



Why Is My Dog Suddenly Spooked?

Developmental Periods for Puppies and Adolescent Dogs



The period between 0 and 16 weeks is the most important period in your puppy's life.

0 – 12 weeks is the **socialisation period where puppies learn about humans**

0 to 16 weeks is the **canine socialisation period where puppies learn about dogs**

Puppies learn more during this short space of time than at any other time in their lives.

Dogs do undergo fear periods during their developmental stages. During these periods, dogs may gradually become more and more fearful of situations they once appeared to accept.

You may observe that your puppy or dog approaches people or items tentatively or shows defensive behaviours involving barking/lunging/growling. Dogs may be confident with some things and uncertain with others.

First Fear Imprint Period: 5 Weeks

Puppies go through their very first "fear period" when they are still in the breeder's care at 5 weeks. Puppies at 5 weeks of age demonstrate a strong fear response toward loud noises and new stimuli, however, they overcome these fears through gradual introductions, and over time accept them as normal part of their lives.

8-10 Weeks

The next fear period takes place between the ages of 8 to 10 weeks. During this time, puppies are very sensitive to new experiences, and a single event may be enough to traumatise a puppy and have life-long effects on future behaviours. The fear can be of a person, dog, object, noise or experience

In nature, during this time, puppies are getting out of the den and starting to explore the world around them. This is when puppies would learn under the guidance of their mother which things are dangerous and which are not.



13 to 16 Weeks Seniority Classification Period:

Puppy starts to cut teeth and apron strings! Puppy begins testing its position in the family unit. That's is the time when he begins serious chewing! A dog's teeth don't set in his jaw until around about a year depending on breed and size. During this time, the puppy has a physical need to exercise his mouth by chewing. Training must continue through this period or all your good work may revert back to stage one.

Occasionally the puppy will start to urinate in the house again. If this happens, just go back to basic toilet training.

Discourage all biting of humans; swap your hand for a toy or a chew. The dog should have started to learn and understand bite inhibition by this time! It is important that you are a loving, but firm and consistent leader. Remember leadership is NOT dominance, but it is important to put rules and boundaries in place for your growing puppy exactly as you would for young children. All the family need to follow these rules to avoid sending mixed messages to your puppy.

4 to 8 months - Play Instinct Period. Flight Instinct Period:

Puppy may wander and ignore you. It is very important that you keep the puppy on a lead at this time and play recall games with your puppy so that it learns that being near you is the best place to be when not on a lead. **Contact me if your dog has problems with recall.**

The behaviours you see at 16 weeks without extensive training and behavioural management are what you are going to with your adult dog. Your dog is not going to magically learn how you want it to behave unless you train it!

Contact me for help with behaviour problems or to learn basic commands.

Second Fear Period: 6 to 14 Months

While the 8 to 12 week puppy fear period is often not noticed by puppy owners, the second fear period may have a much bigger impact. The dog has grown now. This fear period is linked to the dog's sexual maturity and growth spurts. In large breeds, it may develop later compared to a smaller dog. This stage is also known as "teenage flakiness,"

In the wild, dogs at this age are allowed to go on hunts with the rest of the pack. They must learn to stick with the pack for safety, but they also need to experience fear because they need this for survival purposes. This fear period ensures that the puppy is suspicious enough to run away if something unfamiliar approaches them.



Reactivity levels rise during this stage, dogs may act defensively, become protective and more territorial. You may feel the fear has popped up from nowhere. Dogs appear fearful of new things or things they experienced in the past, but that did not trigger significant reactions. Sometimes owners interpret signs of **fear** which may include growling or barking as **aggression** and react by shouting at their dog, or pulling them away. If your dog is reactive, seek the advice of a Behaviourist who will help you to work through a desensitisation programme.

During this stage it is important to:

- ☑ Recognise the signs of fear, give your dog time and space and calm reassurance to approach the animal, object or person **at their own pace**
- ☑ Continue socialising as much as possible but without exposing the dog to overwhelming situations
- ☑ Create positive associations with scary situations (through treats and toys)
- ☑ Build confidence through training and confidence building sports and exercises
- ☑ Remember that your dog will look to you to assess your reaction – if you shout, drag the dog away or towards the object, you will compound the problem.

Training will help improve the dog's confidence. This fear period is often more marked in male dogs.

How can I help my dog?

Allow and encourage your young dog to mingle and play with adult dogs and especially other young puppies. Rough and tumble play is what teaches puppies communication skills, body language and bite inhibition. Adult dogs will put puppies in their place and will growl and snap – but not bite, to show them their place. This is normal healthy canine behaviour.

The complex body language dogs learn at this age is crucial to their later behaviour, when they are approaching unknown dogs.

Dogs that are unable to either perform or understand the greeting rituals, are immediately viewed by other dogs with suspicion and conflict may arise. This is especially so if they have not been socialised with puppies of a similar age.

Avoid cuddling or comforting your puppy when it is startled or showing fear or anxiety. Dogs and puppies see comfort and cuddle as **Reinforcement, not Reassurance**. The puppy will interpret your comforting responses as praise for being frightened.



1 to 4 Years Maturity Period:

You may encounter some increased aggression and renewed testing for position and authority.

If you have spent lots of time with your dog and trained consistently and regularly, then this should not present itself as a problem - in fact, you may hardly notice this change, it is just something to keep in mind.

Continue to train your dog during this period. It is possible that your dog may have another fear period between 12 - 16 months of age.



The importance of Continued Socialisation

Even dogs who are well socialised as puppies and appeared to have a generally friendly, calm temperament may sometimes react with aggression when they encounter difficult experiences or situations.

Even if the dog has had no traumatic or frightening experiences in their life, the lack of continued socialisation prevents them from maintaining their calm, friendly temperament and certain situations may push them into fearful or aggressive reactions.



pleasant experience.

Dog socialisation does not have to be complicated or time consuming. You can simply walk your dog frequently, allowing him to meet other animals and people in a pleasant atmosphere.

Arrange dog play dates with other friendly dogs, or even trips to the local dog park. Dogs should be allowed to meet with people who come into the home, and see that this too is a

A dog owner's interaction with and training of their dog can definitely help improve and stabilise their dog's behaviour, but regular socialisation throughout a dog's life is critical to their well-being, health and happiness, and makes for a much happier relationship and home.