

Puppy Developmental Stages

Stage	Key Developments	Playgroup Considerations
Neonatal (birth to 2 weeks)	Devoted to obtaining nutrition. Senses: touch & taste (eyes closed & deaf); reacts to cold & pain. Slow crawl. Vocalization: distress calls.	Too young for play-group. Puppies can be harmed physically more than psychologically.
Transition (2-3 weeks)	Changes in basic sensory & motor capability's. Period begins with eyes opening & ends when sounds cause a startle response. Teeth form. Begin to see adult behaviors, movements & nutrition.	Too young for play-group. Puppies begins to show communication through body language.
Awareness (3-4 weeks)	First uses of sight & hearing. Key period of development so puppy should be kept stable & not moved. Develops comfort from the "familiar."	Too young for play group. Puppies begin to learn what it is to be a dog.
Canine Socialization (1-2 months)	Critical period for psychological development/damage; social & location relationships are important. New behavior patterns related to mother & littermates; puppy investigates. Weaning to solid food with eliminations outside nest box. Adult behaviors in playful form, social play, develops relationships easily, tail wag begins.	Too young for play-group. Learns to use body language & vocalizations to communicate. Learns to accept discipline from mother. Social bonding with humans & others. Key time to be with litter to learn dog language; stay with mother & litter at least through 7 weeks.
Human Socialization (2-3 months)	Good time to introduce puppy to new home and environment. Attention span is short & learning is permanent. Fear response to strangers.	Puppy socialization in small groups with properly matched puppy & adult dog playmates. Begin positive puppy training.
Fear Impact (2-3 months)	Any traumatic experiences may have a lasting impression on puppy. New experiences must be non-threatening. Take extra care to make puppy feel safe.	Critical that all social interactions be fun & positive. Fearful adult behaviors can result from experiences puppy perceives as threatening.

<p>Seniority Classification (3-4 months)</p>	<p>Period of adjustment, all sense organs fully developed. Permanent teeth growing; result in chewing & biting behaviors. May begin to experiment with some aggressive behaviors, if confident.</p>	<p>Playgroups with effective management and leadership. Discourage all biting behaviors. Consistent enforcement of rules & boundaries with a lot of patience and positive reinforcement.</p>
<p>Flight Instinct (4-8 months)</p>	<p>Dog's natural instinct to explore new territory is evident. May ignore "come" command & see human chasing them as a game. Teething & chewing behaviors continue.</p>	<p>Playgrounds with properly matched playmates. Reward "come"; be sure no negatives or discipline are given when dog comes. Needs to learn "come" is a safe command to follow.</p>
<p>Fear Impact Period 2 (6-14 months)</p>	<p>Fear of change or new experiences. Dependent on growth spurts so dog may go through more than one during period. May be uncomfortable with "unfamiliar" situations & people. Do not force dog into situations.</p>	<p>Playgrounds with properly matched playmates. Work to build confidence and do not force into situations & people. Do not force dog into situations.</p>
<p>Maturity (1-4 years)</p>	<p>Timing differs by breed with average being 18 months-3 years. Smaller breeds mature earlier than larger breeds. Confident dogs may challenge & display aggressive behaviors. Effective management, strong relationships and training is critical to minimize aggression, bites, and territorial displays. Reward "watchdog" behaviors outwent & redirect high arousal display.</p>	<p>Playgrounds with properly matched playmates. Effective management and leadership is very important with consistent enforcement of rules. Watch for resource guarding or inappropriate aggressive behaviors. Allow appropriate dog-to dog interactions.</p>