

Guide to Raising a Charmer

A yearlong guide to your dog's socialization process.

Arden Moore

Adolescent Chewers: 6 to 9 monthsPhysical Growth: Most puppies enter a second intensive chewing phase. They also continue to grow in height, and their sexual organs fully develop to the point that they can mate.Social Growth: Veterinarians and behaviorists label this time as the adolescence age. During this stage, puberty and sexual maturity begin. Females will experience their first estrus (heat cycle) unless spayed first. Males will develop the sexual hormone testosterone in sufficient levels to mate. Intact males begin scent marking, urinating to mark territory, and may become less friendly to other male dogs they view as threats or challenges. Social Skill Tips: You can prevent many unwanted behavior problems by having your puppy spayed or neutered well before 6 months of age (unless you own a pedigree show-quality dog that you intend to breed responsibly). Puppies can be safely sterilized after 8 weeks of age, providing that they weigh at least 2 pounds.This is definitely the time to reinforce your role as leader of the household pack. Re-channel your puppy's sexual energies into interactive, fun, learning games and activities. Consider enrolling your puppy into a formal obedience training class to reinforce basic commands. Introduce your puppy to dog parks, beaches and other canine-friendly places.Next Step: Terrible Twos: 9 to 12 Months