**Puppy Development-What to Expect During the First Year**

***8 to 12 weeks-*** *Physical Development*

Your puppy is getting his act together physically-he is quite roly-poly, but learning to coordinate his growing body well enough for playful jumping and tumbling. Toward his 12th week, he’ll start shedding puppy teeth as permanent adult teeth emerge. By his 12th week, bladder control is improving.

*Behavior- changes and challenges*

As your puppy shifts his dependence to you as his leader, you’ll become the center of his world. He’ll probably like to lie down on top of or beside your feet. He’s very curious, has a short attention span, and is easily distracted. Although he had little sense of fear in earlier weeks, at some point between 7 to 9 weeks he may be suddenly cautious of anything new in his environment. This “fear stage” is normal. He may be fearful of abrupt movement or loud sounds. Try to prevent undue trauma during this phase. Be patient and understanding. Much as a toddler explores with hands and fingers, puppies like to investigate things using their mouths. Combine this with the increasing urge to chew as permanent teeth start to come in and you have one mouthy pup! Be prepared for his by providing him with lots of sage and chewable toys. Keep in mind like any baby, your young pup needs to sleep much of the day. Keep playtimes short to give him lots of “down time.” Don’t force him to keep up prolonged activity and resist the urge to show him off to everyone right away.

*Health and Nutrition Reminders*

Your pup’s immune system is not fully developed until he’s about 12 weeks old. To protect him from several serious diseases, it’s crucial to keep up with his vaccine schedule. Remember to not take him to public parks and other areas where he could potentially get parvo. Don’t give the puppy people food but do feed him 3 times a day with high-quality food that has the nutrients he needs at this stage.

*Training Tips for This Age*

Introduce “pre-training activities.” Although your puppy has a very short attention span, you can begin gently developing a few basic behaviors such as wearing a collar, following on a leash, and coming when called. Keep each session about 5 minutes long and make sure it’s fun and exciting! Lots of treats and praise should be used! Since his immunity isn’t established, your pup can’t yet go to training classes or public places. But it’s important for him to start meeting a variety of people at your home or family homes. Simple have others interact with the puppy whenever possible. Not until about 12 weeks, as your puppy gets control of his bladder and bowels, can more focused housetraining begin. Right now, be sure to take him out frequently. When not with the puppy, provide a safe, confined space, including a place for him to sleep and a separate potty area.

***12-16 weeks****-Physical Development*

Your puppy’s senses and motor skills are well developed now. He still needs to sleep a lot, but he’s full of energy and he’s awake. His bladder and bowel control are continuing to improve. His adult teeth are still coming in. Since sometimes puppy teeth don’t fall out as they should, have your vet check his mouth on the next visit.

*Behavior Changes and Challenges*

Your pup is inquisitive and interested in exploring the world around him. Right now his brain is geared toward soaking in everything it can. His coincides with crucial phase in his development: He is in what is called the critical socialization period. Through 4 months of age is the single most important period of influencing how your dog will behave as an adult. Now is when the foundation is laid for the rest of his life in terms of his attitude toward you, other humans, and other dogs. It’s extremely important for your pup to have good experiences now, being introduced to all kinds of people and things he’ll encounter during his life. His immune system continues to mature start bringing him to a variety of public places and introduce him to other dogs that you know to be healthy. Group puppy classes are a great way to introduce your puppy to a variety of people and dogs.

*Training Tips for This Age*

Housetraining can begin in earnest. Take your puppy out frequently, and praise him every time he eliminates outside. You can even treat him after he does his business! Don’t let your puppy roam free in the house. “Accidents” are not a puppy’s purposeful misbehavior; they’re an indication that you’re not keeping tabs on him. Your puppy is playful and easily distracted right now, but don’t get tough in training him. He’s still sensitive emotionally and psychology. Fears can occur easily and inhibit learning. You can start teaching him basic manners. To nurture the bond with your pup, try hand-feeding him. Feed kibble to him bit by bit. Play a game: call his name, back away, then give him food when he comes to you. You can also begin basic grooming, praise him while you gently brush him, handle his mouth and paws, and trim his nails.

