

Puppy Raising

The adolescent dog

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Introduction

It's important to remember that adolescence is a phase and that it won't last forever! Your puppy needs you to be their advocate and this document provides you with some ways that you can support your puppy. Remember, that every puppy is an individual and what works for one puppy might not work for another. Please contact your Puppy Development Advisor (PDA) for further advice if your puppy is struggling.

Sources:

What Happens When Dogs Hit Adolescence? - Dog Discoveries

The Adolescent Dog - Canine Coaching

Discovering the Effects of Testosterone on Dog Behavior - Dog Discoveries

Puppy Puberty: How Does a Dog's Behaviour Change in Adolescence? (adaptil.com)

Dog Puberty: What You Need to Know | Purina

What do we mean by the adolescence phase?

The adolescence phase in dogs takes place anywhere between 6 and 18 months of age, but there are strong individual differences. During this phase, your puppy's brain and endocrine system go through a major development. Testosterone in males and oestrogen in females are responsible for some of the physical as well as behavioural changes you might notice. However, each puppy is an individual and how these changes will affect them will differ. Research has also shown that the environment and experiences the adolescent dog has during this period also strongly influence their behaviour. They can also experience growing pains because of the rapid growth that often takes place in this phase. During this time, our puppies are still at a

vulnerable age. The adolescent stage in dogs is a transitory time during which dogs start looking more and more like adults, but their brain may still retain some puppy-like behaviours. The way other dogs treat them will start to change, their 'puppy privileges' are taken away. Male adolescent dogs produce more testosterone than an adult male and this can lead to a different reaction when meeting other dogs. Coping with these changes is just as confusing for your puppy, as it is for you.

Behaviour changes

In both males and females

- Your puppy might seem to have forgotten everything they have learned.
- They may start to become more independent (increased desire to explore) or already insecure dogs may become more insecure.
- The response from other dogs towards your pup might change as they lose their 'puppy privileges', other dogs might not be so tolerant of your puppy being too frank in their approach.
- They might become more dog focused.
- They will become physically stronger (males mainly).
- They can become more scent motivated.
- They can start scent marking, urinating more frequently.
- They may have an increased need to chew.
- You might notice increased energy and stamina.

In female dogs

A female dog can get her first season anywhere between 6 – 15 months. The entire season lasts about 3-4 weeks. Behaviour changes you might see specifically related to being in season are:

- Being less tolerant.
- Seeking out more dog interaction.

- Running away.
- Whining.
- Becoming more restless.
- Cleaning herself more.
- Seeking attention.
- Sometimes they can become quieter.



Think of your puppy's needs they are changing.

General tips on managing your puppy through adolescence



Knowing your puppy

It is easy to fall into the trap to contribute all unintended behaviours to your puppy being an adolescent. This is labelling, and yes, hormones can play a part but always remember that labels can prevent us from looking more closely at what we see, and we might miss things because of this. Have certain behaviours been reinforced without intention? Try to describe what you see. For example, it is more helpful to say; 'When I open the car boot and give the cue, my dog remains sitting, until I throw a treat in the car.' This defines what happens before you open boot (what does the dog perceive to be the cue?), the behaviour that happens ('sitting') and what happens after, the consequence (treat thrown in the car). This opens our mind to consider throwing in the treat has maintained that behaviour – i.e., the dog thinks opening the boot is the cue to sit and throwing a treat in the car the (release) cue to jump in, reinforced by getting the treat as a reward. It also makes us consider alternative options as to why it's happening such as health.

- Think of your puppy's needs, they are changing. Provide your dog with enough physical and mental stimulation.
- Keep a diary to try to identify when and why the behaviour occurs and think about how you can manage the situation to prevent the behaviour occurring.



Managing for success

- Try to make the right choices for your puppy. For example, continue socialisation with calm dogs rather than excitable dogs and walk in areas where you know they can cope, and continue to build on from there referring to your Puppy Raising Guidance Chapters.
- Make use of (natural) visual barriers where possible.
- Increase distance where possible, distance is your friend.



Try to describe what you see and keep an open mind to why this behaviour is occurring



Teaching foundations

- Make things easier for you and your puppy, do not be afraid to go back a few steps or increase your rate of reinforcement to help your puppy out.
- Use high value reinforcers where your puppy struggles.



Being a partnership

- Be patient with yourself and your puppy and be consistent.

Tip: refer to the following guidance;

- Please read the document *Your first week* for support on topics such as mouthing, chewing and appropriate play.
- Please read the document *Preparing for your puppy* for support on topics such as your puppy and children and crate training.

The adolescent dog Q&A

The adolescent dog and children

Please read the document Preparing for you puppy for detailed guidance.

Phantom pregnancies

A phantom pregnancy is when a female dog exhibits physical and behavioural signs of being pregnant when they are not. This often occurs after a season and is a result of the body producing progesterone (the pregnancy hormone) causing a false pregnancy.

