

## **Introducing An Adolescent Dog To a New Puppy**

**Daniel Estep, Ph.D. and Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D.**

**www.AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com**

**Copyright ABA, Inc.**

We recently received a letter from a person who is concerned that her 2 year old female dog is not accepting their new 11 week old puppy. Hannah is growling at Sasha when the puppy tries to sleep with her. Hannah also growls whenever her owners pet Sasha or praise her for getting her housetraining right. Hannah hasn't harmed Sasha, but Hannah doesn't seem to want the puppy in her life, and bullies her during play.

When Hannah was a puppy, her owners took her to puppy class, and socialized her to lots of different people. Hannah got along well with both other dogs and people until she was about a year old, when she became possessive about her food, water, toys and other resources when other dogs were around.

These types of adolescent dog problems are not uncommon. While most dog owners now realize the importance of socialization during early puppy hood, very little attention or encouragement is given to adolescent socialization, from about 6 to 18 months. During this time, dogs begin to mature and show more adult-like behaviors. Threatening and aggressive behaviors are more common, and in fact many aggressive behavior problems surface when dogs are between one and two years of age.

Compounding this lack of socialization is the lifestyle of many family dogs. By spending time in the house and yard alone, they have many opportunities to "practice" territorial behavior by barking at passersby, and in their minds, being rewarded by making these individuals leave.

Without continued socialization during adolescence, many dogs seem to lose the social skills they developed during puppy hood. If your dog is between 6 months and a year, and is still friendly, now is the time to take preventive action. Find other friendly dogs your dog can play with. Enrolling her in doggie day care one day a week, and visiting an off-leash dog park on the weekends would go a long way toward keeping your dog friendly.

Ongoing training classes may be beneficial, but can also backfire. If you pull your dog away from other dogs, or correct her for wanting to socialize, your dog can begin to think that being approached by other dogs predicts unpleasantness. This can contribute to her unfriendly behavior.

When you need to keep your dog's attention on you rather than on other dogs, do so using positive distractions, such as an irresistible tidbit, or special toy, rather than leash and collar corrections. Collars that cause pain, such as choke chains and pinch collars, are especially like to create further problems.

If your dog can't play well with others, your life becomes more complicated. You may resort to walking your dog very early in the morning or late at night to avoid meeting other dogs. More likely, you may stop taking your dog for walks altogether because encountering other dogs is so unpleasant. Hiking in off-leash dog areas is no longer a possibility. Your dog's quality of life suffers, as does your enjoyment of your pet.

Rehabilitating a dog who has become aggressive or unfriendly to other dogs is much more difficult and time intensive than taking several hours a week now to provide socialization experiences while your dog is still friendly.