when a puppy is most likely to develop strong bonds with people. It is the time to forget corrections or punishments. In a perfect world have the puppy follow you around all day. Interact with the puppy lots, and make it happy. You will reap the rewards when you start training.</p> <p>This is the time I start getting puppies to be calm when driving. I may start by just having an excited puppy in the car (with me) and have the car not moving.</p> <p>A puppy should be accustomed to a home environment by now. It should be use to all the scary noises, smells, and the routine. People coming and going, cars driving by. If your puppy grew up in a kennel, or wasn't socialized, or was raised in a basement then forget everything but potty training and teaching the puppy that houses are great.</p> |

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| | <p>Puppies can start learning to sleep alone at this time.</p> <p>Your puppies senses are developed by 9 weeks, but its coordination still needs help</p> |
| 8-11 | <p>The Fear Period. The puppy is forming object associations. It is associating emotions with things. It will see something and build an association with the object and safety and happiness, or fear. Don't teach the puppy to fear you by losing your temper, punishing, or forcing it into situations it doesn't want to go. Avoid anything that might cause fear or stress. If you need to go to the vets then make it fun and give the puppy lots of treats and play. Puppies feel that anything is good if there is food involved.</p> <p>The adult dog's behaviors, reactions, and manners are starting to develop. This isn't the time to let the puppy run around biting you, run wild in the back yard, and spend hours playing independently. Many people let their puppies do whatever they want and then in 2 weeks go to obedience class hoping there is a 'quick fix' for their little monster.</p> <p>The fear imprinting stage ends at 10 – 11 weeks.</p> |
| 8-12 | <p>This is the time you can best prevent behaviors and imprint new behaviors like being calm, bite inhibition, staying quiet, and following (which turns into heeling).</p> <p>Your puppy should start asking to go out to potty. You can start training the puppy to ring a bell, or do something to ask to be let out.</p> |
| 6 – 12 | <p>This is your dog's most crucial people socialization period. The puppy needs to 'see' (but not necessarily meet) all sorts of people, in a happy calm environment. It is especially important that the puppy meet lots of men and children. Look for people who are dressed different, beards, loud and moving, quiet and still, heavy, skin tones, etc.</p> <p>Do not force the puppy to let people pet it. Do not let people run up to the puppy and excitedly talk or move. Don't teach the puppy to be afraid of people. A puppies impression of people is firmly fixed at 12 weeks old – for the rest of its life.</p> <p>Your puppy should come, sit, lay down, and follow you when on a leash. If your puppy doesn't then seek professional help. Practice more. We practice puppy exercises 2 – 5 minutes, 10-20 times a day, followed by 1 – 2 minutes of play.</p> |
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| Age in Weeks | STAGE 2 |
| 10-16 | Seniority Classification Stage. Either you are getting your own way, or the puppy is. One of you are winning. Whoever wins is the alpha. |
| 12 | The puppy's character is set. You have run out of time to influence whether your puppy will be independent or bonded/loyal, calm or crazy, solve problems or be reactive, etc. |
| 12 | <p>Start puppy socialization classes, off leash if you have a good training center with certified trainers in your area. Start puppy obedience classes. Do not take your puppy to a dog park, or walk it where adult dogs can bully it.</p> <p>If you are going to compete with your dog, then you want to start working on the behaviors that the puppy will need later. For example, if you are going to do agility then you want your puppy to hand target and reorient back to me. If you want to do rally and obedience, then you want to build the follow and 'look at me' behaviors. You also want to do these behaviors if you are going to take your puppy into public or around crowds.</p> |
| 12 - 20 | <p>This pre-adolescent period is characterized by the gradual increase of independence and confidence. The puppy will venture further and further from you side, motivated by his own curiosity and increasing confidence in the world.</p> <p>This is the time you socialize. Introduce something new to the puppy daily. Do the 100 people, places, things socialization. Have the puppy explore – but with you. It is VITAL that your puppy learns to develop a 'teamwork' relationship with you, not learn to be independent.</p> <p>Start taking the puppy for short walks as soon as your vet says it is safe to do so. Do not force the puppy to walk until tired. It is vital that a puppy is given time to explore and sniff the world. Most dogs who are reactive when they were older were not given daily opportunities to sniff when on a walk, or taken visiting.</p> |
| 18 | This is the deadline for bite inhibition. If you haven't taught the puppy not to bite, act aggressive, or become excited when someone arrives then you will have problems when it is an adolescent, and when it becomes an adult. |
| 12 – 1 year | Your puppies tolerance for boredom will be very low. It will want to do something – with you. It will want to work. It will want to be busy. Either you give it something to do, or it will find something destructive to do. |
| 16 – 30 | Take the puppy with you everywhere, and play with it. A puppy needs to experience everything it will possibly need to encounter in its life. I introduce things and repeat until the puppy is calm in that situation, then move to something new. |
| 20 | Your puppy should follow you instead of pulling, wait calmly when you stop moving, greet strange dogs and people quietly. If these behaviors haven't been taught by 20 weeks then you will have a challenge working with the puppy until one year old, after adolescence. |

