

Adolescent Dogs

Teenagers are the worst. They're a big bundle of confidence, fear, hormones and hubris. Adolescence is messy, even for dogs. Luckily, dogs don't go through 7 years of adolescence, although it can certainly feel that way.

Adolescence for dogs depends on their breeds. Smaller dogs get to and go through adolescence quickly, while large breeds take more time. Knowing that your dog is a teenager is something that you should keep in mind when you're dealing with his or her sudden belligerence and unpredictability.

Dogs are pack animals, meaning that in the wild, they live in a social order. That social order is fluid, but there are dogs that like to be in charge and those that would rather not. As a puppy, your dog was at the bottom of the pile. As your dog grows, he has to try and challenge others so that he can "rise up" in the pack. This means that your dog is looking for someone to boss around.

During this time, your dog is also trying to be what he considers to be "an adult". An adult doesn't have to listen to anyone. An adult can decide who has permission to do things. An adult can decide when and what they eat. An adult can't be bossed around. Of course, this is wrong, but your teenage dog doesn't know that.

Your dog, as a teenager, is going to try and press your buttons. He's going to try and push his boundaries. He's going to try and see what he can get away with. He's going to just generally be a butthead. He's not going to listen to anyone. He'd rather be at the mall with his friends. He can't be bothered being part of a family. Until he decides he needs snuggles and ear rubs..

The shelters are full of teenage dogs. This is the most common age to give up a dog. That cute adorable compliant puppy has become an apathetic terror who is trying to boss everyone around. Suddenly your dog has forgotten every single command you've ever taught him. He's chewed up the blanket that's been in his crate for 8 months. He's reacting to dogs he sees on the streets. He's trying to hump the cat.

Even though it's difficult, remember that this is a phase. All dogs go through this, and they usually return to the loveable dog you remember. While your dog is going through adolescence, you have to deal accordingly. Be a little more specific about what you want. Be more exacting in what they give. Set your boundaries a little tighter. Don't give them the leeway that they're trying to force you to give. You don't have to become a tyrant, but you might have to start channeling a drill sergeant for a while. Be patient with both yourself and your dog. Hormones aren't fun.

Written by Sheila of Integral Dog Training in collaboration with Animal Rescue Konnection (c) 2022.