

Bratty behaviour

What to do when your puppy turns into a teenage terror

BY JESS ALLSOP

We all know human teenagers are hard work, and teenage dogs – aged from approximately five months to two years old – are no different! As your cute, cuddly bundle of fur grows into a sleek adolescent dog, all that willingness to please goes out the window. Your once faithful puppy that lay by your feet and followed you around the house now ignores your verbal requests. It would rather be on the opposite side of the park from you, and doesn't come back when you call it. If this sounds like your pup then you should begin by congratulating yourself for producing a confident puppy that wants to play with strangers and other dogs. But now let's discuss what's going on with your dog's behavioural development.

Your pup spent the first three to four months getting to know its new home and family, and now has the confidence to have some independence. Along with this newly found impartiality comes the apparent deafness, and the loss of basic manners. No, you're not imagining it – your puppy gets worse before it gets better! Training your puppy from a young age will not prevent these problems occurring as they are a natural part of growing up, but it will certainly make them more manageable. Attending a basic puppy training course lays the foundation for further training, but it is just the beginning.

The most powerful way to gain that reliability from your dog is to train it in all situations. Turn those distractions, such as other dogs and people, into a reward. Integrating training into play teaches your dog to listen to you in all circumstances. If your dog has ceased to come back when you call it, don't increase your dog's freedom, reduce it. Start by retraining in your back garden or a small enclosed space and gradually increase the distractions there before you head back to the park. Go back to handfeeding your pup so it works for every morsel it gets.

Take your pup's dinner to the park, make it sit and lie down before releasing it to play. Every few minutes call your dog and feed it a small portion of its dinner before releasing it again. Soon, when your pup hears its name, it will come flying towards you rather than high-tailing it in the opposite direction. Why? Your dog now associates being called with huge rewards as well as being released back to its favourite play space again. Off-leash play becomes a reward for good behaviour. Contrary to old beliefs, dogs won't come back because they should, they come back if they want to, so we need to make it worth their while. Getting cross with your dog when it runs away will make it run further, faster and for longer the next time.

Recognising the things that your dog loves in life, and using these to reward good behaviour, is the best and most reliable way to ensure you have a dog that listens to you both on and off leash. Stop giving those favourite things to your dog for free until it understands that you really are the way and the light, and no longer takes you for granted.

Expect that the first couple of years of your dog's life will be challenging, but if you put in some hard work when it's young you will have a delightful companion for life.

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