



Critical periods in your puppy's development

FIRST PERIOD—BIRTH-21 DAYS

Neonatal sub period 0-13 days

Characteristics: Puppies are "foetuses out of the womb." They cannot see, hear, regulate their own body temperature or climate without stimulation and are totally dependent upon their dam or surrogate mother. No emotional development, social attachment, or learning takes place during this period. Puppy's brain waves remain constant whether sleeping or awake. Puppies do, however, exhibit reflex reactions to hunger, cold, and touch. They pile for warmth or spread out if too hot but cannot regulate their own temperature by shivering or panting. During this neonatal period puppies will crawl backward and forward and will swing their heads from side to side, often repetitively while mewling or trilling. These movements appear to be involuntary and prepare pups muscles, nervous system, and inner ear for further development.

Breeder should; Keep bitch happy, healthy and well-fed. Her physical and emotional wellbeing will supply everything the puppies need during this stage. Handle puppies very gently with very slow massaging movements. Very light stimulation of the nervous system ("called pre-stressing") may be beneficial when applied during the second week of life. This could involve rotating the pups gently in your hands, applying light pressure to the ear leather, and holding each pup gently on its back for a few seconds each day. Pups should, of course, be weighed daily to monitor growth and this would be a good time to handle each pup. **THIS IS NOT SOCIALIZATION OR TRAINING.** Pre-stress does, however, assist in developing brain cells.

Breeder Don'ts: Don't allow visitors (human or canine) during this period. Avoid anything that will stress the bitch (house guest, parties, home repairs, etc...) Also try not to move puppies or remove mother from the litter at this time. If the pups or dam need to see a veterinarian try to arrange for a home visit. Despite the common practice, this is not a good age to take a litter to a dog show in you van, trailer or motor home.

Transition Sub Period 13-21 days.

Characteristics; Eyes and ears open and pups slowly begin responding to light, movement and sound. Puppies become more mobile as they gain awareness of their surroundings, their mother, litter mates, and objects. Pups may also begin to alert to human presence during this period. This is still a reaction to stimuli rather than a social bond or emotional attachment. Pups will attempt to get up on their feet, but continue crawling backward and forward. They may begin trying to get out of whelping box toward the end of this period.

Breeder Do's: Introduce toys as obstacles to climb over or bump into. This helps pups develop spatial awareness. Some pups may begin briefly interacting with toys near the end of the third week. Continue handling pups daily using slow, massaging movements. Pups are growing fast and need frequent nail trimming. Introducing brushing with soft brush. Again, this is not training but stimulation.

Breeder Don'ts; Avoid startling pup with loud noises or sudden movements while hearing and eyesight are developing. If you must move or change puppies environment, this is the time to do so. Do not remove dam.

SECOND PERIOD 21-28 DAYS

Characteristics; Most important period with rapid sensory development. Puppies are fully alert to their environment and will startle easily at sudden sounds and movements. During this time they are able to recognize their breeder and other significant humans by smell, sight and sound. However, they have lost the natural insulation of the neonatal period and negative events can easily imprint basic behaviour during this period. Social bonding begins to occur during this week. Neonatal behaviours such as head swinging, mewling and crawling back and forth stop. Pups are more active and moving well on their feet. This is a time of rapid physical change. There are also significant changes in brain waves during this period and pups are now able to learn from experience and to retain what they have learned.

Breeders Do's: Introduce new tactile sensations in puppies box pups enjoy borrowing in shredded newspaper, for example, or crawling over a rolled towel or blanket. Continue daily handling, adding new sounds and sights to the environment radio, TV, telephone, computer and printer. Introduce toys and make sounds. Pups can be removed from the box and placed on new surfaces. Do this with two pups at a time rather than separating from litter.

Breeder Don'ts: AVOID LOUD NOISES OR SUDDEN CHANGES DURING THIS PERIOD. Negative events can permanently imprint on the pups during this week. Do not run vacuum cleaner around pups, blow hair dryers, run clippers etc. Postpone having work done on your home and ask prospective purchasers or curious friends to wait to the end of the 4th week to visit puppies. Do not move puppies or separate from dam during this week.

THIRD PERIOD 21-49 DAYS

Characteristics: Social awareness, learning to become dogs (note: first week of this critical stage of develops overlaps with second period of development). Play fighting behaviour becomes increasingly intense. Pups are developing problem solving abilities, physical coordination, and bite inhibition. Mother begins weaning pups during this period, thus beginning to initiate discipline. During this time puppies will begin to move to the far corners of their bed, box or pen to urinate and defecate. House breaking can begin!

Breeder Do's: During entire period leave pups together as litter and allow dam free access to pups. During 4th week (21-28 days) introduce food to pups without removing the dam. You can feed her in the litter box at the same time. Begin escalating sensory experience (see notes on critical period). Continue daily handling by breeder and family members. Provide more feeding bowls than pups to prevent food guarding issues later.

During 5th week (28-35 days) Introduce pups to the outdoors. Take them outside to urinate and defecate after drinking or eating. When this is not possible provide pups with a designed bathroom spot to begin the housebreaking.

Begin handling pups individually away from litter mates and dam for at least 10 minutes each day. Enlist the help of family members, friends, neighbours and prospective puppy owner in this process. If you cannot handle 10 minutes each day, do 5 minutes. Daily experiences away from litter mates are crucial.