Possible symptoms:

- Mammary development.
- Lactation (producing milk).
- Enlarged belly.
- Loss of appetite.
- Lethargy.
- Vomiting.
- Nesting – this can involve digging in or ripping up bedding.
- Nursing, being protective of small inanimate objects.
- Restlessness or aggression.

If suspected, please contact Guide Line to discuss if medication is required. Usually, it will resolve itself after 2-3 weeks, but this is not always the case. Contact your PDA for support around any behavioural changes.

Recognise your dog is behaving differently as a result of a hormonal disbalance in their body, avoid putting unnecessary pressure on them. Make things easier, set

them up for success. Be their advocate and provide a safe and calm environment.

Toileting inside the home

- Give your puppy more opportunities to go to the toilet, start with every hour and gradually increase.
- Go outside with your puppy to make sure they are actually toileting (you can try them both on and off-lead). Reward them when they do.
- Limit access to parts of your home if toileting occurs in particular areas.
- Discuss with your Dog Health & Wellbeing Specialist or PDA to make sure there are no potential health concerns.
- Monitor the amount of water your puppy is drinking and are there any reasons for excess drinking?
- Clean any areas with products designed to eliminate odours from scent marking.
- Keep a toileting diary – any patterns or environmental triggers?

Chewing inappropriate items or destroying things

- Provide plenty of outlets for your puppy to chew e.g., toys, chews, Nyla bones, destruction boxes (cardboard), frozen puppy keys/KONG®, etc.
- Monitor for particular times of day chewing occurs and provide your dog with something to chew, also stop to think if there can be an underlining reason such as separation anxiety.
- Monitor for particular types of items being chewed (hard, soft, rubber etc) and provide appropriate chew items in similar material.
- Consider the amount and type of mental and physical enrichment you're giving your puppy. Consider whether you could offer your puppy more mental

and/or physical enrichment. Your puppy might simply be getting bored as their mental and physical stamina increases. For example, you could do some 'scent work' teaching your puppy to find objects or food rewards in the house by using their nose. Start easy! You can find some fun ideas on the internet but please check with your PDA to make sure they are suitable for your puppy.

- Consider introducing or reintroducing a crate or pen if your puppy no longer has one. Please read the document *Your first week* or ask your PDA for support with this if you are unsure.
- Bear in mind this could also be attention seeking behaviour, have you accidentally reinforced it by chasing them for example (this can be a fun game for your puppy). Ask your PDA for support if you think this might be the case.

Mouthing

- Mouthing can occur for different reasons. Try to think why your puppy might be doing this. Is it over arousal are they unsure about something or might there be pain or frustration or are they simply bored? This will help you choose the best strategy e.g., if they are unsure, you can increase distance and work on building confidence, if there is pain you can contact the Guide Line or your PDA. See other tips in the section on Chewing.
- Think about how you can manage the situation to prevent the behaviour occurring. For example, mouthing when you walk in the room (can you have a toy ready to give to your puppy immediately, but stay calm and avoid talking and greeting them in an excited way, only acknowledging and reinforcing calm behaviours). If it happened in the moment, could you try the following;
 - Redirect mouthing behaviour onto an appropriate toy or chew, if you do so stay calm and do not engage in play, you want to manage the situation

and avoid reinforcing the behaviour as much as you can.

- If nothing is around to redirect the mouthing onto, play 'dead' and do not move or talk at all – pulling away only encourages more mouthing and talking will often increase excitement. Playing 'dead' takes the fun out of the 'game,' and they are more likely to lose interest.
- Provide your puppy with a toybox and/or access to a variety of toys – please read the document Preparing for your puppy for some ideas. Tidy away and rotate your puppy's toys for the novelty effect.
- Movement can create excitement which can lead to mouthing, move slowly, or stop when you see your puppy getting excited. Wait till your puppy is calm before moving again slowly, reinforcing calm behaviour.
- If you are outside on a walk when mouthing occurs – use distance to move away from the cause of excitement or take a toy with you and offer it to puppy to hold, but do not encourage excitement by engaging in play.
- If you are at home – leave the room if possible and come back when your dog is showing signs of relaxation to reinforce calming down. Repeat if needed.

Separation related behaviours

- Separation related behaviours are any undesired behaviours that occur when your puppy is separated from any or specific humans.
- When this occurs as a female comes into season, please contact your PDA first. It might be better to reduce time left on her own during this period as she might return to 'normal' once her season is over.
- There are several Puppy Raising Guidance Chapters that can support you and your puppy with being alone comfortably. Please read the document Social behaviour and settling on a lead.

Other suggestions are:

- Introduce your puppy to friends and family before having them puppy-sit.
- Provide comfortable beds downstairs (multiple types: soft, hard, doughnut, mattresses, etc).
- Make note of which bed's or surfaces your puppy prefers.
- Consider whether your puppy has had enough stimulation (physical and mental) and provide your puppy with things to do.

