

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PUPPY

There's so much to know about taking care of a puppy; there's also much to understand about training a puppy. How do you begin? You begin by first learning about what makes a puppy a puppy - what he needs, what he responds to, what he can do. This chapter then is your introductory course in basic puppy.

THE FIVE CRITICAL PERIODS

Scientific studies have shown that there are 5 critical periods in a puppy's life, that is 5 phases of mental development during which adverse conditions can cripple a dog emotionally without hope for recovery. Conversely, positive conditions during these 5 phases of emotional growth can produce dogs of the highest calibre - mentally and socially. So important are these findings, that guide dog foundations instituted these "positive conditions" for puppies being raised to become leaders of the blind. Dogs trained to lead the blind receive the most rigorous and exacting training of any dogs and therefore must be perfectly adjusted.

Dr Paul J Scott directed a project to determine just when these critical periods took place. The consequences of a person's failure to acknowledge and respond to these critical periods were demonstrated on one particular test. A puppy 21 days old was removed from the litter and completely isolated. Although the puppy was fed and watered, the caretaker was careful not to play with or speak to it. The only toys the experimental puppy had were his water bucket and food dish. By 16 weeks of age, the puppy had no contact with other dogs (except during the first 21 days of its life) and no human contact except the caretaker.

At 4 months of age, the experimental puppy was once again placed with its litter mates. He did not recognise them, either as litter mates or as dogs! His isolation during the critical periods of his life - his complete removal from the companionship of dogs and humans - had marked his character to the extent that he could not adjust to animal or human society.

First Critical Period: 0 - 20 days (0 to 3 weeks)

As a result of many years of scientific research, it has been determined that the first critical period covers the entire first 3 weeks of a puppy's life, 0 to 20 days. During this period, a puppy's mental capacity is nearly zero, and the puppy reacts only to its needs of warmth, food, sleep, and its mother. Tests were conducted to determine whether a puppy was capable of learning anything at all during the first critical period; it was determined that it was not.

Second Critical Period: 21 - 28 days (3 to 4 weeks)

Scientists found, however, that something nearly miraculous happened on the 21st day, and it occurs in all dogs, regardless of breed. On the 21st day, all of a puppy's senses begin to function. The senses were present in the puppy during the first critical period, but were dormant. The 21st day marks the beginning of the second critical period.

During this period (21st to 28th day) the new puppy needs its mother more than at any other time. The brain and nervous system begin to develop. Awareness begins to take place, and in this mental state, a puppy's experiences can be rather frightening. A puppy removed from its mother during this second critical period will never attain the mental and emotional growth that it could.

During the second critical period, the social stress of being alive has its greatest impact on a puppy. No other time in a dog's life is so crucial to emotional growth.

It is during the second critical period that the characteristic of nervousness can generate shyness and other negative qualities in a puppy. Once negative characteristics have been allowed to develop (during the second critical period) no amount of reconditioning or training later in life will alter the negative characteristics.

Third Critical Period: 29 - 49 days (4 to 7 weeks)

The third critical period is the fifth through to the seventh week (29 to 49 days). At that age, puppies will venture away from the nest - although not very far - and do a little exploring. At the beginning of a puppy's 6th week, the awareness of society will dawn; that is, the society of man and the society of dog. A puppy's nervous system and his trainability are developing and, by the end of the 3rd critical period, will have developed to capacity. Unfortunately some dog books say that a puppy has the brain of an adult at the conclusion of the 3rd critical period. This is not true, and research proves it.

At the conclusion of the 3rd critical period (the 7th week of age), the puppy's nervous system and trainability have developed to capacity, so a more comprehensive look at what takes place during this 3rd critical period is certainly in order.

During this period a puppy will learn to respond to voices and will begin to recognise people. A social "pecking order" will be established among the puppies in the litter. Some of the puppies will learn to fight for their food and will learn to be bullies. The litter mates that are cowed by aggressive tendencies of the others will become shy.

Scientific tests have shown that it is advantageous for a puppy to remain with the litter long enough to acquire a little competitive spirit, but that too much is detrimental to the puppy's emotional growth. The pups that remain in the litter after the 7th week will begin to develop bullyish or cowed tendencies - which will remain with them into adulthood. The longer a puppy remains with the litter after completing the 7th week of its life, the more deteriorated the emotional growth of that puppy will be.

At the end of the 3rd critical period, the puppy is considered emotionally developed and ready to learn, but the puppy does not possess an adult brain at that age.

Fourth Critical Period: 50 - 84 days (7 to 12 weeks)

The trainability of a puppy is ripe and operating to capacity as the puppy enters the 8th week of life. Thus, the puppy enters the 4th critical period of emotion; growth (50 to 84 days). What the puppy learns during the 4th critical period will be retained and become part of the dog's personality. If a puppy is left with its mother during the 4th critical period, its emotional development will be crippled. The puppy will remain dependent upon her, but in her will find very little, if any, security.

