

## WHAT HAPPENED TO MY PUPPY???

Adolescence occurs between 5 months to up to 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 prevent 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 carrots and provide those as soothing treats.

When your dog is unsupervised, use baby gates or pens to confine your dog (see our handout on *Home Alone: Confinement Training*) or to keep them out of areas they might be tempted to chew.

### MOUTHING & 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's normal, natural 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 because they think it's acceptable to us, they bite when they perceive a person or something the person is doing as a threat.



*Everything is a chew toy to an adolescent dog!*

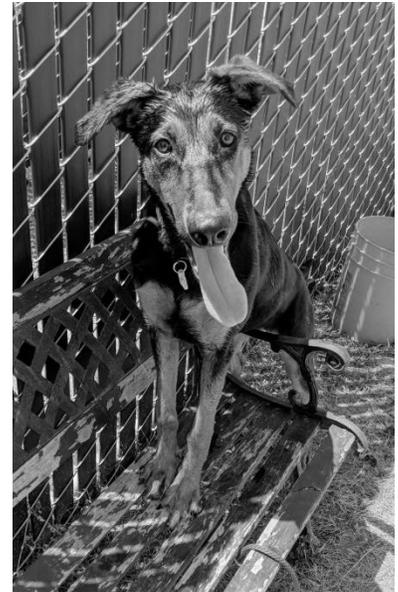
Mouthing and play biting are *attention-seeking behaviors*. This means that any attention, including saying “No,” can end up being a reward. For effective strategies on how to minimize mouthing, see our handout on *Puppy Play Biting*.

## NEW FEARS & REACTIVITY

Adolescent dogs can also start to display fearful or reactive (barking/growling) behaviors between 5-9 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.

See our handouts on *Fearful Dogs* and *Reactivity: Leash Aggression* for more information or attend one of our behavior seminars at the Sacramento SPCA.



Like any teenager, adolescent dogs can be a challenge, but they are always worth the extra effort!

## 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 by enrolling in our Family Dog classes!

## ADDITIONAL SSPCA HANDOUTS

- *Puppy Play Biting*
- *Home Alone: Confinement Training*
- *Fearful Dogs*
- *Reactivity: Leash Aggression*
- *How To Change Problem Behavior*

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- *Juvenile Delinquent Dogs, Sue Brown*
- *Chill Out Fido, Nan Arthur*