

# Puppy Stages

Puppies as infants and toddlers go through different stages of their growth. These stages are characterized by both physiological and psychological changes which characterize each stage. By recognizing these stages, as a new puppy owner, you will benefit by knowing what to expect and being one step ahead of puppy training. Following are the most common stages of puppy-hood through adulthood.

## From Birth to 7 weeks old

Being born blind and deaf, puppies are very vulnerable beings that must stay close to their mother who may become particularly protective in some cases. From their birth to 7 weeks old, puppies must stay close to their mother in order to be fed, learn some basic manners and social behavior etiquette. Taking puppies away from their mother too soon can result in behavior problems and sometimes aggression.

## 7 weeks to 8 weeks

This is a very important stage in a puppy's life. By now they must have been fully weaned and have effectively learned from their mother acceptable social behavior. They are also at a stage where they easily adjust to new situations, an ideal time to change home and care givers. At 8 weeks old puppies must also begin their first series of shots and continue at 12 weeks and up until they will be 16 weeks. It is the new owner's responsibility at this time to ensure the puppy is not traumatized by the trip to the veterinarian.

## 8 weeks to 18 weeks

The great thing about puppies is that at this stage they are mentally very elastic, being able to absorb from their new owners new commands and new acceptable behaviors. Puppies at this stage must be socialized as much as possible because they undergo a grace period where they are much more open to being introduced to new people and new scenarios. **However, between the ages of 8 to 10 weeks old, puppies undergo a "fear" stage where they can be easily startled.** It is important not too excessively reassure or baby the dogs during this stage or they may perceive that you are praising them for being afraid.

## 4 months to 6 months

Expect your puppy to go through a growing spurt and develop new teeth as the baby teeth start falling out. Keep on hand a good supply of chew toys and redirect your puppy towards them by saying "no" when he or she gets a hold of your favorite slippers. Redirect them with an appropriate toy. Puppies at this stage are full of energy and will benefit greatly from lots of exercise and training. At approximately 4 months your puppy may go through a **second fear stage**, try to build your dog's confidence levels by praising when your dog exhibits confidence in himself and takes initiative in inquiring the world around him. Around six months most veterinarians recommend spaying or neutering your dog.

## 6 months to 12 months

Think only children go through adolescence? Think twice since your dog will go through its teen age phase at this point. Expect some testing, reluctance to obey commands, and a rebound effect where your puppy may act as if he has forgotten all about what your basic commands mean. Continue to be consistent and firm and your dog will get back to norm after this critical phase. Provide lots of stimulation, training and exercise. Obedience training may be helpful in resetting goals and refreshing commands.