



**6201 FLORIN PERKINS ROAD
SACRAMENTO, CA 95828**

**PHONE: (916) 383-7387
FAX: (916) 383-7062**

BEHAVIOR@SSPCA.ORG

ADOLESCENCE: 5-24 MONTHS

WHAT HAPPENED TO MY PUPPY??

Adolescence typically occurs between 5 months and two years and can be a challenging stage for dog owners. Adolescent dogs look like grown dogs, but they are still very much puppies who go through a resurgence of some puppy behaviors. While it may take a little extra work to get through this stage, the reward is an adult dog who is the companion you've always wanted.

So here are a few things to be prepared for:

DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING

When your puppy was younger, they explored the world with their mouths and did quite a bit of chewing during the first teething phase. After this stage, the chewing seems to happen less frequently and, when it does happen, it causes very minor damage.

However, at around 5 months, your puppy's adult teeth have emerged, bringing about a second teething phase that will last at least one year. During this time, the type of chewing that dogs engage in can be much more destructive if you don't take steps to manage it.

Your puppy doesn't just like to chew at this stage, they need to chew! They still have aches and pains related to teething, so provide them with plenty of appropriate outlets. This includes rope toys, natural chews like cow hooves and bully sticks, and specially designed chews like Nylabones. You can also freeze whole, large carrots and provide those as soothing treats.

When your dog is unsupervised, use baby gates or pens to confine your dog to keep them out of areas where they might be tempted to chew inappropriately.

MOUTH & PLAY BITING

Just like when they were little, adolescent dogs can be "mouthy" during this time. This is how they played and interacted with their littermates, so they try to play with you the same way. This is not a sign of aggression. It is a normal, if sometimes overwhelming, behavior.

Some people worry that a dog will "learn that it's okay to bite" if they are allowed to put their teeth on human skin. But dogs don't bite aggressively because they think it's acceptable to us, they bite when they perceive a person or something the person is doing as a threat.



**6201 FLORIN PERKINS ROAD
SACRAMENTO, CA 95828**

**PHONE: (916) 383-7387
FAX: (916) 383-7062**

BEHAVIOR@SSPCA.ORG

Mouthing and play biting are attention-seeking behaviors. This means that any attention, including saying “No,” can end up being a reward. For effective strategies on how to minimize mouthing, see our handout on Puppy Play Biting.

NEW FEARS & REACTIVITY

Adolescent dogs can also start to display fearful behaviors, including barking and growling, between 5 and 9 months. This can be triggered by things that didn't bother them before, like garbage cans on the street, strangers, or other dogs.

This is not something that your dog will grow out of or just get used to. If they are showing fearful or reactive behavior now and you don't take steps to make them feel better about those situations, the behavior will continue or worsen as your dog gets older.

For more information, see our handouts on Fearful Dogs and Reactivity.

REGULAR TEENAGER STUFF

In addition to everything else, your adolescent dog is impulsive, has lots of energy, and needs your patience and guidance. Remember, they may look grown, but adolescent dogs are still puppies at heart!

Some things will get better as your dog matures (between 2-3 years old), but if you haven't already attended a class with your dog (or you let things slide a little since puppy class), now is a great time to learn how to teach your dog good manners.

ADDITIONAL SACRAMENTO SPCA HANDOUTS

- Home Alone: Confinement Training
- Puppy Play Biting
- Fearful Dogs
- Reactivity: leash Aggression
- How to Change Problem Behavior