



Developmental Stages of Dogs

Puppies/Dogs go through a number of developmental periods and it is important to know what they are so that you can recognise the behaviour that goes along with that phase.

Human Socialisation Period (6-12 Weeks)

The puppy has a developed brain that can think like an adult dog.

This is the best time to interact with the puppy, bring it inside for the night in front of the TV etc.

Crate training is possible & should be attempted as early as possible.

He now has the ability to learn respect and simple training steps such as come, sit, stay.

He can now learn by association.

The permanent man-dog bonding begins; we do not use any corrective measures when training puppies at this stage, other than removal of an available reward.

Confidence building is now possible too.

Outline the rules as soon as the pup gets home, such as where the pup will sleep, eats & toilets & also set boundaries to some behaviours such as play.

Period of Fear (12-16 weeks of age)



This is a critical development period that you need to be aware of.

The puppy will spook very easily in this period, & frightening experiences can have a lasting effect on the puppy.

In this period, try not to allow children to carry or pick up puppies, nor play with them without close supervision.

People are told to overly socialise their puppies at this stage, however this can backfire if the puppy is attacked. The key here is careful socialisation under close supervision.

Stay away from dog parks during this period.

Try not to allow the pup any contact with dogs you don't know who may not be gentle with pups. A puppy subjected to an attack by another dog in this period will most likely suffer from fear aggression its whole life.

If you do not wish your dog to have a high value for other dogs e.g. like other dogs more than you, you can start to neutralise your dog to other dogs with the help of a trainer. This means your dog won't be fussed by seeing other dogs and sees you as more interesting.

Things learned by negative association in this period can be permanent.

If your puppy spooks at something, take no notice. If you sympathise with your puppy when it gets scared it will reinforce this reaction.

Rank & Shaping (14-18 weeks of age)



If you don't enforce the rules here you could have an on-going battle on your hands.

Puppies teethe at this point, this makes them chew & people are good chew toys.

They begin to realise the power of their jaws & should be taught bite inhibition (for pets) at this age.

They can also start to show signs of dominance. Good pack leadership should be exercised now as a Great Dane let go at this point can be quite a handful, (yes at 18 weeks!). They can learn the skills they need to dominate you & exercise these skills when they get big & strong enough. It may be funny to watch a 16 week old pup growling at you, but it's not so funny at 16 months & 60-70 plus kg.

Keep up with positive training at this point; learning a new behaviour at this stage is easier than breaking a bad habit later. Train often in this period, putting formality to the work the puppy can do, asking for more focus etc.

If you are struggling dealing with your puppy at this stage it is highly recommended that you seek the assistance of an experienced Trainer/Behaviourist, some easy to implement changes can quickly turn around a pushy puppy.

If you haven't implemented the 'Nothing in Life is Free (NILIF)' program you'll want to get it started straight away. The NILIF Program (mentioned in this book) assists dogs of any age to understand what their boundaries are.

If during this period your dog is irritating you beyond belief and you really cannot cope then remove your dog from your presence e.g. put it outside or in its crate until a time you can get your head straight and deal with the dog without emotion.

Leadership is about being calm & fair and giving off that presence that you're in control. Think of human leaders (such as Presidents & Prime Ministers) and how they portray themselves to their human followers.

Selective Deafness & the 2nd Fear Period (5-9 Months of age & 8-16 months of age)

Training, training, training.



Selective deafness? (5-9 Months)

It's no surprise to see puppies pretend not to hear your known commands at this age. It's at this age we introduce more formal training including consequences for disobedience.

Dogs often chew & destroy things that have your scent on them at this point too: Many pups are dumped before 9 months... why? Because they now have strength, they are getting bigger, faster & less reactive to a simple "no"... By now they have either been taught to walk on a loose leash or pull on the

leash.

Second Fear Period (8 - 16 Months)

As puppies become what is called "gangly" i.e. have long legs due to growth spurts, they seem to become a little weaker in nerve than previously noted.

It's strange sounds, new sights that often spook a dog more easily than just a week ago. It's at this time we need to be good leaders. When your dog balks at a stairway, keep walking at full pace to show your pup all is okay.

Molly coddling him when he shows fear will reinforce that fear & you will have to work to get over it later.

More training now is crucial to his behavioural development.

Social Maturity (from 2 years of age)

A 2 year old Great Dane can be thought of as equivalent to an 18 year old human - it's a time where one comes into themselves and learns more about what they are capable of and this certainly also includes Canines.

Owners of Great Danes reaching social maturity may find themselves at their wits end. This is the most common age where Great Danes seem to be re-homed or surrendered to pounds and shelters.

Behaviours that you may see from a dog coming into Social Maturity:

- Ignoring your commands / cues
- Pushing buttons
- Using their weight against you
- Pushy behaviour with other dogs
- Challenging Behaviour with other dogs
- Generally being more rude and pushy than usual

It is important that you keep a clear head during these periods and ask for help from your breeder and / or qualified Trainer / Behaviourist to help guide you through this period if you do get stuck.

Keep practicing the NILIF program and be 100% consistent with your rules and boundaries.

Most Great Dane families will fly through this period without too many dramas, be prepared for what might come, it is better to be pro-active than reactive.