

PART 2: Adolescent Socialisation (16/17 Weeks to 18 Months of Age)



Last week we introduced you to the concept of canine socialisation and published Part 1 of our 3 Part series. This week we will be focusing on canine adolescent socialisation (16/17 weeks to 18 months of age). One of the most important things you will read from this post is simple: Dogs need ongoing socialisation throughout their lives to keep the lessons fresh.

We saw about 800 canines come through RSPCA ACT last year, and too many of them have not been properly socialised which makes it much harder for our team to rehome them.

It's not uncommon for dogs around the six month mark to be surrendered to us when the cute things they did as a puppy start causing problems now that they're older. We've all made the mistake before. A puppy jumping on people is inundated with infatuated people clamouring to give him attention. They're small and adorable – what's the harm?

A few months later, that puppy has spent his entire life jumping on people. He's never been shown that it's not appropriate and has only had positive experiences from doing so. He was small and cute and relatively harmless? Unfortunately he now weighs 25kg and his full length is the height of some adults. He's knocking people over and unintentionally causing harm.

It's now a safety issue. The mistake that many people are guilty of is excusing problematic behaviour while they're young! It's easier to teach dogs good coping techniques while young than it is to try to reverse undesirable behaviour later in life.

That same dog that we mentioned earlier – he may also have enjoyed nibbling on your fingers and clothing as a puppy. Well.... His teeth are bigger, and now he's hurting you and putting holes in your clothing. His behaviour hasn't changed – just his size and the consequences of his actions.

WHAT SHOULD YOU REINFORCE?

- Keep introducing your pet to new people and other dogs. An animal's behaviour can change and deteriorate over time. So it's important to maintain training.
- Vary your walking routes! Keep things interesting! Let your dog experience different locations.
- Teach your dog that it's okay to be alone. Help them deal with separation anxiety by scheduling alone time. If your dog doesn't practice being away from you, he'll never learn.
- Never punish a scared/anxious/nervous dog. Remember that most displays of aggression such as growling are the result of fear. Around the adolescent age, dogs may start interpreting the unfamiliar as a threat and be frightened. Punishing this reaction will only confirm their fear. So simply remove the dog from the situation and ask for a different behaviour (like "sit").

I spoke to Shari, our Senior Behavioural Trainer, and she had this to say, *"Punishing your dog for growling is like taking the batteries out of your smoke alarm. If your dog is growling – listen to him! And then take action to remove him from whatever stimulus is causing him to growl."*

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