

# WHAT IS ADOLESCENCE

When it comes to canine development, there are several stages they will go through. Perhaps the most challenging is adolescence. This is the period between sexual maturity and social maturity between the ages of approximately 4 -24 months, though it varies between breeds and individuals.

During this time lots of changes are happening within your dog's body and although they look more grown up, they are a far cry from the adult they will become.

As their body grows, they become bigger and physically stronger. They will grow in spurts and this can lead to imbalance in your teens developing body. They might seem clumsy as they haven't developed skill and awareness of their body. They might also experience discomfort associated with rapid growth and could start to dislike their harness or react to touch on certain parts of their body.

Hormone levels rising and changes to brain chemistry also mean that teens can undertake more risky behaviour to find excitement and pleasure. They are likely to be more interested in other dogs, scent and exploration. This can lead to your dog getting themselves into trouble with other dogs as behaviour which was tolerated by others as a puppy becomes a problem as they get older.

The good news is with the right foundations, continued training and appropriate exposure to the world around them, this stage is temporary and you will emerge on the other side with a wonderfully well rounded, resilient adult dog.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# HOW DOGS LEARN

Dogs learn in 2 main ways - by association and through consequence.

The first, learning by association is always happening. Every moment of the day your dog is linking how they are feeling with what they are experiencing in their environment. If they feel happy and safe, they will form positive associations to the things around them. If they are startled or feel scared they will naturally link this feeling to what they see, hear, feel or smell around them at that time.

The second way of learning, through consequence, is really effective at shaping dogs' behaviour. When their actions lead to rewarding consequences they will repeat them more often. An example might be your dog sitting in front of you and you reaching down to pet them.

If your dog loves interacting with you, they are likely to come and sit in front of you again.

If instead the consequence is something your dog dislikes, they will be less likely to do that behaviour again. Perhaps they jumped up on the countertop and slipped, spooking themselves. Your dog may be less likely to jump up again, but there is a fallout for unpleasant consequences. Remember learning by association is always happening, so in this example your dog might not jump up on the countertop, but they may also become wary of going into the kitchen or develop concern with slippery surfaces as a result.

This is why it's important not to resort to punishing your dog if they are doing things you don't want them to. You don't want to scare your dog or risk that they will begin to distrust you. Your relationship is THE most important thing in the world.

Instead in training you are going to help your dog learn what you'd like them to do by rewarding everything you like, setting up their environment so they can make good choices and if they make a mistake, direct them to what you'd like them to do instead and put an action plan together to ensure they can't make the same mistake again.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# UNDERSTANDING TRIGGER STACKING

Every day your dog will experience things which get them excited or perhaps concern them. It is normal for dogs to have a range of emotions to the things happening in the world around them. It's our goal to help them develop resilience and the ability to relax in the situations they encounter each day.

When it comes to stress (both positive and negative) it's important to realise that it is cumulative. That means that unless your dog has a chance to fully relax between experiences, their stress level could continue to rise with each experience.

This can lead to your dog reacting strongly to something that usually wouldn't bother them to that degree. They might bark, pull, jump up, grab the lead among other behaviours.

This effect is called trigger stacking.

Your dog might cope with greeting a neighbour one day, watching children at the park the next and going to the groomers later in the week. But if these things all happen in short succession, your dog might not be able to remain calm in the same situations.

It's important to be aware of this plan time to rest into your dog's daily routine. Don't be afraid to alter plans to help set your dog up for success if you notice things are unfolding in a way which will quickly become too much for your dog to cope with.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# IMPORTANCE OF CHEWING

During adolescence your dog has finished puppy teething but you will notice them needing to chew a lot. This is because they are developing muscles around their jaw to enable them to use their adult teeth effectively.

It is important that you continue to provide your dog with lots of items to chew of varying texture so that they have an outlet for this need.

If dogs don't have appropriate chew items to occupy them, they may go in search of finding their own outlet and start to chew furniture or other items you don't want them to.

