



Most of us remember the slogan “A dog is for life, not just for Christmas” and this message seems to have got through. But I have come across a few cases this year where behaviour issues in young dogs seem to be related to being weaned or rather separated from the litter too early.

Puppy development

Weaning usually refers to the gradual change from milk to solid food and is usually started when the puppies are between 3 and 4 weeks old. In nature the mother would start the process around 1 month, before that the maternal instinct is very strong and milk provides the best nutrients for the puppies.

By week 7 or 8 the process is completed.

But what I want to highlight is not the correct time to change from milk to solid food but the importance of the environment in the puppies' development.

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION PERIOD: Week 4:

This is the stage of when the pup may imprint of on the mother, littermates and humans. It is very detrimental to remove pups from the mother and the natural weaning process at this time. Mother dog initiates weaning process by regurgitating food.

CANINE SOCIALIZATION PERIOD: 5-7 weeks.

Interactive play with littermates essential at this time if pup is to become properly socialised. It is the beginning of the pup learning discipline. Pup begins to learn to moderate biting and control aggressive behaviour.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT PERIOD: 7 weeks to 6 months.

Pups learn pack discipline and survival behaviour. This includes learning to hunt from the adults in the pack.

FIRST FEAR IMPRINT PERIOD: 8-10 weeks.

Fright or trauma produces permanent personality damage during this time. Avoid placing pup in severe stressful situations if possible. Unfortunately this is the most common time for the puppies first visit to the veterinarian.

SECOND FEAR IMPRINT PERIOD: 6-9 months.

This is the adolescent period. Unfortunately this is the most common time for castration and spaying to be performed.

SOCIALIZATION PERIOD: 5-16 weeks.

Expose pup often to as many new people and situations as possible.

OPTIMAL LEARNING PERIOD: 7-12 weeks.

Best time to start obedience training because pup is very open to being taught new things. Such training is very likely to remain and not be forgotten.

BONDING BEHAVIOR: 8-12 weeks.

Providing earlier imprinting has occurred the pup will bond emotionally to the pack which includes his or her people. The pup begins to learn subordination.

DOMINANCE ORDER ESTABLISHED 12-16 weeks.

Litter dominance order established and practice for adult ranking in pack. This is the time the teeth begin to appear.

If you are thinking about getting a new dog I would always suggest going to one of the numerous animal charities and look to re-homing a dog rather than going to a puppy breeder. It is true that you may not know all the history about the dog but there are so many out there looking for good homes that we do not need to encourage breeding of more dogs.

Of course horse charities have many horses that need re-homing too- and not just companion animals but ones that can be ridden and often excel in many spheres!



**With that I wish you all a Merry Christmas
and all the best for the New Year!**

Quote of the month

Gifts of time and love are surely the basic ingredients of a truly merry Christmas.

~Peg Bracken

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