

Adolescent Dogs

Article appeared in Woofers Times (June 2006)

Dear Madame Good Dog,

I have a one-year old terrier mix, Izzy and she's driving me crazy! We walk twice a day, but she's still getting into everything and although she did beautifully in class, she sometimes acts like she doesn't even know her own name let alone what "Sit" means. Help! What can I do? Signed, On-the-Edge

Dear On-the-Edge,

Congratulations! Your puppy is growing up. Izzy is now an adolescent. Just like human beings, dogs go through different stages of development, both physically and mentally. A dog's developmental stages are: Neonatal – 0 to 14 days, Transitional – 14 to 21 days, Socialization – 3 to 16 weeks, Juvenile – 4 to 6 months, Adolescence – 6 to 18 months, and Adult.

As a general rule, adolescence can appear in smaller dogs as early as five months. In larger breeds, it can start as late as nine or ten months. In general, the larger the dog, the longer they take to mature. (Timeframe varies with dog breed and size.) Some breeds can remain adolescents until they are 2 1/2 or 3 years old.

Adolescence is a very difficult time for guardians. They are surprised when their cute little puppy becomes an independent thinker. Minor puppy rambunctiousness becomes major-league unruly behavior, such as ignoring you (Come? What's that?), chewing inappropriate objects, and extreme bouncing-off-the-walls hyperactivity.

The good news is we have many ways to help Izzy through this period. While walks are an essential part of any dog's day, all too often we consider a walk enough exercise. When our puppy's energy level increases, we try to wear them out with longer walks. Increasing walks will get you a physically fit dog, but it's not enough. We must stimulate our dogs mentally as well.

There are many activities that will "wear Izzy out", both physically and mentally. Place Izzy's meals in Kongs and let her work for supper. (In a bowl, it's gone in 3 minutes.) She'll spend time figuring out how to get at her supper, and extracting the food provides much needed chewing exercise. (For the 3 stages of Kong stuffing visit fundawgs.com.) If Izzy spends several hours alone on a regular basis, consider purchasing a Kong Time, which releases Kongs at variable intervals. Sterilized bones can also be stuffed with favorite treats.

In addition, there are many interactive toys for dogs, such as Egg Babies and the Hide-a-Squirrel. Egg Babies have squeaky eggs in a velcroed enclosure, which they must work to extract. The Squirrel Hut is similar in that stuffed squirrels are pulled from their tree.

Be sure to provide plenty of chew toys, such as bully sticks and Nylabones. Chewing naturally calms a dog. As always supervise Izzy with anything new to make sure she is using it appropriately.

Training is another way of channeling Izzy's energy. The mental exercise your pup gets from training is just as important as the physical exercise. Learning is hard work! A 10 minute session of obedience training is as good as a two mile walk. Don't forget about teaching tricks. They're as much fun to teach as they are to learn.





Toni Lee Hage, CTC
Toni@Fundawgs.com
510.326.4597
FunDawgs.com

While obedience classes are always a good idea, there are many more activities available that provide physical and mental exercise. These activities can be done for fun or competition.

Agility is a sport that uses an obstacle course. With direction from their humans, dogs jump hurdles, scale ramps, burst through tunnels, traverse a see-saw and weave through a line of poles.

Rally Obedience is a combination of obedience exercises performed on a course. Rally-O emphasizes fun and excitement, while building your skills as a handler and increasing your dog's repertoire of behaviors.

Canine Freestyle is a choreographed performance. Musical freestyle artistically displays the dog and handler in an original dance, using intricate movements to showcase teamwork. Heelwork-to-Music incorporates traditional obedience and the art of dressage with the inclusion of musical interpretation and dance elements.

Try out some of these suggestions and I'm sure you'll have a calmer and happier adolescent.

Toni Lee Hage is a graduate of the SF SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers and the owner/trainer of Fun Dawgs in San Leandro (fundawgs.com). She offers a variety of group classes, plus private sessions in good manners and bad manners behavior modification.