

Understanding Canine Adolescence

Why has my puppy suddenly stopped listening?

Adolescence is a normal stage of development during which your dog's brain, body and behaviour are still maturing. Although they may look fully grown, they are still learning to regulate their emotions, control their impulses and cope with an increasingly exciting world. This temporary stage can make it seem as though your dog has "forgotten" everything they have learned, but with patience, consistency and positive training, most dogs go on to become calm, confident adults.



WHY HAS MY DOG CHANGED



Brain still developing



More impulsive



Reduced concentration



Easily distracted



Bigger emotions



Greater interest in the world

Did you know?

Most dogs enter adolescence between 6–12 months of age, but behavioural maturity is often not reached until 18 months to 3 years, depending on the individual dog and breed.

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE

You may notice your dog:

- ✓ Appears to "forget" previously learned behaviours
- ✓ Has a less reliable recall
- ✓ Pulls more on the lead
- ✓ Becomes more easily distracted
- ✓ Finds it harder to settle
- ✓ Is more excitable or impulsive
- ✓ Shows greater interest in other dogs, people and smells
- ✓ Reacts more strongly to exciting or frustrating situations

THE LEARNING ZONE

Dogs can only learn when they are in the right emotional state.



CALM & READY TO LEARN

- Relaxed
- Responsive
- Able to think
- Learning takes place.



OVER-EXCITED

- Highly distracted
- Impulsive
- Training becomes much harder.



OVERWHELMED

- Highly emotional
- Unable to learn
- Needs distance, rest and recovery.

The best learning happens before your dog becomes overwhelmed.

CONFIDENCE CAN FLUCTUATE

Some adolescent dogs experience temporary dips in confidence. Your dog may suddenly appear worried by things they previously ignored, e.g.



- Unfamiliar dogs
- Unfamiliar people
- Loud or unexpected noises
- New environments
- Unusual objects
- People wearing hats, hoods or carrying umbrellas

If this happens:

- ✓ Give your dog more space.
- ✓ Allow them time to observe.
- ✓ Pair the experience with something they enjoy.
- ✓ Allow confidence to build gradually.

Avoid forcing your dog to investigate or "face their fears".

TOP TIPS

- ✓ Keep training sessions short, fun and achievable.
- ✓ Reward the behaviours you would like to see more often.
- ✓ Prevent rehearsal of unwanted behaviours using sensible management.
- ✓ Continue providing positive experiences with people, dogs and new environments.
- ✓ Allow plenty of sleep, rest and recovery.
- ✓ Provide opportunities to sniff, explore and play
- ✓ Be patient and consistent—your dog is still learning.

COMMON MISTAKES

- ✗ Assuming your dog is being stubborn or "testing" you when really he/she is likely just overwhelmed
- ✗ Repeating cues over and over.
- ✗ Punishing mistakes.
- ✗ Expecting too much too soon.
- ✗ Stopping training because your dog "already knows it."
- ✗ Flooding worried dogs with situations and/or interactions they cannot cope with.

ADOLESCENCE IS A STAGE—NOT A PERSONALITY.

Your dog hasn't become "bad" or forgotten everything they have learned. They are still developing and need guidance, patience and consistency. The habits and experiences you provide during adolescence help shape the confident adult dog they will become.



NEED MORE HELP?

Behaviour concerns are often easier to address when support is sought early. Did you know most pet insurance companies cover the costs of clinical behaviourists?



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