

## Important information on your puppy's behavioural development that will help you better understand certain problems that may arise:

Dogs are social animals that must develop necessary communication skills to enable them to socialise with unfamiliar dogs and people. They also need to obtain certain tools to cope and adjust to environmental challenges.

### CRITICAL PERIOD

Between the ages of **3 -18 weeks** your puppy is in its **critical period** for **socialisation** (the length of which may vary according to breed). During this period your puppy needs to receive the opportunity to socialise with people and other animals.

During this period correct weaning and introduction protocols play a major role in your puppy's future in order to help them tolerate frustration and be brave dogs for life.

After the age of approx. **4 months**, the socialisation phase ends, but it is important to build on your dog's current socialisation and habituation skills.

**Habituation** means exposing your puppy to challenges so that they become desensitised to new objects and other stressful situations, including being examined by the vet.

### FEAR STAGES

Your puppy will also go through **fear stages** during its behavioural development. It is important to keep this in mind if your puppy suddenly becomes fearful of new things out of the ordinary.

The ages at which your puppy might go through a fear stage is (depending on breed):

- During the Critical period (5 -18 weeks)
- Between 5 and 6 months of age
- Approx. 9 months of age (Which is normally the most noticeable)

During such times it's important to "keep it light" and help your puppy through it without making too big a fuss, as it normally passes within a week or two.

### TEENAGE PHASE

The last and most dreadful of the stages is the **teenage phase**, which is the start of reproductive behaviour. This phase starts between the age **5- 6 months** and last up to **1 year** of age for small breed dogs, and **2 years** of age for medium to large breed dogs.

During this phase you might expect:

- Reluctance to come back
- Difficulty to train
- Increase in destructive behaviour
- Urine marking
- The start of aggressive behaviour

The good news is that it does pass. The bad news is it might get worse before it gets better. So here are some tips and tools to help you manage this phase of your puppy's life:

**Spay/ Neuter before it's too late.** The ideal time to neuter your male dog is after they have gained enough confidence to start exploring, but preferably before or as soon as they start urine marking (normally between 6 -7 months of age).

**Training and early learning.** It is never too soon or too late to start teaching your puppy helpful skills. Training from an early age will help you manage undesired behaviours.

**Be patient.** During this time, your puppy's brain is under development. Which means sometimes your puppy can not remember things it has been taught. Make it easier.

**Be consistent.** On other days, your puppy might be pushing the boundaries, which is very frustrating for the owner. Make sure to set the rules at an early stage and stick to them. If your puppy pushes back, wait for them to get it right and reward all the good behaviours in between.

**Keep your puppy on lead.** During this time your puppy will start exploring its freedom. Make sure to keep your puppy on a lead or a long lead when you are out of the yard so that you are able to get them back if necessary. The more they get it wrong, the more they're going to - so help them get it right.

**Exercise and Mental Stimulation.** Exercise such as walks, interactive games and free runs (in enclosed areas) will help burn unwanted energy and help keep your puppy/dog satisfied, but that's not all...

Life happens and it is extremely difficult to give your puppy/dog enough exercise to keep him/her stimulated for long periods of time. The result may be *destructive behaviour and excessive digging, irregular sleep patterns, hyper-activity or even breaking out of the yard.*

Mental stimulating toys, toy rotation, food toys, chews/ice lollies, smarter feeding programs e.g. scatter feeding, digging boxes/ gardens and brain games will help to naturally release Dopamine in the brain, keeping your puppy/ dog calm, happy and satisfied.

If you have an ongoing behavioural problem or need any advice/support, please contact the shelter or a qualified animal behaviourist to prevent the problem from escalating.