



## Behavior Consultant Denise O'Moore Explains How to Survive and Thrive with Adolescent Dogs



Behavior consultant Denise O'Moore spends her time helping dogs through their various life stages, including the difficult adolescent stage.

### ► What are the most common behavior concerns owners having during the adolescent phase?

There are some gender-based changes we see, such as male dogs suddenly lifting their leg to urinate or an increase in sniffing outdoors. Also, their mates are suddenly way more interesting to them. They are going to challenge you. Most owners have gotten that look from their dog in the park when they ask for a recall and the dog stares at them with what looks like a smirk that says: "make me." It's reminiscent of human teens rolling their eyes at their parents. It's not intentional—they are just growing up. Suddenly jumping up on new people tends to show up as well, even if they were angelic little ones who loved to show off a sit whenever you asked for one.

► **How do you recommend owners train an adolescent dog?**

For every action there is a reaction. The key is to find what motivates your dog. We often must increase our reinforcers during this period. Dry, boring dog biscuits aren't going to mean much. Once owners are aware that this is a phase, they can be prepared with extra patience and a plan, such as having the dog on leash when new people come over. I teach almost everything through play. I keep their creative minds engaged. You don't want these guys to get bored because you don't know what you are going to come back to. Strive to be more creative than they are. I love to use tools like brain games, snuffle mats, and activity mats that are readily available online and in pet stores. I can't recommend K9Connectables enough! These toys are like canine Lego®—engaging and stimulating for the brain.



**You don't want an adolescent dog to get bored. Use brain games, puzzles, snuffle mats, and other exciting toys and products to keep their creative minds engaged.**

► **What do you advise dog owners do to help their teenage dogs with the abundance of energy that tends to show up in adolescence?**

*Choose your battles!* Sometimes owners increase the length or intensity of their walks thinking that will help calm the young dog down. Often, however, that just increases the dog's strength and stamina. You are building an athlete you won't be able to handle. This is the period in which the dog is going to try everything and anything, including behaviors she hasn't tried before. I encourage the use of management—such as picking up any tempting shoes and socks left around the house, removing items that look tempting to the dog, etc. Sometimes we need to remove the dog from a situation where bad behavior, such as “counter surfing,” might appear and redirect that energy into politely chewing on something wonderful in another room. You can also give them a “safe mat” in the same room—one they are rewarded for going to and staying on (choosing to do this instead of jumping on the counter). Experiment and see what works for your dog and make it as fun and rewarding as possible. This is the time to slow down and really observe your dog to find out the things she loves, and then you can use those things in your training. Strengthening your bond will help smooth out this period of potential tension. Ignoring these new behaviors will not help the dog and these undesired behaviors will get worse. Also, the one thing people often miss is in the few moments after returning from a walk—they tend to remove the leash, harness, collar, and then disappear! Stay a bit and spend some down time with your dog—it's all about bonding and it's important to enjoy time with them as much as they do with you!