

Adolescence Survival Guide & the Importance of Continued Socialisation

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The most important quality in a dog is their temperament: A dog with a good temperament can be a dream to live with but a dog with a tricky temperament is a perpetual nightmare. In addition, regardless of breed or breeding, a dog's temperament — i.e. his feelings towards people and other dogs — is largely the result of socialisation (or lack of socialisation) during puppyhood — the most significant time in a dog's life and was discussed in the last newsletter. This month we are going to talk about Doggy Adolescence.



Adolescence is a time of change one day you have a cute, socialised well trained puppy and overnight he has turned into a crazy monster, running off in the park, suddenly deaf to your cues, pulling on lead, chewing up the house, jumping on visitors, stealing things when you are not looking and does

things you don't talk about in polite conversation (unless your a dog breeder) to every dog he meets. Dogs and humans are very different, but they do have this in common: teenage angst! Welcome to adolescence.

Adolescence is often a rocky period. Like human teens, adolescent dogs explore their world, testing their own abilities and pushing the boundaries in ways that owners often don't like: What's on the other side of the fence? Can I boss these other dogs? Can I catch that cat? Who's that cute Goldie? You will have to be especially vigilant to make sure that your dog's manners, behaviour and temperament do not go backwards, adolescence dogs seem to be brimming with confidence – however, they still need parental guidance, help and support. Adolescence is a challenging time; most dogs abandoned at shelters are between eight and 18 months old, at the height of adolescence. This is also a prime time for dogs to be banished to the backyard - a boring and sad place for such social

animals, but with a few sensible steps and a lot of patience you will get through this stage (it is only temporary) and your attentive, mannerly and friendly puppy will return in adulthood.

Owners of adolescence dogs often feel what was the point in training my puppy because he has forgotten everything and has no desire to do anything for me. Don't panic! The answer is to keep on training, go back to basics and reinforce simple tasks such as "Sit" which you can reward and get back on the right track; it is much easier to approach doggy adolescence with an already socialised and well-trained dog. However, maintaining your dog's socialisation and training through his adolescence can be tricky if you don't know what to expect and how to deal with it.

Characteristic Adolescent Behaviour

- **Mounting**
A perfectly natural, but embarrassing behaviour for owners which most adolescent dogs love to do both males and females, they mount other dogs, other objects like cushions, toys and humans. Dogs mount as a sexual activity, but also for fun and because it gets attention. Interrupt the behaviour calmly (ask the dog to sit – it's impossible to sit and mount the same time), then redirect the dog onto a more appropriate pastime.
- **Push your buttons**
Adolescent dogs love to wind you up over trivial matters, such as refusing to have their feet wiped, ignoring you and running round like crazy when you ask them to come inside, playing "keep away" with your shoes or refusing to get off the sofa. This type of behaviour is usually fuelled by you participating in it, so avoiding the fight is far more important than trying to win it. Stay calm; instead of getting into a battle of physical strength or a shouting match with your dog use your brain power to find away around it instead.
- **Energy**
It seems that adolescent dogs have boundless energy, so they need to release this in a variety of ways – and being destructive shouldn't be one of them. One off the best ways for them to let off steam is to spend time daily running off lead in a safe place, however, you can't do this unless your dog comes to you when called, which is why it is so important to teach your puppy to do this. Another good way to use up energy is to let your dog fulfil their needs, Golden Retrievers are gundogs; picking things up and carrying things in their mouths are hard wired behaviours that cannot be removed but they can be channelled. Provide them with an outlet for their natural drives – Teach them to retrieve! Reward them for picking their toys up.
- **No Impulse Control**

Teenagers like to be doing something that feels good and not what they are being told to do. In order to cope with life dogs need to learn self control, rather than simply reacting or overreacting. Teach them the following simple exercises to help them learn self control:

- Settle Down
- Leave it & take it
- Wait
- Chewing

All dogs need to chew not just puppies, make sure you provide your dog with appropriate chew toys otherwise they will develop a taste for your things. Dogs love novelty; it's a good idea to rotate their toys so they aren't all available at all times.

It is very important to keep socialising your adolescent dog; he needs to meet unfamiliar people on a regular basis. In other words, your dog needs to be walked at least once a day. Otherwise, he will soon grow to be wary and fearful of strangers, especially children and men. Don't take dog - dog interactions for granted, your dog needs to meet unfamiliar dogs on a regular basis. Like human teenagers, teenage dogs especially males can be a real pain in the butt around other dogs and they are often reprimanded by mature, confident dogs (which is why it is so important to have taught your dog bite inhibition as a puppy). This is not a bad thing, it teaches adolescents respect and a little self restraint, as well as appropriate social skills. However, from your teenager's point of view, he may start to feel that the world is out to get him so he needs to meet lots of dogs some will be grumpy, some will be playful and some quite dull. If he doesn't meet many dogs then those that he does encounter will have a bigger impact on his behaviour and if he has too few interactions then he will also become frustrated and anxious when he sees other dogs. Unfortunately owners keep their adolescent dogs away from other dogs because their behaviour is over-the-top, embarrassing or confrontational – which leads to a downward spiral of worsening social behaviour. One of the easiest and best ways to maintain social skills around other dogs is to keep taking them to a good training class; at the very least you will have other owners of adolescent dogs to empathise with.

Finally, even though adolescence is challenging, adolescent dogs are also great fun, bright and entertaining. Make sure you enjoy this stage in your dog's life and set the scene for years to come. Even though behaviour is always changing, hopefully for the better, but sometimes for the worse, with a large breed like the Golden Retriever behaviour and temperament will tend to stabilise, and become more resistant to change, as they reach adulthood around their third birthday. So remember Good Habits are just as hard to break as Bad Habits, Happy Training!