Proactively giving your dog items to chew on will not only satisfy their need to chew, but also provide them with mental enrichment, essential for their wellbeing.

Be sure to keep your home tidy so that your dog doesn't have the chance to mistakenly chew on something they shouldn't and use management when you leave them alone until they are out of this phase of heavy chewing.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# APPROPRIATE PLAY PART 1

As your dog is going through adolescence their body will be developing rapidly but often it takes a while longer for them to socially and emotionally mature. Teenage dogs need continued appropriate socialisation and careful exposure to the world around them as they develop to ensure that they grow up to be well rounded adult dogs.

If you are thinking of letting your dog interact and play with others then there are some important things to realise about appropriate play etiquette between dogs. You'll need to match your dog to others in terms of their size, play style and energy level so that each dog enjoys the experience. Some dogs love to chase and be chased, other dogs enjoy making body contact or wrestling. Your dog's individual play style will depend on several factors, including their breed, social history and individual character.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# APPROPRIATE PLAY PART 2

Good play, no matter the style, should look loose and wiggly. You should be able to see crescent shapes in the dogs' bodies as they move and there should be some space between each dog as they move back and forth. The dogs should take turns to chase or be chased, be on top or roll underneath. When dogs are well versed in play you should also see moments where they disengage from the game and do something else to calm themselves down again, like sniffing.

Often adolescent dogs have not had a chance to practice this enough to naturally moderate their own play so it's important that you help them to do this by giving them a break between bursts of play and keeping sessions short - no more than 5-10 minutes including breaks.

If you start to see the play speeding up, think it is becoming one sided or notice any stress signals in either dog, take a break and move to a distance that will help your dog to relax.

Creating a chance for your dog to experience appropriate play with a selection of social dogs as they grow up can help them learn useful skills but be mindful and set your dog up for success by only putting them in social situations that they are ready for.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# INAPPROPRIATE PLAY PART 1

During adolescence things are changing physically, chemically and emotionally for your dog. They are rapidly becoming bigger and stronger and often don't realise the impact this has. Play that was tolerated by other dogs when they were a puppy becomes socially inappropriate and may lead to altercations occurring.

Teenage dogs will often take risks and become quickly aroused and overstimulated. You might notice things going from 0-100 very quickly and dogs struggling to naturally break themselves away from activities to calm down.

If left to continue in this way dogs can become overly forceful in their play which might scare the other dog or lead to a fight if one accidentally hurts the other by being too rough. This can cause physical injury and be emotionally damaging for the dogs involved.

It's important to choose your dog's playmates wisely. Always supervise and be ready to intervene as needed.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# INAPPROPRIATE PLAY PART 2

Inappropriate interaction varies depending on the dogs involved and their individual play styles. Some of the key things to watch for include one dog pinning the other, where there is no space between their bodies and the dog underneath cannot get up or move away if they want to. They might put their paws up on another dog's back, start to bite their neck or mount them.

You might also see relentless chasing without breaks or a lack of role switching, where dogs take it in turn to chase and be chased. Intervene and create space between the dogs.

Always look for changes in speed and intensity and call your dog away if you notice things getting too rough.

Spending time carefully supporting your dog in their interactions and proactively calling things off if you see things heading in the wrong direction, can help prevent negative experiences and the long lasting effects of play gone wrong.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**



# BREAKING UP PLAY PT1

When it comes to play, it is important to be able to bring your dog away from others at varying intervals to allow them to calm down and de-escalate before things become too intense. Adolescent dogs often want to engage in high arousal play and will take more risks during interaction with others. This can lead to undesirable interactions becoming a habit and depending on the dogs involved could quickly turn into a dog fight if left to escalate. To prevent physical injury and damaging social experiences you will want to practice bringing your dog away from interacting for short periods before allowing them to return if they are engaging appropriately.

Make sure to prepare these 3 techniques before you need to use them.