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| | <p>If you haven't taught the puppy that all things come from you, and that you make the decisions about what is done (not the puppy) then you will have a lot of work trying to make the puppy obey.</p> |
| 20 | <p>If you have a working dog then this would be a good time to start taking it to group classes and introduce it to the equipment you will use.</p> |
| | <p>Depending on the puppies development and confidence I start carrying food when on walks. If the puppy wants to meet people then I give them a treat and let them feed the puppy. I don't let them pet the puppy – especially on the head. Puppies need to learn that they must ignore and not fear that everything they see on a walk is going to engage with them.</p> |

| Age in Months | STAGE 3 |
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| 4-8 | <p>Flight Stage. The puppy will seem to forget everything it previously learned. The puppy should only be 'off leash' in controlled areas. Don't chase your puppy. It is better in this stage to let the puppy run, or steal something, and then outsmart him, than it is to teach him that having you chase him is a fun game. The puppy may act out because it is teething.</p> |
| 4-6 | <p>Continue training, in a class if possible. Begin incorporating distractions into your practice sessions. Take the puppy with you everywhere! This period is very important in cementing a bond strong enough to withstand the trials of adolescence.</p> <p>Do not stop training. Obedience/Work needs to be a lifestyle. Continue introducing unfamiliar people, dogs, and places on a weekly basis.</p> <p>Your puppy's bladder should be fully developed in this stage. It should be able to go all night without urinating.</p> |
| 5 – 6 | <p>Your puppy should be able to give you a controlled loose leash walk and a precision heel by this time. It should be able to give you a reliable 3 minute down, and 1 minute sit. It needs to let people touch it, but you need to watch. If the puppy says 'no please' then you need to ask the people to step back.</p> |
| 6-14 | <p>The second fear phase. This is where many people take their dogs to dog parks, the dog is attacked, and becomes reactive. People start getting bored with socialization and stop, increasing the chances of having a dog become fearful or nervous. Do not punish aggressive or fear displays. Instead, teach an alternative behavior.</p> <p>When out walking if your puppy doesn't want to approach someone/something then turn and 'make space' so the puppy learns that it doesn't need to resort to aggression to keep scary things away.</p> |
| 4-6 | <p>I expect a puppy to start laying quietly at my feet when I stop moving. When</p> |

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| | <p>puppies learn to stay with me and be calm I give them more freedom.</p> <p>You will probably be playing with the puppy 2x 30 to 60 minute sessions a day by now, depending on your dog's 'drive'.</p> |
| 6-9 | <p>The dog will start exhibiting sexual maturity depending on breed. The dog will start testing its boundaries and its place in the pack. This is not the time for Alpha roles, instead it is the time to lengthen the training sessions and increase the working motivation.</p> |
| 9 – 12 | <p>Your dog reaches adolescence and your wonderful pup turns into a disobedient teen. Just be patient. It will only last 4 – 8 weeks. Don't become frustrated and ruin your relationship. Note: some working and/or big breeds do not reach adolescence until 18 months.</p> |
| 12 - 18 | <p>Your dog will reach emotional maturity; sooner, for small breeds, and later for large breeds. Dogs with tendencies toward dominance will begin to assert themselves, hoping to raise their status in the home. Or they may become protective, especially if they have been allowed to 'do their own thing. This behavior occurs within a structure of familiar relationships. and when the dog approaches emotional maturity.</p> <p>Remember that you will never win a fight with a dog. The battle will just go on indefinitely. To win the dominance game you need to remain calm, aloof, and get your own way without giving the dog something to 'push/fight' against.</p> <p>This is not the time to take your puppy to a family Christmas, or a music festival, or the dog park. Avoid overwhelming and fearful things.</p> |
| 12 – 30 | <p>Maturity. You will now know when your dog can be trusted. Your dog should calm down. Hyper play and testing should diminish.</p> |
| 18 - 25 | <p>Clarence Pfaffenberger," author of The New Knowledge Of Dog Behavior " suggests there is a third fear period taking place in early adulthood. During this time, the level of aggression may increase and the dog may appear more protective and territorial. Episodes of teenage flakiness may still occur.</p> |