

Understanding

Your Adolescent Dog



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Introduction to Canine Adolescence

Just like humans, dogs go through an adolescent phase, usually between 6 to 18 months depending on the breed. Adolescence is a time of significant change and growth, where your dog may seem like a "different dog" from the one you've known. This phase, though challenging, is a key period for development and bonding if managed with patience and understanding.

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Common Behavioural Changes

Here's what many dog owners observe during adolescence:

- Increased Independence: You might notice your dog being more distracted and less likely to listen, often exploring their surroundings with greater curiosity.
- Selective Hearing: It's not unusual for dogs to "ignore" basic commands, especially when something exciting is going on.
- Testing Boundaries: Behaviours like pulling on the lead, jumping up, or selective listening may increase as your dog experiments with independence.
- High Energy and Playfulness: Adolescents are energetic and may engage in rougher play or show bursts of hyperactivity.
- Changes in Social Behaviour: Some dogs become shy or reactive towards people and other dogs, even if they were previously comfortable.



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Why These Changes Happen



1. Hormonal Changes

- **Impact of Hormones:** Just like teenage humans, adolescent dogs experience hormonal fluctuations that influence their emotions, impulses, and reactions. Hormones can make dogs feel unsure or reactive, leading to behaviours like barking at new things or feeling anxious in busy environments.

2. Brain Development

- **Ongoing Brain Growth:** The adolescent dog's brain is still developing, especially in areas responsible for self-control and emotional regulation. This can make them impulsive, reactive, or easily distracted. It's not that your dog is ignoring you on purpose; rather, their brain is figuring out how to respond to and prioritise different stimuli.



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Why These Changes Happen



3. Social Exploration and Independence

- **Experimenting with Boundaries:** Dogs in adolescence begin to assert their independence, exploring their social world more deeply. This may mean testing boundaries to learn what is and isn't allowed. Your dog isn't trying to be naughty; they're simply learning where their limits are and how to navigate their relationship with you and others.

4. Increased Curiosity and Exploration

- **Discovering Their World:** Adolescent dogs are highly curious and tend to get distracted by sounds, smells, and sights they might not have noticed before. They're trying to make sense of everything around them, so it's natural if they seem less focused on you and more interested in exploring.



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How to Manage Behavioural Changes

Understanding that these changes are normal can help you respond with patience and consistency. Here are strategies to guide you:

- Stay Consistent and Patient: Reinforce training basics with a calm, positive approach. Don't expect perfection—adolescence is about helping them practice these skills repeatedly in a variety of environments.
- Limit Overwhelming Situations: If your dog gets easily distracted, keep training sessions short and in controlled environments. Gradually increase the challenge level to avoid overwhelming them.
- Use Positive Reinforcement: Reward calm behaviours, focus, and attempts to follow commands, even if they're slow or distracted. Praise and treats go a long way in reinforcing desired behaviour.
- Set Boundaries Gently: Use management tools like leads and baby gates to guide behaviour instead of using punishment. Setting boundaries gently helps them learn what's acceptable without causing confusion or stress.

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Tips for Training & Bonding



This is a valuable time to build your relationship with your dog, even if things don't go perfectly. Here are ways to stay connected:

- Keep Training Engaging: Incorporate new skills or fun games into training sessions to keep your dog's attention. Use toys, treats, and short sessions to make learning fun.
- Offer Daily Exercise and Enrichment: Make sure your dog gets regular exercise and mental stimulation. This can help them burn off excess energy that might otherwise turn into restlessness or destructiveness.
- Reward Calmness and Focus: When your dog displays calm behaviour, especially in a distracting environment, reward it. This will help them associate calmness with positive outcomes, reinforcing their ability to manage their impulses.
- Stay Connected with Training Support: Adolescence is a temporary phase, but it helps to have support from a trainer or local dog training community. They can provide guidance, answer questions, and reassure you that these behaviours are natural.

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Get In Touch

There's no doubt that the adolescent stage can be really tough, but you don't have to go through it alone.

You can book a free discovery call with us today through our website.

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