The first option is to use a treat magnet to lure your dog away from interacting. Use something that your dog really likes. It is important to only use this technique if neither of the dogs have resource guarding issues. If they do struggle with other dogs around things which are important to them, choose a different method to separate play.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# BREAKING UP PLAY PT2

Another option is to recall your dog to you and reward them for coming. Be sure to practice your dog's recall around other dogs on a lead or longline and make sure it is reliable before letting your dog off lead to play with others.

The third method is to hold your dog's harness to interrupt play as the other dog moves away. Encourage your dog to relax with you for a while before restarting play. You may need to put your dog back on lead, or engage them in sniffing for treats on the ground to help them de-escalate.

If your dog hasn't perfected these skills yet, restrict access to playmates until you have a reliable and safe way of intervening and breaking up play as needed.

Preparing by working on these options now, will help prevent your dog getting into trouble with another if play starts to get out of hand in the future.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

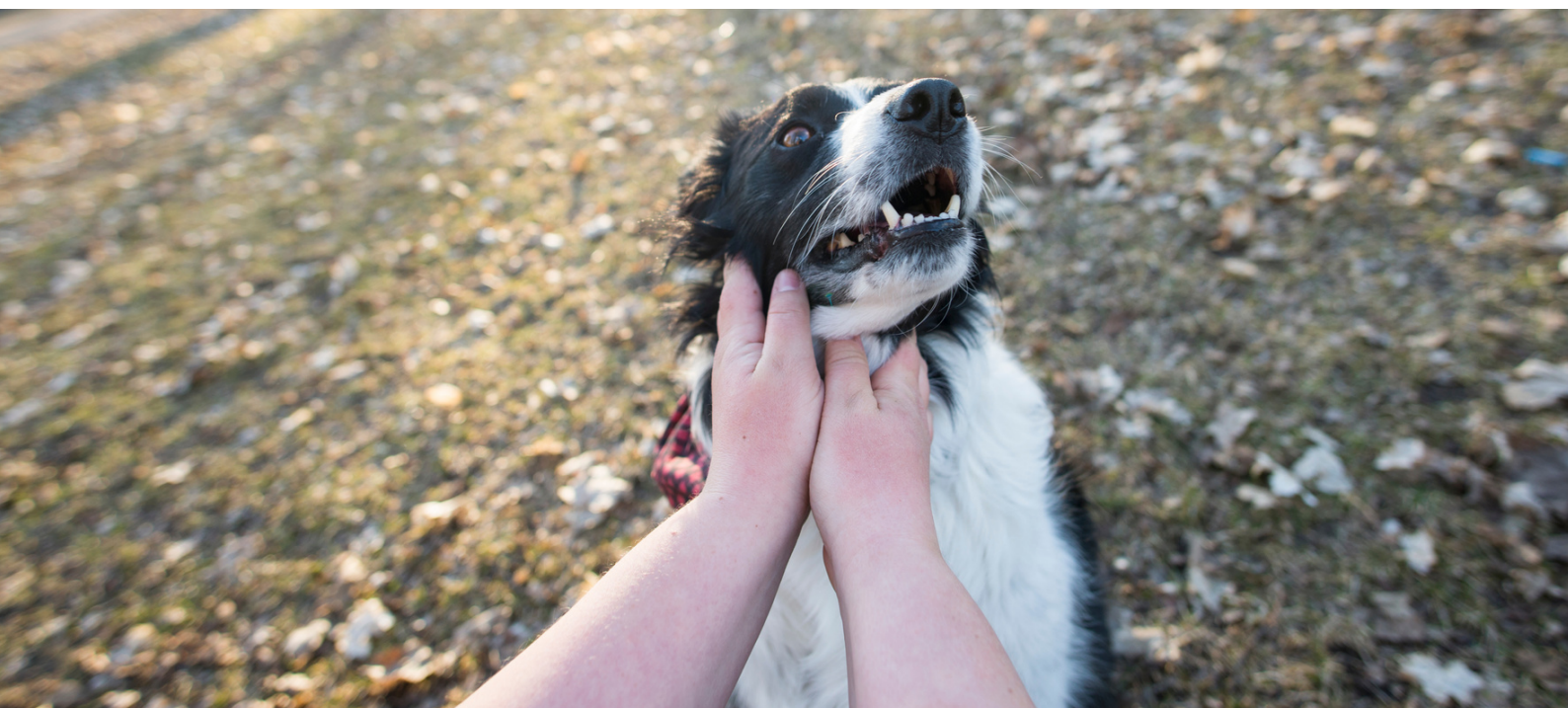
# TOUCH SENSITIVITY

During adolescence dogs can become touch sensitive over parts of their body due to discomfort resulting from growth.

It's important that we recognise this and know what to look out for. If your dog is uncomfortable, you might notice that they behave out of character. Perhaps they are less settled or don't like petting in certain areas of their body that never used to be an issue. If your dog is unhappy with being touched they might turn away, lick their lips, close their mouth, start panting, pull their ears back or even walk away. Sometimes your dog may communicate that they want you to stop by growling or snapping the air. It's important to always listen to your dog and never punish them for communicating. If you look for and respond to the subtle signs that your dog wants you to stop, they won't feel the need to escalate their response.

You might also notice your dog becoming reluctant to wear their harness during adolescence, avoiding you when you pick it up before a walk. If this starts to occur it might be that they are experiencing discomfort. Stop using that harness for the time being and consider walking your dog on their collar, or introducing them to a new harness that fits and feels very different to wear and might be more comfortable for them.

If you are concerned that your dog might be in pain, always consult your veterinarian. With lots changing during this period of growth it is common for underlying issues to come to the surface and the sooner they are picked up, the better the outcome is.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# IMPORTANCE OF SCENT