When a puppy remains with the litter beyond this time - and without adequate human contact - its social adjustment to human society will be crippled, and what it learns will be learned from the littermates. The optimum time for taking a puppy into a new household is at the conclusion of the puppy's 7th week.

Because a pup's trainability and learning facilities are operating at full capacity during the 4th critical period, it is better that a puppy do his learning from his new owner, and learn he will! The 4th critical period marks a time when a new puppy will learn at a fast and furious pace, and much of what he learns will stay with him a long, long time. What the puppy learns during the 4th critical period will help to shape him into the kind of dog he will be forevermore!

That paragraph is so important that every dog owner (and those contemplating getting a puppy) should reread it - and then read it again! For the readers who acquired their dogs at 6 months or more, that paragraph may well explain some of the negative characteristics in the personality and behaviour of their dog.

During the 1st 3 critical periods, insignificant brainwaves from a puppy can be recorded on electroencephalographs. The 4th critical period, however, is quite different. The first actual, and highly significant, waves can be recorded. It is during the 4th period that a bond will be established between dog and man that will have a lasting effect upon the puppy. During no other phase in its life will a canine have the ability to achieve a stronger bond than during the 4th critical period.

A puppy's contact with people during this phase is the whole key to his emotional and social success within human society. In the tests conducted, puppies were isolated at various intervals during the 5 critical periods, and it was determined that isolation from human society had its greatest effect on puppies during the 4th critical period. Without adequate human contact during the 4th critical period, puppies became incapable of being trained and incapable of being companions to man.

It is during this time that a puppy should be integrated into human society. At this time, a puppy should be taken for walks, meet people and be allowed to play with children and other animals (under supervision).

During the 4th critical period, simple commands can, and should, be taught. There should be gentle discipline. Forceful discipline during this period could adversely tip the scales on which the puppy's emotional development now rests. A puppy (during the 4th critical period) is learning to live in a human's world. He is learning to trust and have confidence in human beings. A puppy between the ages of 8 and 12 weeks does not deliberately get into mischief. A physical and forceful correction could result in complete confusion within the mind of the puppy. Faith and trust in his new human friends could be quickly shattered. When mistrust of humans develops during the 4th critical period, that mistrust will remain a permanent part of the puppy's make-up.

Because many people acquire puppies for home security purposes, I must digress for just a moment to put across a very important point. The preceding paragraph may cause some to assume that the best way to raise a puppy to be a watchdog is to isolate it from human society during its fourth critical period so it will distrust humans, but this is not the way to train a watchdog. It is one way to guarantee that a puppy will never be protective of anything. During the 4th critical period discipline should be confined to scolding. Scolding does not include shouting. Commands such as "sit", "stay" and "come" can be taught during the 4th critical period, but must be done so in a playful atmosphere. Housebreaking should be instituted in a gentle manner, insuring that praise is used for correct behaviour rather than forceful correction for misbehaviour.

It is during the 4th critical period that puppies can develop what is generally referred to as "hand shyness" as a result of owners who feel that striking a puppy is the only way to discipline it. A puppy's environment should give him a sense of security. Being smacked around with rolled newspaper or human hands certainly will not achieve this.

Mild restriction should be imposed - such as not allowing the puppy to chew on furniture, shoes, etc. These mild restrictions could have the additional value of raising tolerance levels. Failure to discipline and failure to impose mild restrictions could have a serious effect on the puppy's upbringing and a deleterious effect on the dog's compatibility within the family later in life.

In human society, we have what is known as kindergarten in our public schools. The purpose of kindergarten is to prepare a child emotionally for the learning that will take place later. Kindergarten and pre-school classes are, in effect, a training ground to teach children how to learn. The 4th critical period is the puppy's kindergarten. If a puppy is taught how to learn during the 4th critical period, his actual formal schooling (which can take place during or after the 5th critical period) will be more successful. A puppy given pre-school training during the 4th critical period will be able to learn more than a puppy that does not have pre-school experience.

Although commands such as "come", "sit", "stay", "down" and "no" are invaluable when taught during the 4th critical period, perhaps the most important single response during that period is learning to fetch. Puppies who cannot - or will not - learn to fetch are dropped from guide dog programs. Moreover, dogs being trained to perform narcotic detection duties must first be proficient at retrieving. The significance of fetching cannot be over-emphasised. Explaining how such a game expands a puppy's mind and what willingness to fetch reveals about a puppy would require a book in itself. Learning to fetch in the 4th critical period can spell success or failure in your dog's desire and ability to work for you. The term "work" refers to those duties that involve specialised training.