***4-6 Months****-Physical Development*

This is a period of major growth for your puppy and his high-spirited bursts of activity likely feature much clumsiness. Combine all this with a still relatively short attention span, and you have one rambunctious canine on your hands!

*Behavior Changes and Challenges*

At around 4 months, your puppy will go through an “avoidance period.” During this phase he will probably be hesitant about doing new things and suspicious of new situations and places. This is also known as the fear stage. If he tends to be on the shy side, now is a time to ease up and be sure to keep things fun. Never push him or punish him for his anxiety. If his usual demeanor is especially bold, this might be a time where he simply backs off a little and looks to you for support; in that case, it can be an opportunity where he’s especially receptive to training and you can encourage his responsiveness to you.

*Training Tips for This Age*

Continue socialization to a wide variety of people, other animals, places, sounds, and sights. Housetraining may deteriorate over time, especially if you start taking it for granted. Remember when your pup is especially likely to have to go the bathroom-after eating, drinking, or playing, and upon awakening. Keep working on teaching him basic manners-to walk agreeably on leash, come to you when called, and sit or lie down on commands-always keeping it fun by using lots of treats and praise. Sessions still be short, no more than 15 minutes, but you can have numerous sessions throughout the day. Remember that habits your puppy learns now will persist when he’s much bigger. You might not mind him jumping on your now, but it might be less desirable when his paws hit your chest. Keep in mind that pups cannot take pressure or harsh treatment. Gentle repetition in short session is the key. Also, keep in mind your pup is especially prone to anxiety at this age. Calmly explore new situations with him, but don’t push him or punish him if he is reluctant.

***6-9 Months*** –*Physical Development*

This is another period of major growth, and your pup is probably also starting to feel the effects of increasing hormones in his body. Your raucous adolescent is feeling vigorous and active, so greeting enough exercise during this stage is especially important.

*Behavior Changes and Challenges*

With all those surging hormones your pup may suddenly seem to ignore you more or challenge leadership. Especially in makes there may be early expressions of aggressive or dominant behavior. Be firm about rules you’ve established. This intensity of activity may include a new burst of interest in chewing , so keep providing a variety of sage chew toys at all times.

*Training Tips for This Stage*

During your puppy’s adolescence it’s important to continue training basic commands. Going to obedience classes will help, but remember that helping him maintain his good manners at home is up to you. One key point to remember: Your pup will be much easier to live with during this period if he gets enough exercise. To help reinforce good manners and prevent your teenager from getting into destructive mischief, keep your pup with you as much as possible when you’re home. You might try having him on a leash with you while you’re in the house, and teach him to lie beside you. It may take him a while to settle down, but with patience he will. You can also keep him near you for short periods in a crate or pen.

***9-12 Months****- Physical Development*

Although your canine friend will still seem a puppy at heart in some ways, most breeds will attain adult size by 12 months. Some large and giant breeds may not quite reach adult size or weight for up to another 6 months. Most males will begin to lift their leg to urinate by 12 months.

*Behavior Changes and Challenges*

Stresses in your pup’s routine can cause setbacks or relapses in housetraining and other manners. Go back to reinforcing the basics if necessary, and keep up the praise and positive attitude. For some dogs, signs of separation anxiety can develop or intensify during this time. To help nip this problem in the bud, avoid making a big deal of your comings and goings. If your dog seems stressed when you’re about to leave him, try helping him adjust with numerous “practice departures,” where you pretend to go away but calmly return within a few minutes.

*Training Tips for This Stage*

Keep using praise and periodic treats to reinforce commands and good manners. Consider STAR Puppy program, followed by the Canine Good Citizen test. Each is a great goal to aim for as you continue to train and socialize your puppy. The CGC test simply requires that your dog demonstrate a few specific aspects of basic good behavior and manners in public and around other people. It’s a fun accomplishment you’ll both be proud of. AKC also has Community Canine and Urban Canine courses which we offer too.