During the 6th and 7th weeks (35-49 days) Increase sensory experiences with brief car rides. Introduce pups to vacuum cleaner. Puppies can begin simple training routines using food lures and social attraction at this time. Start teaching pups to stand on grooming table to be examined or to be brushed.

This is the prime socialization periods. Introduce new people, especially children. Pups enjoy interaction with a gentle adult dog kindly auntie or uncle who will baby-sit with patience. Introducing situations that will stimulate problem solving behaviour- - tunnels, cardboard boxes, gates. Steps, fences, logs, etc. Allow pups to have successes and reinforce these successes with food.

Breeder Don'ts: DO NOT REMOVE PUPPIES FROM LITTER DURING THIS PERIOD!! Do not completely remove mother. Do not correct for play fighting, housebreaking errors, or mouthing.

FOURTH PERIOD 49 DAYS TO 12 WEEKS

Characteristics: Enlarging social awareness and bonding outside of litter. Mental abilities are fully formed but pups lack experience. **This is the optimum time to teach new things** and is, in fact, the period of fastest learning. Research has shown that behaviours can be shaped and modified most easily during times when learning is occurring most quickly. Training during this time will actually increase the capacity to learn by increasing brain cells in the appropriate regions of the brain. Bladder and bowel control developed and pups are capable of sleeping through the night without accidents.

Breeder Do's: Greatly enlarge the puppy's world between 49 and 56 days. Begin puppy rotation, playing and sleeping in smaller groups. Pups that remain with breeder can be created with one or two other pups. Be sure to switch puppies around. Continue individual grooming, play and training sessions with each pup. Gentle but firm discipline from humans may be begun. Begin teaching response to simple commands such as sit, down, stand, come, walk on lead at this time. Pups during this period can learn complex behaviour chain and can make associations.

Breeder Don'ts: Do not isolate from humans or unnecessarily restrain during this period (only restraints should be crate or necessary fencing). Avoid inadvertently reinforcing fearful responses.

NOTE: FIRST FEAR IMPRINT PERIOD OCCURS BETWEEN 8-10 WEEKS; AVOID PLACING PUPS DURING THIS TIME. AVOID ANY TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES.

Pups that have been properly socialized and bonded with breeder can be successfully placed at 10-12 weeks after they have passed the fear imprint period and while they are still young enough to be "babies".

FIFTH PERIOD 3-4 MONTHS

Characteristics: Dominance period where pup solidifies position. Pups will begin testing their place in the world during this time. They tend to become emboldened. This is a period of very fast physical growth.

Breeder/Owner Do's: Pups must be treated as individual dogs. If they are still with the breeder they should no longer be treated as part of a litter and should sleep alone in individual crates at night and all training and grooming sessions should be individual. Introduce behavioural dominance exercises, teach the pup at this time that you are in control of all the resources; food, toys, attention, affection, play, access to you, water etc. Move crate to different locations so pup doesn't become site protective, take food and toys away while pup is eating or playing. Continue socialization and obedience training providing slight distractions. **TEACH THE RECALL AND PRACTICE IT SEVERAL TIMES EVERY SINGLE DAY!!!!** Do this before pup enters the "flight period" at about age of 16 weeks.

Breeder/Owner Don'ts: No tug of war games. Do not allow pup to sleep in bed with humans. Absolutely forbid all chasing games with children. **Keep to a routine and be consistent!**

VERY, VERY IMPORTANT NOTE: DO NOT RAISE LITTER MATES OR TWO UNRELATED PUPPIES TOGETHER DURING THIS PERIOD!!!

SIXTH PERIOD 4-6 MONTHS

Characteristics: The flight period, corresponding to teething. Pups begin testing limits. May attempt to assert dominance over human pack members (especially children). May "forget" housebreaking. This period is characterized by independence and wilfulness. Owner or breeder is no longer Mommy substitute.

Breeder/ Owner Do's: Keep pup on lead when outside fenced enclosures. Continue recall training and response to commands. Continue handling all parts of pup's body.

Breeder/ Owner Don'ts: Do not let pup off lead if at all possible. Do not chase pup or play chasing games.

SECOND FEAR IMPRINT PERIOD 6-14 MONTHS

Characteristics: Sexual maturity, hormonal changes. Fearfulness of new situations, objects, people, other dogs. Male dogs begin lifting legs. Some individuals will pass through this period faster than others, often with no noticeable problems. Others may display marked changes in behaviour in strange situations. Reinforce the behaviours you want: do not reinforce fearfulness by coddling to protective behaviour. But also try to avoid punishing fearfulness. Try to adopt a firm but patient and kindly attitude to the pup's fearful behaviour. Continue socialization to humans and other dogs. Avoid or postpone extremely stressful or traumatic experience for the animals that appear to be in the fear imprint period. ***Remember that consistency and PRAISE are the key words.***

Maturity 1 to 4 years

Many breeds, especially giant breeds continue to grow and physically mature beyond 4 years of age. The average dog will mature between 1 to 3 years of age. This period can be marked by an increase in the dog testing the owner for leadership, or by aggression.

Regular training throughout your dog's life will help it to maintain good manners and socialisation skills with other dogs and will maintain the bond between dog and owner.

From reading this, you can see that the early development of the puppy whilst it is with the breeder is crucial, as is the initial first few weeks with you when you bring the pup home. Always be diligent in linking new experiences with something nice happening; a toy or a treat, and be consistent!