Failure to learn fetching does not mean that a dog will not be able to learn to respond to commands for everyday obedience, but stop and think for a moment if a dog is not smart enough to learn to fetch, how then can he be expected to manage the more complex tasks of hunting, retrieving game, pulling a sled, working stock, guarding a house, or detecting bombs?

Fifth Critical Period: 12 - 16 weeks (3 to 4 months)

The 5th critical period is the 13th through the 16th week of a puppy's life. A highly significant thing will happen during the 5th critical period, and puppy owners should be prepared for it. A puppy will make its first attempt to establish itself as the dominant being in the pack (family). It is during the 5th period that a puppy will learn whether he can physically strike out at his owner - and get away with it!

If a puppy is allowed to get away with it, he will lose the confidence and the respect for the owner that developed during the 4th critical period. The tolerance level toward the owner will be narrowed. The puppy will learn that by rebelling he'll get things his own way. It is during this 5th critical period that authority will be challenged. It is here that the challenge must be met head on by the pup's owner.

Instructing people as to the best method for dealing with the problem is quite difficult because not 2 dogs are exactly alike. Disciplinary measures for one are not necessarily suitable for another. In my own training school the question is often asked, "What shall I do if my dog bites me"? My answer usually goes something like, "What would you do if your child hit you"? Heaps of love and understanding are not applicable here. A puppy must be shown swiftly and firmly that though he is loved, you, the owner, are the dominant being.

Formal obedience training should begin not later than the age of 6 months for optimum ease in teaching. This is not to say that a dog that has attained the age of 10 years cannot or should not be trained. As long as a dog is healthy, there is no maximum age limit for training. It is always easier to train a dog that has not had too much time to develop bad habits.

Being aware of the 5 critical periods, providing the correct environment during these periods, and instituting proper learning techniques, will allow a puppy to develop emotionally and socially to full potential. Each time you marvel at a guide dog leading its blind owner through busy traffic, you can be assured that the 5 critical periods in that dog's life was handled with great care and concern.

The puppy you acquire can grow up to be all the things he is capable of becoming. Pay close attention to the critical periods in his life. Those are the periods that shape and mould his character and personality. He is in your hands. What he is to become he will become during those 5 critical periods.

Most formal obedience classes conducted throughout the country will not accept a puppy for obedience training unless it has attained the age of 6 months or more. It is unfortunate, however, that by the time some dogs reach 6 months of age, and they have already become problem dogs. Obedience training may or may not help, depending upon the severity of the problem. In too many cases, it does not. This is implied because obedience training does not teach a dog to refrain from turning over trash cans, chasing cars, barking excessively, or tearing up the livingroom furniture; these bad habits are learned during the 5 critical periods.

The Pack Instinct

The natural instinct of the canine is to try to assume dominance within the pack. As was stated earlier he begins this during the 5th critical period, and the dog will periodically "test" the owner's ability to dominate. The fact that a dog will periodically test the owner's dominance does not mean that the dog does not love or respect that owner. However, if the owner is permissive and weak - thus allowing the dog to achieve dominance - his love and respect for the owner will quickly wane. The dog owner then becomes inferior in the dog's eyes, and the owner is destined to be owned by the dog. The scales of love and discipline must be equally balanced. That is the magic formula for success in the rearing of any puppy.

Security - Prime Ingredient for Emotional Growth

Although your new puppy may be destined to become the family dog, one member of the family should be designated the puppy's foster mother during the remaining critical periods in its life. This is not to suggest that other members of the family should be restricted in their association with the puppy. On the contrary, all should share in the joy of caring for, and playing with the new arrival. But the bond between the puppy and its litter mother has been severed by removal from the litter. For optimum emotional development, the puppy should have the security of knowing which member of the human family has take the litter mother's place.

It is strongly urged that a child member of the family not be given this responsibility if optimum emotional growth is to be achieved. Many children are presented with puppies to "help the child to develop responsibility". In all too many cases, it does just the opposite; often children will find excuses why they cannot take the time to feed, water, train and care for their new charges. Dog pounds and humane societies (not to mention research laboratories) are filled to overflowing with dogs and puppies awaiting execution because their child-owners failed to develop the hoped-for responsibility.

A puppy knows very well when it is unwanted. Being unwanted brings insecurities to a puppy, just as it does to a human. Insecurities breed emotional problems. Emotional problems during the puppy's critical periods will remain as personality faults throughout the dog's life. The personality faults can cause fear biters, piddlers, and runaways and perhaps complete emotional withdrawal from human society.

To increase the puppy's security, he should have his own bed in a place where he can be alone when he wants. You must expect the first four nights to lend themselves to some inconvenience for you and the rest of the family. Your new puppy will be lonely at night, having been accustomed to the presence of his littermates. Although the puppy may have been playful during the first day in his new household, nightfall - when you and the rest of the family have gone to bed - will give the puppy time to remember (and miss) his litter brothers and sisters. By the fourth night, however, the pup will have adjusted to his new environment and to your family's routine. It takes just four days for the average dog to learn to adjust to a new environment.

