

THE DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF A PUPPY

The Prenatal Period

Before birth - adverse experiences for the pregnant mother may affect the behavior of the offspring. These include the lack of a balanced diet or a stressful experience such as being hit by a car.

The Neonatal Period

Birth to 2 weeks - a constant human interference will interrupt the instinctive relationship between mother and puppy and can have a detrimental effect on the pup in later life. A puppy who has never had a human touch or external stimulation can grow up less confident and emotionally stable. The need for a happy balance is important if future stability is needed. The needs of a puppy at this stage are; food, warmth, rest, urination and defecations.

The Socialization Period

3 to 12 weeks - This happens rapidly and is when particular responses are acquired most readily and bonds are made. The socialization period is characterized by interactions with family, people and its surroundings. The pup learns how to dominate or submit during this stage. Environmental issues at this stage have the greatest effect on the behavior as an adult.

This is also the best time to buy a puppy. A healthy age to buy a puppy is 10 weeks and older but not younger than 6 weeks. Some experts believe that puppies should stay with the mother until 12 weeks of age as before this time puppies are very vulnerable but this is also after the crucial stages of socialization. Puppies removed at 6 weeks showed a loss of appetite, increased distress and a susceptibility to illness.

The optimum time for socialization is between 6 - 12 weeks when the puppy's instinct to make friends with strangers overcomes its natural wariness and is why it is advocated the ideal time to remove the puppy from its mother and litter mates to a new home. There are gaps in our current knowledge of the early development of behavior problems. We do not know a great deal about what crosses the placenta to the unborn puppy and this may affect behavior. Research shows that puppies are particularly vulnerable to psychological damage resulting in behavioral problems. With children we can monitor progress through interview, dream interpretation and free association but with our puppies we can only guess at what might have occurred.

The Juvenile Period

12 weeks to 2 years - This happens at the end of the socialization period but the timing is not clear cut. Many puppies regress at around 6 months old when they have a heightened awareness of stimuli previously tolerated such as traffic or strangers which can provoke a fearful response. The puppy is now old enough to start training to heel and stay on command. This can only be for short periods at a time to begin with at first.

The Adulthood Period

Two (2) years old is generally accepted as the age of adulthood. This is when entire male dogs make a bid for dominance, either challenging the owner or other dogs in the house. Traumatic experiences which occur during the socialization period between 3 and 12 weeks of age can have detrimental consequences and attribute to behavior problems during adult life. This period is characterized by interactions with its litter mates, its mother, with people and the surroundings.

The more POSITIVE experiences that the puppy encounters during this time, the more stable the puppy will be going into adulthood. It should be remembered that this is usually a very stressful time for a puppy as usually they are re-homed at around this age and if the move is traumatic it can have an affect on the adult dog.

Some health problems includes prone to sunburn along the hair parting; skin, eye issues, respiratory, and slipped stifle. Some may be difficult to feed with weak, upset digestion. They may get the chills, and they experience discomfort in hot weather. Maltese should be kept out of damp areas. Also prone to teeth problems. Feeding dry dog biscuits in addition to their normal food can help the teeth stay clean and healthy.

Maltese need a daily walk. Play will take care of a lot of their exercise needs, however, as with all breeds, play will not fulfil their primal instinct to walk. Dogs who do not get to go on daily walks are more likely to display behaviour problems. They will also enjoy a good romp in a safe open area off lead, such as a large fenced in yard. They remain playful well into old age. They are very active indoors.

Daily combing and brushing of the long coat is important but be gentle, as the coat is very soft. Clean the eyes daily to prevent staining, and clean the beard after meals for the same reason. Bathe or dry shampoo regularly - making sure the animal is thoroughly dry and warm afterward. Clean the ears, and pull out hair growing inside the ear canal. The eyes should be checked regularly and cleaned if necessary. The hair on the top of the head is

often tied up in a topknot to keep it away from the eyes. Some pet owners opt to clip the hair short for easier and less time consuming grooming. The Maltese sheds little to no hair and is good for allergy sufferers.

To some people a dog crate seems like cruelty to the dog. However, if presented correctly, it is just the opposite. It gives your Maltese a place that belongs to him, a safe den where he can go if he wants to be left alone or rest. It also give you a place to keep your Maltese at the times when you do not want him underfoot, and a safe way of traveling your dog. If you crate your Maltese in the car, he can be left with the windows completely down. It is extremely dangerous to leave your Maltese in a closed car in warm weather or ride loose in the back of a truck. Also if you should have an auto accident, your dog is not likely to be thrown out of the car or escape in the confusion. Hotel rooms generally prefer crated dogs, also. To crate train your Maltese, first select a crate which will be large enough to fit him as an adult. The puppy should be fed in his crate, and encouraged to sleep in it with the door open. He may be left with the door closed for short periods of time once he is used to it. Avoid leaving a Maltese puppy in a crate for extended periods of time. *NEVER* use the crate as a punishment. The location should be out of the way but near family activity.

The goal for "house breaking" your Maltese is to have it "potty" outside and not inside your house.

Here's some hints to make house training a little easier

Keep your Maltese puppy up on a consistent housebreaking schedule. Feed at the same time ever day. Designate one area outside as a potty area. Take your Maltese out every 2 hours to the potty area, whether it has eaten or not. The times that a puppy will most likely want to eliminate are after eating or drinking, after a nap, or after a period of play or vigorous exercise. Make up a written time log showing feeding and trips to the potty area, this really helps. Bring the puppy on a leash to the designated area. Initially you want to teach the puppy what the words go potty mean, but don't distract the puppy from its business by constant YAPPING...be quiet...say go potty just before you see it is about to, say good Potty (not too loud or distracting) as it eliminates, and then get really excited and be as loud as you wish, saying GOOD POTTY once the puppy has done the "business"....and give it a treat . Praise them with the most flavorful treats as opposed to the dry kind.

The two most important words in house training are WATCH or CONFINE. Never give a puppy full run of the house, start in a small area like a utility room or a small pen, don't graduate to a larger area until it has proven (no accidents) itself in that area for a period of time. Watching means ...CONSTANTLY being aware of where the puppy is. Its preferable to put the puppy on a leash when not in the puppy pen or crate. (Outside dog runs are a great investment too !!)

Get yourself a suitably sized crate the same day you buy your puppy. It's not inhumane or cruel (cruel is constantly reprimanding, scolding and possibly getting physical with the puppy for eliminating inside the house). Do not fill the entire floor area of the crate with newspaper or bedding of any kind, just put make a 1/4 of the crate a bed, if you wish. Always make sure the crate is in a well ventilated area out of direct sunlight. Also, if you live in colder climates, be sure the room temperature stays fairly constant, not too hot...or too cold.

Never be physical with a puppy for eliminating inside. In fact never be physical with your puppy. Being overly physical with your Maltese will make it not want to perform in front of you, and will actually cause the puppy to leave gifts for you out of your sigh. You can start a very young Maltese puppy on newspaper, but get rid of the paper as soon as you can and begin formal crate training. Be patient, consistent, and diligent in taking the puppy outside, regulate what goes into your puppy's tummy, so you can regulate what comes out..

Enjoy the company of your altese.