

TENAFLY VETERINARY CENTER

Puppy Development

Curiosity Period (5-7 weeks)

- Now weaned, puppies are virtually fearless and thus ready to explore the world. They want to climb, crawl, investigate, and taste everything. Their acceptance of people peaks at this time as they are becoming increasingly mobile.

Behavioral Refinement (7-9 weeks)

- Puppies are capable of learning anything despite their short attention span. Learning is permanent at this age.

Fear Imprint (8-11 weeks)

- Puppies begin to be more cautious, even fearful of loud noises, sudden movements, strangers, and discipline from other dogs or humans. If frightened during this period, it may take weeks to return to normal. In non-socialized puppies, anything associated with fear at this age will be a fearful stimulus throughout life without extensive desensitization.

Environmental Awareness (9-12 weeks)

- If almost totally separated from other dogs, the human bond becomes strong. Puppies left with littermates often have trouble with separation anxiety and/or hyperexcitability.

Seniority Classification (13-16 weeks)

- The age of independence, this is when a puppy begins to test dominance and leadership. Critical learning occurs now. Puppies that are allowed to bite, dominate children or resist activities such as leash training, nail cutting, and removal of food possessions are less likely to develop into a well-behaved dog. Puppy classes are essential, and being handled and trained by a variety of people helps build self-confidence.

Opportunities that are missed during the critical socialization period puts puppies at risk of becoming shy, fearful, defensive adult dogs.