



BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Understanding Your Puppy's Behavior and Development

WELL-SOCIALIZED DOGS ARE MORE LIKELY to have well-socialized puppies. Pups often mirror their mothers' calm or fearful attitude toward people; this is a normal part of their socialization. But you can play a vital role, too, by petting, talking, and playing with puppy to help him develop good "people skills."

Puppies are usually weaned at six to seven weeks, but are still learning important skills as their mother gradually leaves them for longer periods of time. Ideally, puppies should stay with their littermates (or other "role-model" dogs) for at least 12 weeks.

Puppies separated from their littermates too early often fail to develop appropriate social skills, such as learning how to send and receive signals, what an "inhibited bite" (acceptable mouthing pressure) means, how far to go in play-wrestling, and so forth. Play is important for puppies because it increases their physical coordination, social skills, and learning limits. By interacting with their mother and littermates, puppies explore the ranking process (who's in charge) and also learn how to be a dog.

Skills not acquired during the first eight weeks may be lost forever. While these stages are important and fairly consistent, a dog's mind remains receptive to new experiences and lessons well beyond puppyhood. Most dogs are still puppies, in mind and body, through the first two years of life.

Stages of Puppy Development:

0–2 Weeks: Neonatal Period

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother.
- Senses of touch and taste are present at birth.

2–4 Weeks: Transitional Period

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother and littermates.
- Eyes open, teeth begin to come in, and senses of hearing and smell develop.
- Puppy begins to stand, walk a little, wag tail, and bark.
- By the fourth or fifth week, eyesight is well-developed.

3–12 Weeks: Socialization Period

- During this period, puppy needs opportunities to meet other dogs and people.
- By three to five weeks, puppy becomes aware of his surroundings, companions (both canine and human), and relationships, including play.
- By four to six weeks, puppy is most influenced by littermates and is learning about being a dog.

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Beartooth Humane Alliance
PO Box 853
Red Lodge, MT 59068
(406)672-6960
info@beartoothhumane.org
www.beartoothhumane.org