

## ALDAR'S BULLDOGS

### **CRITICAL PERIODS**

A critical period is a specific time in a dog's life when an apparently insignificant experience may and often does not have a great effect on later behaviour. All dogs, regardless of breed or mix, are affected in their psychological growth by their environment. Critical periods apply to all dogs, but not necessarily in the same degree. Understanding these critical periods will help you to understand your dogs behaviour and to know how to handle both him and yourself during certain special times.

#### **Birth to Seven weeks (0 to 49 days)**

In order to maximize the mental and psychological development of a puppy, it is absolutely essential that he remain with his mother littermates until seven weeks of age. It is during this time that puppies learn that they are dogs. While playing, they practice different body postures-learning what they mean and the effects they have on their brothers and sisters and their mother. They learn what it feels like to bite and be bitten and what barking sound like. Such activity tempers their own barking and biting.

Puppies are disciplined by mom in a way they clearly understand. They learn to be submissive to her leadership, which teaches them to accept discipline. .If a pup has not learned to accept leadership in its early dog to dog interactions it's training will be much more difficult. Puppies that leave the nest too early tend to be nervous, prone to barking and biting, and less responsive to discipline. Often they are more aggressive with other dogs. In general, a puppy taken away to new home before seven weeks will not realize it's full potential as a dog and companion.

#### **Socialization period (7-12 weeks)**

The best time to bring a puppy into it's new home is during the socialization period. At this time he should be introduced to as many things as possible that will play a role in his future life. For example, if you want him to interact peacefully with farm animals or a cat, it is at this age that he should meet them in a positive, non threatening manner. If the breeder has not already introduced him to sounds like the vacuum cleaner, engine noises, city traffic etc. it is during this period that you should do so. Children, men with beards, women in floppy hats and senior citizens, while all people to us, appear differently to a dog and he should meet as many different ages and types of people as possible.

At seven weeks of age, a puppy's brain has the waves of an adult dog. His capacity for concentration, however, is not yet adult and thus his attention span is quite short. Yet, the puppy can learn!!!!

Not only can a young puppy learn, he will learn, whether he is taught or not. It is at this age that

the most rapid learning occurs. Everything the puppy comes in contact with is making a lasting impression on him as it never will again. Things learned at this age are learned permanently. This is important to think about when you want to hold your puppy on your lap while you watch TV. Remember the puppy will grow up and do you want a 50 pound dog sitting on your lap. This is the best way to begin your pups training in a positive, non-punitive manner, taking into account his physical limitations and short attention span. The lessons taught at this age in a non-punitive manner are proven very successful and effective.

### **Fear Imprint Period (8-10 weeks)**

During this period any traumatic, painful or frightening experience will have a more lasting impact on your puppy than if it occurred at any other time. For instance, a trip to the veterinarian, if unpleasant, could forever make your dog apprehensive about going to the vet. To avoid this, take along a toy to play along with loads of petting and praise after completing the examination.

### **Seniority Classification Period (12-16 weeks)**

This is the period also known as the "Age of Cutting"-cutting teeth and cutting apron strings. It is at this age that your pup will begin testing to see who is the pack leader is going to be. From 12 weeks on, if your puppy makes an attempt to bite you, even in play, or bites the leash when you are walking or training, it is usually an attempt to dominate. Biting behaviour should be completely and absolutely discouraged from 13 weeks on.

Serious training, if not already started should begin now. It will establish, in a manner easy for the pup to understand, that you are the pack leader. When you assume responsibility for having a dog, you assume the responsibility for training and for being pack leader. Pack Leadership is something you will learn through training-through specific exercises designed to teach your dog that you are in charge.

The critical periods above are generally the same, regardless of breed or size of dog. The ages of the next critical stages may vary depending upon the size of the dog. In general smaller dogs tend to experience these periods earlier than large dogs.

### **Flight Instinct Period(4-8 months)**

This is the age when your puppy will truly test his wings. He will venture off on his own and turn completely deaf when you call him. If this occurs during training, the puppies response to your "come" command will be to take off in the opposite direction. Now you know why, and you can say to yourself "Aha! Flight Instinct!"

The flight instinct period generally lasts anywhere from several weeks to months. How you handle your dog at this time will mean the difference between a dog that ignores your call and

the one who responds readily. REMEMBER, until you are absolutely sure of your dog and his training, keep him on a leash.

Putting him in a position where he can run away from you will only serve to ingrain this undesirable behaviour.

### **Second Fear Imprint Period(6-14 months)**

This fear period is not as well defined as the first one which occurs between 8-10 weeks. It is marked by your now adolescent dog's reluctance to approach something new or his sudden fear of something familiar. To get through this period, BE PATIENT, BE KIND. Don't force your puppy to do something frightening to him and above all continue training so that he is being given leadership in a familiar reassuring manner.

### **Maturity (1-4 years)**

This critical period is often marked by an increase in aggression and a renewed testing of your leadership. The increased aggression is not necessarily negative. Often it means that a previously over-friendly dog now becomes a good watch dog and barks when people come to the door. It may also mean, however, that Spot and Fido, who used to be great friends are now fighting every time they see each other.

If, at maturity, your dog tries to test your leadership, handle him firmly and continue training. Train your dog regularly throughout this testing period. Praising for the proper response. If you feel they are too much to handle, you may want to see professional help.

You should be prepared for the psychological changes that will occur in your dog so that you understand and can help them and yourself get through this period.