Scent marking – an increase in marking behaviour

- Please read the document Walking on a lead for support. It can help to go back to the initial stages of training.
- Try increasing your rate of reinforcement and or choose higher value food rewards in areas you know your puppy struggles. If this does not work use an emergency lure of a food reward on your puppy's nose to get them past trees, lampposts, bus stops and other areas where they will be likely to scent mark.
- Offer the opportunity to toilet more frequently for adolescent dogs to allow for natural behaviour to occur, over time you can reduce the frequency again.
- Avoid highly populated dog areas as your puppy is more likely to scent mark, if you can't, then either cue where you can strongly predict your puppy will scent mark or practice name response while passing by and reinforce for looking at you.
- Walk your puppy with the road on their left – the less interesting (less scent) side of the pavement.

Going where you don't want them to

- How can you manage the environment to prevent this from happening e.g., install a baby gate? Please read the document Preparing for your puppy for more information on how to do this.

- Make sure you provide comfortable beds (multiple types: soft, hard, doughnut or mattresses), toys, water etc. where you'd like them to be.

Digging the garden

- Digging is a natural behaviour, so we need to channel it when it occurs.
- Provide an area for your puppy to dig (like a child's sand pit with food rewards and toys hidden inside).
- Restrict access to areas of the garden that are being dug. Digging is often (but not always) a temporary behaviour.
- Supervise time in garden and redirect behaviour before digging occurs.
- Keep your puppy on the lead or a longline (if this has been introduced by your PDA) in the garden.

Counter surfing and stealing

- Please read the document Social behaviour and settling on a lead.
- Restrict access to the kitchen any or room that the stealing behaviour occurs using baby gates or by closing doors.
- Avoid leaving food or items in reach of your puppy.
- Keep all food rewards that are in the home as high up as possible.
- Provide your puppy with enrichment before cooking and mealtimes.
- Close bags and do not leave things on the floor that are not intended for your puppy.

Breakdown of recall or poor recall

- Please read the document Recall and off-lead.
- Try to only recall your puppy when you know they will respond. When you call them, give them time to think and respond and resist repeating the cue. If they don't respond go and collect your puppy instead.

- Practice recall a lot when you don't 'need' it to build successful responses and prevent the pup from anticipating the fun ends when being called.
- Practice off lead;
 - in enclosed spaces.
 - without any other dogs.
- If your puppy requires a longline and harness, it must be Guide Dogs approved equipment and be supplied and introduced by your PDA.

Humping

Bear in mind humping is not always sexual, it can also be because your puppy is unsure or frustrated or is simply trying to get your attention. It is a natural behaviour and can be temporary, however some dogs continue to show this behaviour throughout their lives. If it persists, talk to your PDA.

People and objects

- Try to establish why your puppy is showing this behaviour for example by keeping a diary recording when the behaviour occurs.
- Redirect your puppy onto a toy before or during the humping episode.
- Give your puppy a dedicated outlet for humping e.g., a bed or a large stuffed toy.
- Provide your puppy with a toybox giving them free access to toys.

Dogs

- Keep a diary of the other dogs that your puppy humps (the breed of dog, sex, neutering status, size, colour etc). Where possible try to avoid these dogs or manage your puppy's behaviour around them e.g., by having your puppy on the lead.

- Work on being calm when introducing other dogs, lead walk together for a while to make sure they are calm before of leading your puppies together.
- During off-lead sessions observe your puppy, when they start becoming too excited put them on the lead until they have calmed down again. If they don't calm down, increase distance, or leave the situation.
- Exercise your puppy off-lead on a longline and harness to keep a distance from other dogs - equipment must be Guide Dogs approved and be supplied and introduced by your PDA.
- Exercise your puppy off-lead in low dog populated areas.

Increased interest in scent

- Discuss with your PDA when you're next in contact.
- Give your puppy enough opportunity to sniff to satisfy their natural curiosity alongside times where they are unable to sniff.. It is part of their natural development and research has shown puppies and dogs that are allowed to sniff enough during developmental stages become more confident.
- Offer other outlets for sniffing e.g., snuffle mats, create a snuffle corner or games where you hide some food rewards around the room.
- Emergency lure your puppy (put a food reward on their nose) past trees, lampposts, bus stops and other areas likely to be scent marked.
- Walk your puppy with the road on their left, where there is less scent.

Over arousal (dog – dog and human interaction)

- Keep a diary of what causes your puppy to become over aroused and practice self-control around the areas they struggle with.