Dogs have an incredible sense of smell. Compared to humans who have around 5 million scent receptors, dogs can have up to 300 million! They can detect subtle differences in odour which has many applications in the world. Dogs can locate suspicious substances at the airport, detect cancer and other diseases, search for missing people and even alert to low blood sugar levels or imminent seizures.

Not every dog will be trained to this level but there are many ways you can give your dog an opportunity to use this amazing sense.

It's no wonder that your dog doesn't want to walk in a straight line. They much prefer to zigzag back and forth, sniffing every leaf, blade of grass, lamp post and mailbox. This olfactory exploration is a dog's version of getting sucked into that new Netflix series—there's a whole story of smells unfolding before them.

It's important that dogs are given an outlet for this amazing sense. Not only is it incredibly enriching but will help your dog acclimatise to new environments and build confidence and relaxation through familiarity.

Next time you walk your dog, make sure to appreciate how many different smells, and stories, are circulating through your dog's nose and brain. Instead of rushing your dog along, let them sniff. Scent is how dogs understand the world and it's our responsibility to enable them to experience the many wonders the world has to offer.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**

# BUILDING NEW BEHAVIOR

There are 4 main ways we can build new behaviour. These are luring, targeting, shaping and capturing.

When training your dog you will likely use a combination of methods. It's a great idea to practice each technique and see what works best for you and your dog. You'll probably find different methods will get you quicker results depending on the exercise you're training.

Using a lure can quickly show your dog what you want them to do, but runs into problems if your dog is so focused on the food they don't fully notice what behaviour resulted in being rewarded. Targeting can help with this but may still create a dependence in your dog for being shown what to do, and they might find it harder to think for themselves. Shaping is great for getting dogs to think for themselves and build confidence in trying new behaviour, but dogs can become frustrated if the incremental steps are too big or they are used to being shown what to do. Capturing is great for rewarding naturally offered behaviour and subtle actions that are difficult to prompt, but relies on dogs offering behaviour frequently in order to be effective.

As you train new behaviours with your dog, think about which method will be best in each situation. Practice using each of the methods so that you and your dog have multiple options when it comes to building new skills.



**HAPPY TRAINING!**