The Puppy Crate

The value of such a crate cannot be over-emphasised. For value received, such a crate can be one of your best investments. Teaching a puppy to accept the crate (referred to as "crate breaking") is not difficult at all. It will require a little patience on your part until your puppy realises that the crate is his bed (and his eating place at first), that it is comfortable and safe. You will find that the use of a crate will assist you in one of the more difficult jobs - toilet training. By nature, a canine does not want to

soil its sleeping quarters. A puppy will have a tendency to "hold it" until he is let out of the crate. A puppy can be completely crate broken within four days of being introduced to it. The crate is like a doghouse, except that the crate has a door that can be closed and locked.

Puppy crates are collapsible and easily carried. When purchasing your crate, keep in mind that your puppy will grow; there's not much sense in getting your puppy used to sleeping in his crate if he outgrows it in 2 months. Get a large crate.

Socialisation

In bringing your puppy home when it is 8 weeks of age, you must remember that it is in its 4th critical period. Your puppy should be taken for walks in public. HE should be allowed to meet people and be allowed to play with children (under close supervision).

In too many cases, puppies are kept isolated from the outside world. They are not allowed to see just what goes on out there. Their world consists of the inside of the house or the backyard. As they pass through 4th and 5th critical periods without proper socialisation, great damage is done.

NOTE: One should not let one's puppy mix with other dogs, or go places where dogs congregate until all Parvo inoculations have been completed, preferably at 16 weeks, but it may be safe to let the pup socialise at 12 weeks as long as he is with inoculated animals. Parvo is especially virulent during the summer months in Zimbabwe.

Conversation

A puppy that can respond only to words like "good boy", or "here boy", can never achieve the full measure of mental growth. You can enrich your life and expand your puppy's mind by speaking to him - frequently.

While formal obedience training during the puppy's 5th critical period will add to the joy of owning a dog, help is his day-to-day control, and make him a better, well-mannered member of your family; your puppy (during the 8th to the 12th week) needs conversation from you. Though it is true that your puppy will have no idea what you are saying, he will know you are paying attention to him, and that is what is important. Your puppy must feel secure in his new environment. Conversation from you, your enthusiastic and warm tone of voice, will help to create that necessary feeling of security.

THE FIVE CRITICAL PERIODS

PERIOD 1	
Days	2 - 20 days
Basic needs	Warmth, food, sleep, mother
Mental capacity	Nearly zero
Trainability	None
SPECIAL NOTE	Little or no handling by humans. If handles, do so very gently.
PERIOD 2	
Days	4th week (21 - 28 days)
Basic needs	Warmth, food, sleep, mother
Mental capacity	All sense functioning. Awareness of living begins.
Trainability	Slight
SPECIAL NOTE	Extreme critical period - do not remove from littermates or mother. Introduction to human society should be instituted but carefully controlled.
PERIOD 3	
Days	5th - 7th week (29 - 49 days)
Basic needs	Canine socialisation within litter & human society
Mental capacity	Capable of responding to voices and ability to recognise people
Trainability	Developing
SPECIAL NOTE	Awareness of difference between human and canine societies
PERIOD 4	
Days	8th - 12th weeks (50 - 84 days)
Basic needs	Remove from littermates & mother influence, supervised human socialisation, love, security, supervised play with children, requires new mother image for security.
Mental capacity	Brainwaves can be recorded, ability to establish permanent bond & man-dog relationship, ability to establish confidence, capable of accepting gentle discipline.
Trainability	Ability to learn respect, capable of learning simple behavioural responses - come, sit, down, stay, no, begin housebreaking & fetch training.
SPECIAL NOTE	Children & other animals should not be allowed to scare or hurt the puppy, either maliciously or inadvertently. Intro to other humans is very important now but must be closely supervised to minimise adverse conditioning. Expose to loud noises gradually, ie, cars, vacuum, washing machine, gun fire, etc.
PERIOD 5	
Days	13th - 16th weeks (85 - 112 days)
Basic needs	Love, attention, discipline, socialisation, security
Mental capacity	Fully developed, needing only experience. Will attempt to establish self as dominant being, mind still being influenced.
Trainability	Capable of undergoing formal obedience training, capable of adopting a positive/negative attitude toward training, & time to begin field training for hunting & field trials.
SPECIAL NOTE	Obedience training classes should be attended as a family unit with your puppy. Puppy's mind still being influenced. Praise for correct behavioural response is most effective training tool. Meaningful praise highly important to shape positive attitudes. This is also the time to start agility & tracking training if you want your dog to compete in those types of competitions.