

Critical Periods in Canine Development

Neonatal Period (0-12 Days):

The puppy responds only to warmth, touch, and smell. He cannot regulate body functions such as temperature and elimination.

Transition Period (13 - 20 Days):

Eyes and ears are open, but sight and hearing are limited. Tail wagging begins and the puppy begins to control body functions.

Awareness Period (21 - 28 Days):

Sight and hearing functions well. The puppy is learning that he is a dog and has a great deal of need for a stable environment.

Canine Socialization Period (21 - 49 Days):

Interacting with his mother and littermates, the pup learns various canine behaviors. He is now aware of the differences between canine and human societies.

Human Socialization Period (7 to 12 Weeks):

The pup has the brain wave of an adult dog. The best time for going to a new home. He now has the ability to learn respect, simple behavioral responses: sit, stay, come. Housebreaking begins. He now learns by association. The permanent man/dog bonding begins, and he is able to accept gentle discipline and establish confidence.

Fear Impact Period (8 - 11 Weeks):

Try to avoid frightening the puppy during this time, since traumatic experiences can have an effect during this period. As you can see, this period overlaps that of the previous definition and children or animal should not be allowed to hurt or scare the puppy -- either maliciously or inadvertently. It is very important now to introduce other humans, but he must be closely supervised to minimize adverse conditioning. Learning at this age is permanent. This is the stage where you wonder if your dog is going to be a woosy butt all his life. Also introducing your puppy to other dogs at this time will help him become more socialized. If available in your area, a doggy day care is great for this.

Seniority Classification Period (13 - 16 Weeks):

This critical period is also known as the "Age of Cutting" - cutting teeth and cutting apron strings. At this age, the puppy begins testing dominance and leadership. Biting behavior is absolutely discouraged from thirteen weeks on. Praise for the correct behavior response is the most effective tool. Meaningful praise is highly important to shape positive attitude.

Flight Instinct Period (4 to 8 Months):

During this period puppies test their wings- they will turn a deaf ear when called. This period lasts from a few days to several weeks. It is critical to praise the positive and minimize the negative behavior during this time. However, you must learn how to achieve the correct response. This period corresponds to teething periods, and behavioral problems become compounded by physiological development chewing.





Second Fear Imprint Period (6 - 14 Months) **“Yikes! What’s up with that?”**

You have a puppy that is full of beans, he runs around like a clown in search of his next show. But then, BAM, he refuses to walk down some stairs, he is shaking in the car, or he jumps at the sound of the neighbor’s music. Surprise! This is normal, but you must help your dog figure out how to deal with his fears or concerns. The skills of learning how to “shake it off and keep going” will be valuable to him for the rest of his life. It will also reduce the chances that the things he fears will not be permanently imprinted for life.

What is going on:

- The puppy that was so confident will suddenly become reluctant to new things.
- This period can be subtle.
- This period can come and go several times over this entire period.
- It may appear to be unprovoked or unrelated to any specific occurrence.
- Puppy can become frustrating to owners.
- You may notice this behavior more in males.

What you can do:

- Avoid extremes in your response (no anger or forcing or over comforting)
- Be patient and understanding.
- Be aware of surrounding and potential triggers.
- Work on desensitizing him with gradual introductions with rewards.
- Avoid too much reassurance or coddling (which is a reward for this behavior)
- Don’t over react or correct the fearfulness – just make light of it and encourage him to deal with his fear (work through the fear).
- Praise with grand rewards for his attempts.
- Your dog will take his clues from you, if you act frightened or concerned he will too.

Maturity (1 - 4 years) :

Many breeds’ especially giant breeds continue to grow and physically change well beyond four years of age. The average dog develops to full maturity between 1-1 1/2 years and three years of age. This period is often marked by an increase in aggression and by a renewed testing for leadership. During this time, while testing for leadership, the dog should be handled firmly. Regular training throughout this testing period, praise him for the proper response. Giving him no inroads to affirm his leadership will remind him that this issue has already been settled.