- Practice the skill of going from arousal to calmness and vice versa, your PDA can explain how to do this.
- Offer a toy to redirect excitement onto. This is only a management tool, alongside you should be working on self-control and teach them to be calm, using the suggested Puppy Raising Guidance Chapters.
- Think about how you can manage any situation where your puppy gets excited. For example, if they jump up at visitors, have your puppy on the lead or behind a baby gate when visitors arrive and do not let them greet the person until they are calm. Refer to the guidance 'Greeting People' for more info.
 - Ask people to ignore your puppy when they are too excited to avoid them jumping up.
 - Remember that distance is always your friend.
 - Give your puppy plenty of opportunity to de-escalate and decompress e.g., brain games, snuffle mat, chews, or KONG®.
 - You can use an emergency lure.

Increased interest in the 'outside world' – distracted

- Distance is your friend. Keep your puppy at a safe distance (a distance where they can still focus on you) around the distraction. At a safe distance allow them the opportunity to watch, reinforce for looking back at you. Please read the document Being out and about for further information.
- Use an emergency lure (putting a food reward on your puppy's nose) to get them past any major distractions.
- Where appropriate and safe, avoid close contact by managing the environment for example, cross the road or wait behind a wall or visual barrier until a distraction has passed.

- Use a Guide Dogs approved t-touch harness so you can control your puppy and steer them away from distractions. Your PDA should first show you how to correctly fit and use the harness. Additional guidance is available that your PDA can provide you with.

Barking at people

Keep a diary of what your puppy barks at to try to establish why they are barking. It could be to get attention because they want to get something or somewhere – because they are frustrated or confused – or you have previously accidentally reinforced it?

- Barking for attention:
 - Refer to the guidance 'Social behaviour and settling on a lead'.
 - stop whatever you are doing when the dog starts barking and calmly and quietly leave the room for a couple of minutes. Upon returning to the room, encourage the dog to settle in their bed, if no more barking has happened you could give them a stuffed KONG®, bone or put some of their food rewards into a snuffle mat for them. In this instance it would be best to use food toys that encourage the dog to lie down and chew or lick (such as frozen stuffed KONG® or licky mats) or engage in sniffing (such as snuffle mats), rather than really active toys that encourage lots of movement.
- Barking due to frustration and confusion:
 - Try to make it easier for them, adolescent dogs 'forget' what they have learned, this is a confusing time for them, and you can help by taking your training a few steps back, increase your rate of reinforcement or use higher value rewards. Their attention span is quite low at this stage of their lives because everything else is so much more interesting all of a sudden.

- Please read the document 'Learning to play and mouthing' for how to help your puppy build up frustration tolerance by offering them food toys.

Pulling on the lead

- Please read the document 'Walking on a lead' guidance.
- Provide distance from distractions where possible.
- If you can, walk your puppy with the road on their left, to avoid walking your pup closely to scent areas such as lamp posts, hedges, etc.
- When they pull, freeze until they release tension on the lead (this might take a while initially). Gradually asking more of them e.g., to look at you – come towards you- walk a pace next to you – walk several paces next to you etc.
- When they pull, walk in the opposite direction away from what they want to pull towards.
- Think of why the dog may be pulling, for instance is it towards an off-lead area? If so, walk another way or drive to another area to walk the dog where it is not anticipating going to an off-lead area. Or use the car to drive to these areas rather than walking.

Why has the castration/neutering age been set where it is?

Research has shown that neutering and castrating at a young age can have welfare and health implications for the dog. In 2021, Guide Dogs updated its Neutering of Dogs Statement taking into full consideration the most recent scientific evidence-based research, ensuring the physical and behavioural health and wellbeing of our dogs, the organisations ethical obligation to mitigate against uncontrolled dog breeding and meeting the needs of our service users.

A summary of areas where increased health risks have been observed can be found below.

[Please click on the following link to read the full article - www.dogsnaturallymagazine.com/three-reasons-to-reconsider-spayneuter/](http://www.dogsnaturallymagazine.com/three-reasons-to-reconsider-spayneuter/)

- Hip dysplasia.
- Cruciate ligament tears.
- Obesity and loss of bone mass.
- Certain types of cancer - lymphosarcoma, mast cell cancer, lymphoma, bone sarcoma, prostate cancer despite the popular belief that neutering prevents prostate cancer.
- Neutering and behaviour - neutered dogs would be more likely to develop behaviour disorders such as:
Fear of storms - Separation anxiety - Fear of noises
- Timidity - Excitability - Aggression - Hyperactivity - Fear biting. In addition, studies showed that dogs had an increased risk of developing Hypothyroidism which often causes behaviour changes.

Age for neutering

With the exception of dogs selected for the breeding programme:

- Castration should not be performed on any dog before 12 months of age, but before commencing training.
- Spay should not take place until the bitch has had at least one season (post puberty) and should not be performed before 12 months of age, but before commencing training.
- German shepherds, poodles, curly coated retrievers, and their crossbreeds should be castrated or spayed later than 12 months of age and ideally closer to 14 months of age.