

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF A DOG

Your puppy will go through many stages on her road to adulthood – just like a human baby does. The most important time in your puppy’s development is during her first year, especially during the first four (4) months of her life. By understanding her development, you can provide your puppy with what she needs, when she needs it most – so she can develop into a happy, healthy, well socialized adult dog.

The Developmental Stages of a Dog chart describes the periods of development your puppy goes through, providing all the critical medical and behavioral stages that affect her.

	Development Stage	Age	Learning & Development	What to Do	Veterinary Care
	Neonatal	Birth to 11 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to eliminate or regulate body temperature without the mother • Eyes closed and unable to hear • Crawls forward and vocalizes to seek mother 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle, daily handling by humans • Ensure clothes, footwear and hands are sanitized and clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be checked by a veterinarian at 1 to 2 days to rule out birth defects
	Transitional	11 to 21 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyes open, can hear, reacts to sound and changes in light • Teeth begin erupting • Crawls forward and backward, begins to stand, begins to wag tail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expose puppy to safe, novel objects – towels with different scents, dog-safe toys, etc. • Gentle, daily handling by humans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically, none unless concerns arise
	Primary Socialization Period	3 to 7 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can use all senses fully, regulate body temperature and walk • Puppy begins learning from good experiences (i.e. positive reinforcement) • Learns species-specific behaviors (biting, chasing, barking, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a complex, stimulating environment – will help puppy develop perceptual & learning abilities • Provide clear distinction between sleep & play areas so puppy can leave living area to eliminate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss vaccine regimen with veterinarian • Fun visits to veterinarian starting as early as 4 weeks of age (see Veterinary Scavenger Hunt)



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns from littermates & mother not to bite too hard • Learns how to play with other dogs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one daily contact with humans • Very short periods (5-10 minutes) of isolation away from humans & littermates - ensure experience is positive, can use this time to begin crate training • Provide exposure to a variety of noises and different floor surfaces • Begin handling exercises (see Puppy Handling Exercises) 	
	Human Socialization Period	7 to 14 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be completely weaned from mother at 8 weeks of age • Rapid learning occurs • Greatest impact on future social behavior from experiences at this stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical socialization period - enroll in a puppy socialization class and obedience class • Continue with handling exercises (see Puppy Handling Exercises) • Ensure puppy has bite inhibition (see Puppy Biting, Nipping & Rough Play) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with fun visits to veterinarian (see Veterinary Scavenger Hunt) • Ask veterinarian how to trim your puppy's nails, spay/neuter & about microchipping
	Fear Impact Period	8 to 11 Weeks (Falls within Human Socialization Period)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puppies learn from bad experiences (i.e. they remember bad or scary things that happen to them) • Anything that frightens a puppy during this period could have a lasting effect • Period when puppies are easily frightened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with handling exercises (see Puppy Handling Exercises) • Ensure all experiences are positive • Avoid potentially scary situations that you cannot control or intervene in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with fun visits to veterinarian (see Veterinary Scavenger Hunt) • Usually none, if puppy is healthy
	Juvenile Period	3-4 Months to 5-14 Months (Sexual Maturity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puppies will attempt to clarify & resolve their boundaries • Adult teeth are replacing baby teeth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with handling exercises (see Puppy Handling Exercises) • Continue with obedience classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with fun visits to veterinarian (See Veterinary Scavenger Hunt) • Discuss Rabies vaccine & heartworm prevention with veterinarian



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	<p>Adolescent Period</p>	<p>5-14 Months (Sexual Maturity) to 2-3 Years (Social Maturity)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puppy is changing physiologically (much like a human teenager) • Puppies will test to see if all previous “rules” are the same 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your dog will go through this stage regardless of all the positive work that is done – remain positive & ride it out • Continue with handling exercises (see Puppy Handling Exercises) • Continue with obedience classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with fun visits to veterinarian (See Veterinary Scavenger Hunt) • Your puppy should be spayed/neutered by now
	<p>Second Fear Impact Period</p>	<p>Between 5 and 12 Months (Falls within Adolescent Period)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puppy may suddenly be apprehensive about new things or shy/timid of new people or situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with handling exercises (see Puppy Handling Exercises) • Continue with obedience classes • Avoid potentially scary situations that you cannot control or intervene in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with fun visits to veterinarian (See Veterinary Scavenger Hunt)
	<p>Maturity</p>	<p>1 to 4 Years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller dogs mature earlier, larger dogs later 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue using positive reinforcement for training • Consider advanced obedience classes, specialty classes (agility, nose work, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearly veterinary check-up • Remember to make veterinary visits positive each time

