



## **Puppy Stages of Development**

### **Approximate Age Span of Puppyhood**

- First 7 Weeks (Neonatal Period and Transition Period)
- 3–13 to 16 Weeks (Critical Socialization Period)
- 8-11 Weeks (Fear Period)
- 4–6 Months (Pre-Adolescent Period)

Puppyhood is the most crucial imprinting and learning period in a dog's life. Once a puppy opens their eyes and ears, they are bombarded with stimuli and first impressions are big and permanent. Socialization, as well as confidence and temperament training are the most important priorities, particularly during the first four months. The foundation built during this stage of life will help shape your adult dog's personality and temperament, improve your bond, and prevent behavioral issues before they ever start.

### **What things can happen to negatively affect a dog during this stage?**

**Fear Period**-Somewhere between 8-11 weeks, puppies commonly go through a fear period. During this time, puppies are especially impressionable and any frightening or aversive experiences can cause negative associations that can last a lifetime. It is imperative at this stage that you be hyper vigilant about either preventing, or quickly putting an end to any situation your puppy finds scary.

**Under-socialization**-Unfortunately, there is still a debate as to whether puppies should be socialized before being fully vaccinated. Fortunately, more and more owners are educating themselves and recognizing that the critical socialization period is the best opportunity we have to influence our dog's behavior. The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior released a position statement on early puppy socialization stating their belief that, "It should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated." When we compare the risk factor of a puppy contracting disease due to responsible early socialization, to the risk factor of a

dog being euthanized due to behavior problems, it is a no brainer! **Millions** of dogs are euthanized every year because of behavior and temperament problems.

**What are the best training techniques that are best for this stage?**

During puppyhood, pups should be exposed to as many different types of people (especially men and children), situations, locations, and other well socialized pets as possible without causing fear. Puppies should be handled often and encouraged to explore, play, investigate and problem solve.

By enrolling in a puppy class, you can safely socialize your puppy, work on bite inhibition, instill manners and build a basic obedience foundation all at the same time! Training should be based in positive reinforcement and concentrate on consistency, communication, patience and mutual respect. You must remember that your puppy is an ESL student and must be taught *everything*. Training should be done in short intervals as puppies need lots of brain breaks. They also need lots of rewards such as praise, play, affection, and/or treats. These types of methods are proven to be the most effective way to build a bond and prevent behavioral issues. The debunked methods that focus on dominance, punishment and/or tools that cause pain, are outdated and can actually do more harm than good.