

Guide to Raising a Charmer

A yearlong guide to your dog's socialization process.

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Terrible Twos: 9 to 12 months
Physical Growth: Look for your puppy to finish its physical growth by filling out its frame with muscle bulk. Puppies during this time spend more time building muscle mass and less time growing taller. By a puppy's first birthday, it should be 95 percent adult in physique, intelligence and attitude.
Social Growth: Welcome to the terrible twos, an apt nickname because many puppies behave like unruly child toddlers. Puppies commonly display signs of challenge, stubbornness and even dominance toward owners and other people. They may see the need to protect the home turf by barking at strangers who pass by the house. Some develop food possessiveness and guard their bowls unless trained and socialized earlier. Intact males may stop every few feet during leashed walks and leave urine droplets to inform other dogs of their presence. Female dogs entering estrus may become aggressive, moody, insecure or bold and try to flee while outdoors or off leash. Although a puppy reaches its physical growth by age 1, complete social maturity, depending on the breed, usually doesn't occur until 18 to 24 months of age.
Social Skill Tips: Be consistent with your training and socialization techniques. Step up your positive interactions with your nearly grown puppy. Aim for two or three walks a day. Introduce your dog to an organized sport, such as agility, or Frisbee or another activity, depending on its interest and health status. For growing puppies like Dillon, first-time dog owners Diane and Dan Pucin are learning the importance of socialization. They invite friends over to their home for cookouts, take Dillon with them to visit friends and relatives, and bring him on a leash for short shopping trips so he can practice his meet-and-greet manners with people of all shapes and ages. "There is a lot to puppy parenting," says Diane Pucin. "But Dillon is definitely worth the investment. We want to do what we can to help him grow into a great, friendly dog."

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