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PUPPY DEVELOPMENT & CRITICAL LEARNING PERIODS

All dogs as they develop physically and mentally go through what is termed as critical learning periods. It is during these periods that training and socialisation can be incorporated to ensure that you end up with a happy balanced dog.

0 to 7 Weeks

Neonatal, Transition, Awareness, and Canine Socialisation

It is important for your puppy to remain with his mother and siblings during this time as it is these that will teach him his first social skills, play and bite inhibition. Also the mother begins to teach him not to toilet in the bed area. It is also when he will first learn to accept discipline. A good breeder will also during this time introduce your puppy to new sounds, smells and human contact.

7 to 16 Weeks

Human Socialisation Period

Although he will have a short attention span, it is during this time that your puppy will experience his most rapid learning and what is taught in this period will remain with him for life.

It is therefore the most vital time to introduce him to different environments and people and to make sure that he has plenty of positive experiences. Even though he will not have received his final vaccinations until usually around twelve weeks, it is still essential that he is taken out to meet things. If necessary carry him to different places in your arms and allow people to handle and make a fuss of him. Introduce him to the sounds of busy roads and every day household noises.

During the human socialisation period, your puppy will also experience his first fear period. It is important when socialising your puppy, to make sure that he does not suffer any frightening or painful experiences as this will stay with him for the rest of his life. Should he display any signs of fear or stress during this time, the best thing is to remove him quietly from what is scaring him. Do not make a big fuss as to him this will look as though you are reinforcing his fears and he will then be more likely to remember it.

Towards the end of this period your puppy will begin losing his baby teeth and mouthing family members can be a problem. Bite inhibition will have been started by the mother, but needs to be carried on by the rest of the family. Never smack your puppy for mouthing, just calmly say either “no” or “ouch” and walk away from him and if he persists then quietly put him in his crate for a few minutes to calm down. He will also begin to test his position within the family and it is vital at this time that the rules have been put in place and all the family is being consistent with instigating them. For example, it is no good you not allowing your puppy on the settee when another family member then calls him up for a cuddle. It is said that what is seen at sixteen weeks, without any training, is more or less what your dog will be like in his adult life. This is why training at this age is vital, so that any unwanted behaviour can be prevented.

It is important to continue to play with him and handle him on a daily basis, but games like tug of war or wrestling should be avoided. He may see tug of war as a game of dominance, especially if he wins and also with him losing his teeth, he may see playing with you as a painful experience and be reluctant to do so. ‘Play fighting’ or wrestling is another game that can rapidly get out of hand. As your puppy’s strength grows, he is going to want to ‘play fight’ to see who is the stronger, and even if you win he will learn that this type of play is acceptable – but it is not, at any time. He will not know the difference between wrestling with you or a much younger member of the family. Having an adult Rottweiler leaping on anyone for a rough and tumble is definitely a no-no.

4 to 8 Months

Play Instinct Period. Flight Instinct Period

It is during this time that your dog could show a reluctance to please you and you may well see him test his limits more and more. You need to remain firm, fair and above all consistent in your training methods. The adolescent Rottweiler is no different to the average teenage child and as long as the rules are clear to him, then he will accept them with the minimum of fuss.

6 to 14 Months

Second Fear Imprint Period

This period is where your dog could show fear of something new or even something he is familiar with. If he does act like this, the best thing is to play the whole situation down. Distract him from the object of his fear as best you can, or even better remove him from it. Again it is important not to reassure your dog as this will only reinforce his anxiety. Positive training during this period usually helps to boost his confidence.

1 to 4 Years

Maturity Period

As your dog develops and matures, so his hormones can play havoc with his temperament. This combined with him testing his size and strength could lead to him showing aggression towards other dogs as well as him testing you. It is vital at this stage that you remain firm but fair with him. As long as you continue with the training, then you will be able to see him through this difficult period.